Home as a site of ontological security for people who have experienced homelessness: an exploration of community housing as a source of stability, control and safety

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Declaration for candidates submitting a thesis

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

Housing is a key solution in addressing homelessness. Homelessness is a growing concern within Australia, and, for individuals who are experiencing homelessness, the unaffordability of rent in the private market can present significant challenges. The provision of affordable housing, in the form of community or public housing therefore becomes imperative – but community housing can take many potential forms, not all of which necessarily have the same impact on tenants. The current study investigates the different potential impacts of rooming houses and self-contained units to tease out some of these impacts. It draws on interview and participant observation data from an ethnographic case study that observed the SouthPort Community Housing Group Inc (SouthPort), a local housing provider in Victoria, Australia which provides housing to single people receiving government benefits. SouthPort manage 271 units for single people in the South Melbourne and Port Melbourne areas. However, at the time of research, SouthPort were still operating a rooming house, which does provide shelter and an alternative to rough sleeping, but which would still leave residents classified as homeless according to current understandings of homelessness. At the same time, even tenants who had never lived in SouthPort’s own rooming house often had experience of earlier stays in rooming houses offered by other providers. The observational and interview data therefore allowed for a comparison of tenants’ lived experiences and evaluations of different forms of community housing.

A key theoretical concept for this thesis is ontological security – and, specifically, how a home acts as a site of ontological security. Traditionally, the literature on ontological security has been heavily focused on the role of home ownership. More recently, however, researchers have begun to examine the different and varying ways that people can experience home as a site of ontological security – including in contexts where the home is not, and can never be, a personal possession. This research has cast new light on the contributing factors of ontological security, and opens up the possible application of this concept to the study of homelessness. This study situates itself within this emerging scholarly subfield, and uses its case study to explore how community housing organisations can enable or hinder tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure – particularly through actions that best support tenants to remain in housing long term.

The ethnographic observations and interviews that form the data for this case study were conducted over the course of a seven-month period at a single community housing organisation, located in inner Melbourne. Alongside observations, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted with tenants, an ex-tenant, staff and a community housing worker.

The results focus on three key areas - stability, control and safety - to understand whether and how tenants’ homes serve as a site of ontological security, and to analyse whether there was a difference between rooming houses and self-contained units in supporting the development of ontological security. In brief, observational and interview data suggest that both rooming houses and self-contained unit could offer some measure of security of tenure to tenants, and thus provide some key elements of the stability needed for ontological security.

Control, by contrast, varied substantially between rooming houses and self-contained units. Rooming house tenants were unable to exert control in their primary space, compared to tenants in a rooming house. The only space that rooming houses tenants had control was
their bedroom, but bathroom and kitchen facilities required negotiation with their neighbours. This absence of control over personal and even intimate dimensions of tenants’ lives, greatly hindered the ability of rooming houses to function as a site of ontological security. Self-contained units, however, generally provided the control needed for tenants’ homes to function as a site of ontological security. Even in self-contained units, however, tenants’ interviews suggested that control could still depend on neighbours and their actions in secondary spaces, qualifying the degree to which even self-contained units could satisfy this contributor to tenants’ experience of ontological security.

Safety was a concern for tenants in both rooming houses and self-contained units. Rooming houses were seen as unsafe by tenants - due particularly to the presence of drugs, violence and the need to share facilities. Tenants’ perceptions of safety within self-contained units varied, with unsafe practices of neighbours again posing a perceived risk to the safety of others who had to live in the same complexes. These safety concerns qualify the extent to which tenants could rely on self-contained units to function as a site of ontological security.

Given the diverse nature of tenants’ experiences of home as a site of ontological security, this thesis concludes by suggesting that self-contained units have the capacity to function as a site of ontological security – with significant qualifications that underscore the importance of supporting tenants’ control over, and safety within and around, their accommodation. Rooming houses on the other hand, were not seen to be able to function as a site of ontological security due to the lack of control and safety concerns raised during the research.
1. Introduction

Reed is a 50-year-old male, who migrated to Australia in his late 30’s. Strenuous work conditions and severe mental health concerns saw Reed lose his employment. Although he had some back-up money to help pay his rent, he eventually had to move out of his place because he could no longer afford it. After couch surfing for a year, he sought out alternative accommodation. He spent roughly two years in private rooming houses before contacting South Port Community Housing Group Inc (SouthPort). After living in a rooming house for a few months, he moved into a self-contained unit. As I was sitting across from Reed, I was struck by what he had said,

*I’m not sleeping on the streets. I’m not in a rooming house. I’m in a unit. I’m in my own unit, my own home. And while, you know, it’s not the biggest place, but I have my bed, I have my kitchen, and I have my bathroom. And at the moment, that’s what I really need.*

His view on his housing was striking and something I had not considered prior to this point in my research. His unit, by comparison to any place I had lived, was small and merely functional. But to him, it was his home. It was a space that was his and that he could control. This got me thinking, as I moved on to future interviews, whether other tenants also believed their housing to be a ‘home’.

As interviews progressed, it became apparent that some tenants directly referred to their place as ‘home’, others implied this, whilst others made no mention of it at all. Thomas, a 56-year-old male, has lived at SouthPort for nearly 20 years, and, although he had a tumultuous time at the beginning, he views his one-bedroom apartments as home,

*It’s home. I’m quite a recluse. I’m quite introverted. I need this space, and as you see, I keep it quite neat and nice. It means a lot to me.*

Emma, a 53-year-old female, did not have anywhere to go after experiencing the loss of her partner, so she sought accommodation at the Gatwick Hotel. After living there for over a year and experiencing negative emotions, she managed to secure a place at a self-contained unit at SouthPort, where she has lived since. For Emma, Southport has also become her home,

*Yeah. Well, it feels like home. These are the sort of things you do when you got your own place, pottering around, doing all those sorts of things. So, yeah, it makes it feel like home. The more homely, the better.*

It has gotten to the point that Emma now leaves her door unlocked when she is in the building. Evelyn, who lives in the same building as Emma, feels the same:

*Not feeling like I’ve got a home, a home base or anything. So it was really nice to actually have a space of my own and finally, you know, just mind a place like home.*

---

1 The data collected for this thesis was used as part of an earlier evaluation which has been published as: Diner, S. (2017). *Housing and Homes: Understanding social support and ontological security among South Port Community Housing Group tenants*. Melbourne. The relationship between this thesis and that earlier evaluation research project will be discussed in detail in section 4.2

2 Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to protect the identity of interviewees; for a detailed discussion on the use and justification of pseudonyms, see Chapter 4.2.5
These views were expressed by people who had experienced homelessness prior to entering housing at SouthPort. The experience of homelessness varies, with interviewees having experienced rough sleeping, couch surfing, caravan parks and rooming houses. It made me wonder what constitutes a ‘home’ for people living at SouthPort and how they experience their housing, given their prior experiences. These sentiments led me to focus on how people who have experienced homelessness experience community housing, through the case study of SouthPort.

Social housing, in the form of both public and community housing, is key for people who are unable to afford private rental or own a home. Community housing functions as an alternative means of accommodation to public housing, a space in which to provide low-income earners affordable housing alternatives in an increasingly unaffordable rental environment (Eardley & Flaxman, 2012; Milligan et al, 2009). Different community housing organisations often target specific populations, including: low income earners; people escaping domestic violence; people experiencing homelessness; and people reintegrating after prison.

SouthPort Community Housing Group Inc is a locally-run community housing provider operating in inner-city Melbourne since 1983. They provide housing to tenants who meet the following criteria: at-risk of homelessness or formerly homeless; single; on a government benefit; often with highly complex needs; and preferencing people who have a connection to the local area. SouthPort is focused on maintaining long-term tenancies for individuals with a range of complex needs. At the time of this research, SouthPort’s housing stock consists of 12 family properties, 88 one-bedroom apartments, 161 self-contained units and 22 rooming house rooms.

One of the major issues that people living in community housing face is the lack of capacity to enter private rental due to factors such as: mental health concerns; the inability to work; and the unaffordability of the private rental market. Given that tenants are not able to access private rental and their units function as a long-term housing solution, community housing organisations need to provide stable and safe housing to tenants to ensure that they do not lose their housing and re-enter homelessness: they need to provide tenants with a secure place in which to live long term.

Understanding tenants’ experience of self-contained units provided by a community housing organisation is imperative to ensure that organisations are not only providing housing, but enabling an environment where tenants can be stable, in control, and safe - and thereby create a space where tenants can recover from their experience of homelessness. In this thesis, the concept of ‘ontological security’ will be used to capture these and other dimensions of tenants’ capacity to experience social housing as a ‘home’.

Although the concept of ‘ontological security’ will be explored in more detail further below, for present purposes it suffices to note that the concept captures the capacity for consistency, continuity and predictability in an individual’s life, and their access to a space to feel secure within their place in society and within themselves (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Ontological security is experienced by everyone, even though varying populations have different needs that should be met. Achieving ontological security is a first step to ensure that people who have experienced homelessness can exit their situation (Mee, 2007; D Padgett, 2007). However, obtaining ontological security, although seemingly simple, is difficult to acquire in a holistic, all-encompassing sense with a target population of people who have experienced homelessness. In an earlier paper (Diner, 2017), I have argued that
SouthPort provides a means for tenants to develop ontological security based on their capacity to develop routine, security, safety and other important components of control over their living circumstances. At the same time, although housing has the capacity to function as a site of ontological security, this capacity is not realised for all tenants. This thesis will therefore examine the tensions that arise when trying to establish ontological security in the context of community housing. I use SouthPort as a case study to examine how community housing can enable or impede tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure.

A central dimension of the current study is its investigation of the contrast between tenants’ experiences of rooming houses (sometimes with SouthPort, and sometimes with other providers) versus their experience of self-contained units. Three sub questions are used to guide this research:

- How do tenants experience different types (rooming houses & self-contained units) of community housing?
- What factors enable tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure?
- What factors hinder tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure?

In order to investigate these questions, I conducted a participant observation, ethnographic observational study at SouthPort Community Housing Group over a seven-month period, which was complemented by a series of 26 semi structured interviews. This research was designed as a two-stage process. The first stage involved the analysis of participant observation and interview data, along with some descriptive statistical data, for the purpose of an evaluation research project to assist SouthPort in planning for its service provision. The results from this stage have been published in *Housing and Homes: Understanding social support and ontological security among SouthPort Community Housing Group tenants* (Diner, 2017), which offered a qualitative and descriptive statistical assessment of the housing program at SouthPort. This thesis represents the second stage of the research process and, with the permission of SouthPort and the research participants, re-evaluates the data collected in stage one to investigate tenants’ contrasting experiences of rooming houses and self-contained units, to identify factors most important for tenants’ perceptions of ontological security in community housing.

This thesis argues that, if community housing is to function as a site of ontological security for people who have experienced homelessness, tenants must have access to affordable units that have secure tenure, which are private and free from surveillance, where they can exert control and feel safe to live comfortably. To anticipate the discussion in later chapters, tenants reported that they experienced rooming houses as non-conducive environments for ontological security, whereas self-contained units have the capacity to function as a site of ontological security based on the perceptions of tenants’ and their neighbours. While this result is not itself surprising and reflects the broader move away from rooming houses in the provision of public and social housing, the contrast still merits closer investigation. The key question is why self-contained units are perceived as so much more effective – and whether we can use data about tenants’ contrasting experience of rooming houses and self-contained units to tease out some of the important factors that enable tenants to use specific forms of housing to construct ontological security for themselves after a period of homelessness.

Chapter two provides the background necessary to understand tenants’ experience of housing. It lays out key definitions of homelessness, alongside statistical information on the current situation of homelessness in Australia. Next, it focuses on the policy and societal
context of community housing in Australia, unpacking the complex policy environment in which SouthPort is situated. Lastly, it provides a background on SouthPort as an organisation and an overview of the housing that it provides. This chapter aims to situate the reader within the societal and organisational context of this research, to set the stage for the discussion of the literature to follow.

While appropriate literature is discussed in context across the thesis as a whole, chapter three reviews selected literature in order to develop an analytical framework for interpreting the interview and observational data for this research. Specifically, the chapter discusses literature investigating how the home, as a socio-spatial system and a site of ontological security, is subjectively experienced. For people experiencing homelessness, ‘home’ is not just any sort of shelter. Instead, this chapter argues that for ‘home’ to function as a site of ontological security – particularly for people who have experienced homelessness - it must have three key elements: stability, control and safety.

Chapter four outlines the methodology used in this research. Specifically, this chapter presents the ethnographic participant observation method that guided the seven months of field research, and also outlines the qualitative interview method used with tenants and other stakeholders. Since this research has its origins in an evaluation research project for SouthPort Community Housing, this chapter also discusses the relationship between the first stage of evaluation research, which was oriented to producing a published report for SouthPort, and the separate re-analysis of the data for purposes of this thesis.

Chapters five through seven thematically explore the implications of the interview and observational data. Each of these three data analysis chapters compares and contrasts tenants’ experiences of rooming houses and self-contained units, but each chapter explores this issue with reference to a different core theme: stability; control; or safety.

The focus of chapter five is therefore on how tenants experience Stability in their housing. The chapter begins by focusing on the affordability of housing at SouthPort. Following this, security of tenure is explored by highlighting key differences - and similarities - in legislation, SouthPort management, and tenant experiences. Lastly, tenants’ experience of stability in their housing is explored. This chapter argues that tenants at SouthPort are able to experience stability due to affordability of housing, their own perceptions of SouthPort, and the approach taken by SouthPort management. Tenants in rooming houses, however, also experience their stability to be hindered by a legislative difference in the treatment of the different forms of housing.

Chapter six probes tenants’ perceptions of Control, again comparing rooming houses to self-contained units. This chapter uses Altman’s (1975) understanding of space and privacy to focus on the differences in control that tenants experience in primary space, compared to secondary spaces. This chapter argues that the data compellingly illustrates how tenants have little control in rooming houses, whilst self-contained units provide an element of control in tenants’ primary space. In both forms of housing, however, occurrences in secondary spaces can hinder tenants’ perceptions of control.

Chapter seven explores how tenants experience Safety in their housing, and whether and how this differs in rooming houses compared to self-contained units. This chapter uses a specific case-study of one of the properties, to highlight how perceptions influence feelings of safety. After the more detailed discussion of this exemplary case, other tenants’ experiences are explored. This chapter argues that tenants in rooming houses are not able
to use their space as a site of ontological security because they do not perceive themselves to be living in a safe environment. Self-contained units can also be unsafe environments, however, this depends upon a tenant’s neighbours, their own perceptions and the tenants’ experiences in secondary spaces.

Finally, chapter eight concludes this thesis by arguing that the concept of ontological security provides an important lens for understanding tenants’ negative views of rooming houses, compared to self-contained units. Rooming houses are not able to function as a site of ontological security because tenants have no control and live in an unsafe environment, and the lack of ontological security – and the resulting difficulty in creating a ‘home’ – can drive returns to homelessness. Self-contained units, by contrast, provide greater elements of control and safety that enable ontological security and provide a basis for the development of a ‘home’. Even so, experiences of ontological security depend on more than just the type of housing: they are affected as well by factors such as the tenant, the building dynamics and the tenants’ perceptions of their housing. Following this discussion, limitations and recommendations of this research are explored.
2. Homelessness, Homes & Ontological Security

2.1. Introduction

The chapter begins by providing an outline of key definitions of homelessness, followed by a statistical overview of the context for people experiencing homelessness in Australia. The chapter then discusses the causation and reality of, and exits from, homelessness. The discussion of the policy context then presents a brief historical overview, surveys recent policy responses, and briefly summarises the current situation of social housing in Victoria. Finally, this chapter places the research into the specific policy and organisational context with which it occurs, focusing on background information about SouthPort. This chapter thus explores the policy and demographic context within which SouthPort exists and within which this thesis is situated. In the following sections of this chapter, the thesis will explore the academic literature, and situate the research in its scholarly context.

2.2. Who is Homeless? A Definition

Homelessness is a complex societal problem with a constantly evolving definition. Homelessness is not merely static, with one defining feature, as what is considered homelessness in one country may vary in another (Hopper, 1991). Definitions and historical policy within an Australian context, therefore provide a background to understand the current environment for homelessness and housing policy within Victoria.

Three main definitions of homelessness have dominated Australian policy for the last three decades: the Support Accommodation Assistance Project (SAAP) definition; the cultural definition; and, most recently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition.

The SAAP definition was legislated in 1994, as part of the Support Accommodation Assistance Act 1994. This was the first official working definition of homelessness in Australia (Rosenman, 2006). The SAAP definition was based on the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) definition for homelessness, and stated that “a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing” (Australian Government, 1994, p. 4), after which it specified the meaning of inadequate access to safe and secure housing. The SAAP definition implies that homelessness could be defined according to perception and in universal and timeless terms (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992). Already, however, concerns were being voiced that homelessness could take different forms in different times and in different communities. These concerns were articulated particularly in Chamberlain and Mackenzie’s (1992) proposal that homelessness should be considered within a given time and place.

The cultural definition of homelessness was proposed in 1992, based on Chamberlain and Mackenzie’s (1992) research into 3000 case histories from an after-hours information and referral service for homeless youth in Melbourne. Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2014) proposed a cultural definition of homelessness, which argued that ‘homelessness’ is contingent on the housing conventions of a specific culture/society. Identifying homelessness therefore requires an identification of minimum standards of accommodation.

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3 For a full consideration of historical definitions of homelessness, see Hopper (1991) and Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2014)
for people in a particular community. Chamberlain & MacKenzie argue that community standards change over time and that, within Melbourne, the minimum standard room is a studio apartment with a kitchenette and bathroom (2014, p. 76). After extensive field work, they determined that there were three core groups in the homeless population in an Australian context, which they characterise in terms of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness:

*Primary homelessness includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.*

*Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. On census night, it includes all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.*

*Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are homeless because their accommodation situation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat* (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2006, p. vii).

This definition was a new way to understand and define homelessness in Australia, as it moved away from the notion of “roof-lessness”, to understand homelessness in relation to Australian standards of living. The new definition allowed someone who had shelter still to be considered homeless. This becomes particularly relevant when considering boarding houses, which formed part of the government policy response to homelessness from the 1980’s (Archer, 2009). Rooming houses are often categorised as unsafe and insecure environments, with risks exacerbated by the requirement to share kitchen and bathroom facilities. According to the cultural definition, this lack of safety can provide a basis for understanding those living in the rooming house to be homeless, even though they have access to shelter.

The cultural definition of homelessness also allows for the cycle of homelessness to be considered, rather than the end result. Often, when individuals first lose housing, they will temporarily move into their friends’ and family’s accommodation. After this, they will seek out emergency accommodation, often a rooming house or a caravan park, sometimes moving between temporary accommodation options. Sleeping on the streets is often the last resort. It is through the cultural definition of homelessness that the entire cycle can be understood, and policy responses can be considered that are informed by a sense of the potential continuum between more and less extreme forms of homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014).

The cultural definition of homelessness was used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to determine the homelessness statistics in Australia from 1996 until 2006. However, beginning in 2011, the ABS adopted a new definition, which is considered to be broader and
more encompassing of different forms of homelessness, but also harder to operationalise (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014). The ABS (2012, p. 7) definition is:

When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations

A person is homeless if they do not have one of those elements.

As with the cultural definition, the new definition is based on understanding homelessness as 'home'lessness, not 'roof'lessness (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012; Somerville, 1992). It also, however, includes specific criteria that do not always match well with specific homeless populations. On the one hand, this is a considerably broader definition of homelessness and encompasses six categories: improvising dwellings, tents or rough sleepers (primary homelessness); supported accommodation for the homeless (secondary homelessness); staying temporarily with other households (secondary homelessness); boarding houses (tertiary homelessness); other temporary lodgings; and severely crowded dwellings (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014). On the other hand, this definition is problematic to operationalise because it requires further questioning within the census, particularly when considering people experiencing domestic or family violence. Although by other definitions such populations would be considered homeless, they were not included in the ABS homelessness estimates (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014).

Moreover, the ABS definition has also been heavily criticised on a variety of grounds. First, people who have the financial, physical, psychological and personal means to access standard housing but have chosen to be homeless, are not considered to be homeless. This is problematic, because it does not allow the insight that housing can be viewed as unsafe because of past experiences. The ABS definition of homelessness is also not clear in outlining what it considers to be adequate dwelling size or ‘fit for human habitation’ (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014). Another important criticism of the definition is that there is no cultural diversity to it: it does not consider that different cultural groups may have different understanding of dwellings, especially among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Memmott & Nash, 2014).

For the purposes of this thesis, this paper adopts the Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2006) cultural definition of homelessness as a starting point to understand how tenants who have experienced homelessness, experience their housing. As will be explored in Chapter 3, a person’s experience of their housing is influenced by their previous living situation. To better understand the scope, scale and diversity of these experiences, it is useful to present some overview statistical information here.
2.3. Statistical Context

The number of people experiencing homelessness has risen over the last two decades. In the 2016 census, 116,427 people were recorded to be homeless on census night in Australia. This figure represents 0.5% of the Australian population (ABS, 2018 Table 1.1), and is a 14% increase in people who have experienced homelessness since 2011. In Victoria, the number of homeless persons on census night was 24,817, which is an 11% increase since 2011 (ABS, 2018, Table 1.3). In 2016, the Port Phillip area – where SouthPort is based - had the fourth highest concentration of homeless persons in Victoria based on local area, with 1,127 people without a home on census night (ABS, 2018c, Table 5.1). It is important to note that these statistics are taken from a single night, and these numbers could be higher or lower than the real average. These statistics demonstrate, however, the increase of homelessness in Australia generally, and Victoria specifically. This increased number of people experiencing homelessness requires a focus on the housing options available to people to exit homelessness, but also an understanding of the reasons people enter homelessness.

2.4. Explaining Homelessness: Causation, Reality and Exits

Homelessness has been studied extensively in an Australian context, with research focusing particularly on: entries and exits of homelessness (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2015); transitions from homelessness to housing (Diner, 2017); youth homelessness (Flatau et al., 2015); and Indigenous homelessness (Memmott et al., 2012; Memmott & Chambers, 2010; Memmott & Nash, 2014). Homelessness has also been studied in relation to housing social housing (Dalton et al., 2015; Mee, 2007; Wiesel et al., 2014), marginal rental housing (Goodman et al., 2012), caravan parks (Newton, 2008) and Housing First5 (Johnson et al., 2012).

To understand the causation of homelessness, researchers have divided homelessness into two broad categories: structural and individual (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Johnson et al., 2015). Structural elements are external forces that contribute to an individual becoming homeless, such as: socioeconomic status; housing supply; unemployment; and housing policy (Elliott & Krivo, 1991; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Wood et al., 2015). Individual circumstances and actions are interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that also trigger homelessness, such as: mental illness; domestic and family violence; relationship breakdowns; and addiction (Mallett et al., 2005; Mallett et al., 2009; Zorza, 1991). Pathways to homelessness and continued homelessness are a mixture of structural and individual forces. There is not one cause or reason for homelessness; rather it is a combination of various structural and individual factors which culminate in life events which lead to homelessness (McNaughton, 2008a).

4 For a complete breakdown of homelessness figures in Australia, Victoria and Port Phillip, see 10.1. Appendix A: Australian Homelessness Statistic Tables.

5 Housing First is the provision of permanent housing with a clear separation of housing and services, consumer choice, and community integration for people who have experienced homelessness (Padgett et al., 2006; Tsemberis et al., 2004).
Key structural problems within an Australian context are: housing affordability; low income earners’ capacity to access such housing; and the lack of housing supply (Anglicare Australia, 2015). Other structural issues include: unemployment policies; housing policies; mental health services; and socioeconomic status (Anglicare Australia, 2015; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014; Cashin, 2014). Governments have made various attempts at combating homelessness, yet homelessness has not been reduced (as was explored in Section 2.3). This is largely due to a continued and complex mixture of structural and individual forces which have not been addressed.

The structural and individual factors that can lead to homelessness are often the same as those that can make it difficult to exit homelessness. Johnson et al. (2008) conducted an extensive study into pathways in and out of homelessness within an Australian context, providing pivotal insights into the issues facing people who have experienced homelessness, capacity to exit their situation. Key findings suggested that housing affordability is important for all people trying to exit homelessness (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 169). Permanent affordable housing with security of tenure is imperative for individuals who have experienced homelessness (Hiscock et al., 2001; Padgett et al., 2006; D. Robinson & Walsh, 2014). However, a lack of affordable housing options within Australia present a clear challenge for those wanting to exit homelessness (Beer et al., 2007; Hulse et al., 2011).

Yet the absence of affordable and permanent housing is not the only factor influencing people’s ability to exit homelessness. Access to support services can aid individuals in maintaining tenancies (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 201). The quality of housing, social accessibility and capacity for reintegration into mainstream society are also relevant factors influencing exits from homelessness (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 169). A central concern of this thesis is how such structural and individual factors can combine to result in a loss of what the literature calls ‘ontological security’. While I will discuss this concept in greater detail in section 3.2, for present purposes I can define ontological security more briefly by noting that the term describes the capacity for an individual to have trust in the world around them. Ontological security relates to the level of consistency, continuity, control, trust, and predictability in an individual’s life, and whether the individual has the capacity to feel security within their place in society and within themselves.

Within this framework, when structural factors and individual factors result in homelessness, a person loses their ability to be ontologically secure due to the lack of stable environment in which they can build trust (Johnson & Wylie, 2011; Padgett, 2007). By positing that homelessness is a combination of varying personal and societal circumstances, homelessness can be understood as the culmination of a complex process through which individuals are gradually losing their trust and support in the world, until a final catalyst precipitates homelessness. Individuals spiral down to a place where they have lost all their resources, including their capacity to be ontologically secure. This thesis explores how breaking the cycle of homelessness for individuals relies on creating access to an environment that enables individuals to reconstruct their trust in the world and be ontologically secure. Housing – not just as shelter, but as home – is the first step in ensuring that people are able to rebuild their lives and establish the routine and normalcy that homelessness did not afford them. Therefore, this thesis explores which factors in community housing most help tenants to rebuild their ontological security and related resources. Since housing policy can form an important enabler and hindrance to this process, a brief overview of the policy context is appropriate here.
2.5. Policy Context

2.5.1. Brief Historical Overview

In 1974, the Homeless Persons Assistance Act of 1974 was introduced as the first federal legislation responding to the issue of homelessness (Parsell, 2010, p. 22). It contained funding for the Homeless Persons Assistance Program, which allowed shelters to be established for women escaping domestic violence, and centred around health, rather than homelessness (Coleman & Fopp, 2014, p. 16). As Rosenman explains, "This was the beginning of official recognition of homelessness as a social issue and beginning of coordinated government response" (2006, p. 26). Over the years, more groups of people who experienced homelessness were identified, creating a challenge for successive governments and their policy responses. Women escaping violent relationships, young people, families with children and older Australians, the working poor and older single women, have since all been identified as vulnerable groups of people with regard to homelessness (Coleman & Fopp, 2014).

Rooming houses were originally set up to accommodate a wide variety of people - the working class, or single, married tradesmen or visitors to a city (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). During the 1960's and 70's, however, there was a large increase in incomes, which contributed to people moving away from rooming houses and into self-contained apartments (Archer, 2009). This led to rooming houses becoming associated with economically marginalised populations (Dalton et al., 2015). This was further exacerbated by the de-institutionalisation of large institutions, increasing the number of formerly institutionalised residents living in rooming houses, as this was the only form of housing that accommodated people leaving state care and criminal justice systems (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Furthermore, during the 1970's, under pressure from gentrification, owners of rooming houses were under pressure to maximise their investment, contributing to a decline in rooming house stock (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). During this time, the Victorian government, concerned with the decline of rooming houses, began purchasing rooming houses and funding custom-built rooming houses across Melbourne, as part of the Rooming House Program (Dalton et al., 2015). It was through this initiative that SouthPort Community Housing Group Inc - originally known as the SouthPort Rooming House Committee - was created. In 1987-88, 43 rooming houses were owned by the Victorian government and managed through community organisations (Dalton et al., 2015).

The Federal and State Governments, in 1984, developed the first comprehensive plan to tackle homelessness. The Support Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), complemented by the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP), came into effect in 1985, as an agreement between federal and state governments (Rosenman, 2006). CAP was a project for capital funding, designed to provide housing for people experiencing homelessness (Coleman & Fopp, 2014). The SAAP brought together eight homelessness programs run by state and territory governments, under one federal policy. It was designed to provide funding to non-government agencies to provide short term, temporary services and housing to people who had experienced homelessness, and encompassed three programs targeting, respectively, general populations, women's services and young people. Over time, there were five variations of SAAP (Coleman & Fopp, 2014; Rosenman, 2006). In 1994 the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) was legislated, providing stability.
for the program and creating a more secure form of funding for homelessness organisations, whilst creating the first official definition of homelessness, as discussed above. One of the biggest criticisms of SAAP was the lack of exit points into private or the public rental markets. The final evaluation of the program thus draws attention to the problem of housing affordability, and notes that “it would appear that the single most influential structural cause relates to the lack of affordable, sustainable long term housing” (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004, p. 139). This was a shortfall of the program, as SAAP did not aid in building housing (Fopp, 2015).

As the previous discussion suggests, the Australian government has attempted to respond to homelessness within Australia through a range of strategies across the past four decades. However, as can be seen through the statistics, these approaches have not succeeded in eliminating the problem – and the lack of affordable housing options in Australia remains as central a social challenge as it was in the final evaluation of SAAP. This history suggests that community housing will remain a core dimension of homelessness strategies well into the future – making it important to examine why housing is important for people who have experienced homelessness and ways to enable home and ontological security that go beyond concepts of shelter. This thesis understands itself to be a contribution to this project, and situates itself particularly in the context of recent policy initiatives that have driven a move away from rooming houses, to which I turn below.

2.5.2. Recent Policy Responses

The most recent federal policy responding to the issue of homelessness was the Rudd-led Federal Government’s White Paper, A Road to Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (Australian Government, 2008). The Rudd government sought to combine programs under one, clear policy. Through this policy, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) were established, whilst SAAP was incorporated into these agreements (FaHCSIA, 2008). The NPAH provided $800 million over five years for services, and $300 million for homes, for people experiencing homelessness. The NAHA provided $400 million to build affordable and supported accommodation. The NPARIH provided $5.5 million to build 4200 new homes and upgrade 4800 existing homes for Indigenous communities over 10 years (Australian Government, 2008; Bullen & Reynolds, 2014). These initiatives represented a 55% increase in funding for homelessness responses. The White Paper provided an overarching approach, designed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services and housing, with the aim to provide more suitable accommodation and better services, and reduce homelessness within Australia. At the time of this research, the White Paper remains the main policy informing Australian homelessness response (Bullen & Reynolds, 2014). Victoria worked alongside the Federal government to deliver these elements, which allowed for more housing to be created in the state.

When SAAP was incorporated into NAHA & NPAH, SAAP services were replaced with Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). The SHS continues to provide the bulk of support to people experiencing homelessness (Homelessness Australia, n.d.). In 2015-16 in Victoria, 105,287 clients were assisted by the SHS, which equated to 1 in 56 people in the state. 32%

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6 For a more comprehensive review of SAAP refer to Coleman & Fopp (2014)
of clients who received support were still considered homeless when their support ended (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016c). SHS provide services to people experiencing homelessness and are often the initial point of contact for people experiencing homelessness. Services can take the form of:

prevention and early intervention, crisis and post crisis assistance to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness [...] The service types an agency delivers range from basic, short-term interventions such as advice and information, meals, and shower/laundering facilities through to more specialised, time-intensive services such as financial advice and counselling and professional legal services (see Glossary for a complete list of service types) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016b, para. 19).

SouthPort are part of the SHS network. SouthPort have two programs - including their housing program, which provides housing for people experiencing homelessness and is the focus of this thesis. The Youth Housing Support team provide support for young people to maintain housing. The SHS services are imperative to maintain tenancies, but are often underfunded, as noted by Homelessness Australia:

It is the view of our members that NAHA services, like SAAP before them, continue to be considerably under-funded. Minimal indexation indexes of less than 2% per year have failed to keep pace with the significant increase in demand for services. This has resulted in funding per client declining in real terms over the past 10 years (Homelessness Australia, n.d., p. 2).

Although the Federal government has been active in tackling homelessness, it thus appears that more can done.

2.5.3. Affordable Housing Measures

Housing affordability and stress are key concepts in the policy debate. Housing affordability is a household’s capacity, based on income, to meet costs associated with housing. The 30:40 indicator is a common measure used to determine housing affordability and stress, and refers to households that are in the bottom 40% of income earners in Australia, and are paying over 30% of their income on housing costs: such households are deemed to be under housing stress (Yates, 2007; Yates & Gabriel, 2006). Due to rising costs in the private rental market, single persons and families increasingly fall into this category. Low income earners are of particular concern, with 41.6% of Victorian low-income households in rental stress (Productivity Commission, 2016, tab. GA.5). In this context, the provision of affordable housing becomes imperative.

Housing affordability is of particular concern within an Australian context (Beer et al., 2007; Gan & Hill, 2009; Hulse et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2007; Yates, 2007; Yates & Gabriel, 2006). Without access to affordable housing, people can be, and are, priced out of the housing market and struggle to re-enter, which is particularly noticeable within the homeless population. Homeless people often find it hard to enter the private rental market due to the high costs of rent and the requirement to get a bond, material issues that are exacerbated by social stigma. Therefore, often they enter private rental through privately run boarding houses, which can be particularly problematic due to their lack of transparency (Chamberlain
et al., 2007; McNaughton, 2008a). Victoria is not immune to these general Australian trends, as I discuss in the next section.

2.5.4. Victoria

As is clear from the previous section, the policy framework within Australia for people experiencing homelessness has undergone a number of important shifts historically, including the recent development of NAHA and SHS programs with a greater focus on community housing. In this subsection, I provide a brief overview of the historical policy context in Victoria, before discussing the types of social housing in Victoria.

Victoria was the first state to develop its own policy relating to people who have experienced homelessness, and it has been active ever since in developing appropriate policy. In 1997, the Victorian government acknowledged a gap in SAAP provision, as SAAP, often run by community organisations, was not appropriate for clients with complex needs. This led the state government to develop the Transitional Housing Management program (THM) which separated tenancy management from service provision, to allow services to continue with the client, post initial housing placement (Gough, 2015). In 2000, Victoria announced its first Victorian Homeless Strategy, with the final report being developed in 2002 (Rosenman, 2006). Its intention was to create a more integrated service system for those who were experiencing homelessness, focusing on individual needs rather than on the funding source.

In 2005, the Victorian State Government established the Housing Registrar to regulate rental housing in Victoria (Victorian State Government, 2005). Reporting to State Government, the registrar is responsible for regulating not-for-profit and non-government agencies through the promotion of continuous improvement of affordable rental housing. This is achieved through the registration, regulation and monitoring of housing agencies (housing associations and providers) (Housing Registrar of Victoria, 2016a).

A Fairer Victoria, published in 2005, was a major state policy including a goal to reduce the risk of homelessness in Victoria. This was done through: (1) investing money into homelessness assistance; (2) building more social housing; (3) improving access and pathways for homeless persons to housing and services through the Opening Doors initiative ($9.1 million); (4) improving housing affordability ($4.2 million); and (5) supporting tenants in social housing ($4.2 million) (Victorian State Government, 2008). The overarching intention of this policy was to develop more liveable communities. Following this, the state government released Creating Connections in 2006, which specifically focused on linking young homeless persons to employment, education and training (Gough, 2015). A Fairer Victoria was followed in 2010 by A Better Place: Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy - however, soon after announcing the policy, the Brumby Government lost the election and, with it, the opportunity to implement the policy proposals (Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2010).

In 2017 the Victorian Government developed the Homes for All: Affordability, Access and Choice strategy, taking a holistic approach to housing concerns within Victoria whilst also focusing on the homelessness sector, committing an extra $10 million over two years to the Towards Home – Rough Sleeping Package (Victorian State Government, 2017). In 2018, Victoria introduced Victoria’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, aiming to reduce the cycle of homelessness in Victoria, by supplying more social housing, getting people off the streets, boosting early intervention programs, upgrading buildings, funding
family violence housing and extending private rental brokerage to aid people in securing and maintaining accommodation (Victorian State Government, 2018).

In addition to these state-level initiatives, the City of Port Phillip, the local council where SouthPort is located, has developed its own strategy to combat homelessness. In 2015, it released *Homelessness Action Strategy 2015 – 2018*. This strategy had four goals: (1) Building a more informed response; (2) Staying Connected; (3) Being Inclusive; (4) and focusing on prevention and early intervention (City of Port Phillip, 2015). In the same year, the council released the *In Our Backyard: growing affordable housing in Port Phillip 2015-2025* strategy, with the goal of increasing affordable housing options in the local area (City of Port Phillip, 2016). These strategies across Victoria work in combination with each other to provide the capacity for people experiencing homelessness to have access to affordable housing options.

Victoria has been an active state in tackling homelessness over the last three decades, utilising federal resources to enable more housing within Victoria (Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2010; Victorian State Government, 2008, 2017). In combination with the *In Our Backyard Strategy* of Port Phillip, the policy environment provides security for organisations like SouthPort to focus on housing people who have experienced homelessness, rather than constantly apply for funding; allowing organisations to focus on *how* they house people who experienced homelessness, rather than *where*. The policy environment has meant that community housing has grown substantially, and with security for local organisations, as can be seen in the following section.

### 2.5.5. Social Housing in Victoria

Social housing in Victoria consists of public housing, mainstream community housing and indigenous community housing. Social housing aims to provide low income earners, including homeless persons, with an affordable place to live in Victoria (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a). This section focuses on providing a brief overview of the social housing context at the time that research was conducted.

In June 2015, there were 321,627 public housing dwellings available within Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a). In June 2015, Victoria held 64,404 dwellings in their public housing stock, which comprises 80.2% of the total social housing provided within Victoria (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a). In the same period, there were 73,620 community housing dwellings available, as well as 17,466 Indigenous community housing dwellings available in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a). In Victoria, there were 13,943 community housing dwellings, representing 17.4% of total social housing dwellings. Furthermore, there were 1,964 community housing dwellings in Indigenous community housing, representing 2.4% of the housing provided (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a). As these figures make clear, community housing forms a significant portion of the available stock for placing homeless tenants, in Australia generally and Victoria specifically – and, importantly for this research, that proportion is rising, and seems likely to continue to rise (Victorian State Government, 2017). A significant driver for increased reliance on community housing is national government policy incentives – in particular the Federal Government’s funding of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) for community housing tenants, but not for tenants in public housing. As a result, it can be more cost-effective for state governments to invest into community housing by supplying and renovating properties and supporting local
organisations to house tenants privately, than to provide public housing (Milligan et al., 2009).

Community housing in Victoria consists of housing associations and housing providers. The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) is the peak body for community housing organisations in Australia, with a branch located in Victoria to advocate for community housing. As of June 2015, there are 9 housing associations, and 33 housing providers. Community Housing organisations manage and develop affordable dwellings for low income earners. Community Housing organisations either lease land and buildings from the government, or they own the buildings outright. Table 1 provides a brief account of the types of housing that people who are single and experiencing homelessness have access to within Victoria.

Table 1: Types of Community Housing for Single People Experiencing Homelessness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis and Emergency Accommodation</th>
<th>Not for Profit organisations throughout Victoria offer short-term accommodation for individuals in crisis/emergency. There are generalist services alongside women’s and youth refuges.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Accommodation</td>
<td>The provision of short-term accommodation of up to two years for people who have experienced homelessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooming Houses</td>
<td>are buildings in which you are provided a private room, while you share both the kitchen and bathroom facilities with other tenants. These are generally considered not to be a long-term solution to housing, and residents of shared-facility Rooming Houses are generally still classified as homeless. Rooming Houses are commonly perceived as unsafe and insecure environments, with many rooming houses having violence and drug taking and selling present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed sits</td>
<td>are studio-designed rooms, ranging from 15m² to 30m². Although they are still classified as a kind of Rooming House, they differ as they provide a kitchenette and a bathroom in each room, ensuring that the individual person does not need to be in public spaces to fulfil basic needs. The room is physically one room with a separate bathroom attached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-bedroom apartments</td>
<td>are self-contained units with a bedroom that is separate to the lounge and dining area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The provision of community housing is growing in Victoria, and this is often the most likely place for single people who are experiencing homelessness to find housing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016a; Victorian State Government, 2017). With limited stock available in Victoria and SouthPort, the provision of safe, secure, affordable housing is imperative to ensure that tenants are able to use their home as a site of ontological security.

2.6. Research context: South Port Community Housing Group

Australian and Victorian governments have been active in expanding community housing organisations, to the benefit of organisations like SouthPort, as well as those experiencing homelessness. The following section provides a snap-shot of the SouthPort organisation and
the housing program, to provide context for both the setting in which the research was conducted, and the population studied.

SouthPort is a community housing provider working in inner-city Melbourne to provide housing for single people experiencing homelessness. SouthPort was established in 1983 due to the growing concern for homeless people on the streets in South and Port Melbourne (South Port Community Housing Group Inc., 2018). Since 1983, the organisation has expanded and adapted to the changing political and social climate in Victoria. SouthPort housing is aimed at housing formerly homeless persons, or people at risk of homelessness, who are single, receiving government benefits, have a connection to the South Melbourne and Port Melbourne area and can live independently (Diner, 2017).

Beginning in 1983 with 2 rooming houses with 21 rooms, by 2015 when the research was conducted, SouthPort was managing 16+ properties with an aggregate 283 rooms. 22 of these rooms were in a rooming house, 161 were self-contained units, while 88 were one-bedroom apartments for single people and 12 were family units/houses (Diner, 2017). The housing program consisted of 4 trained staff members.

SouthPort leases out 14 properties from the State Government, whilst owning two properties. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the type of units that are managed and owned by SouthPort according to demographic. SouthPort operates one rooming house, which is a male-only property. There were two women-only and one male-only bed-sit self-contained unit properties at the time of research. The remainder of the properties were mixed gender. 271 properties were assigned for single people, with 12 properties being two-bedroom units for families, equalling 283 managed units. Since 1991 all SouthPort managed, State-Owned properties had been upgraded, renovated or built up to some extent.

SouthPort uses these properties to sub-lease individual units/apartments to people who have experienced homelessness. SouthPort functions as a property and tenancy manager – collecting rent from tenants, managing anti-social behaviours, and conducting maintenance on the units and properties. As discussed above, SouthPort are solely a housing provider and do not provide support services to tenants. Services are outsourced with local organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Self-Contained Bed Sit unit</th>
<th>One Bedroom Flat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Gender</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Only Property</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Only property</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SouthPort is a small and local organisation within the City of Port Phillip. As the smallest housing provider in the region, SouthPort aims to remain local to develop a strong sense of community amongst its tenants (Port Phillip Housing Association Ltd, 2016; St Kilda Community Housing Ltd, 2017).

2.6.1. Process of Tenancy

Figure 1: Process of Tenancy at SouthPort.

SouthPort have a clear process of tenancy, which is set out in Figure 1. First, to obtain housing, homeless people, those at risk of homelessness, and case managers inquire on a weekly basis as to whether the waiting list is open. Waiting lists are opened when there are a few properties available and ready for tenants to move in. The types of vacant units determine who is able to get on the waiting list (i.e. if there are only properties in women’s households, then only women will be able to get on the waiting list). It is a first-in, first-served system. During the seven-month fieldwork period for this research project, the waiting list only opened once for women and thrice for men. This process is likely to change soon, with the introduction of a state-wide waiting list.

Once they are on the waiting list, individuals are asked to come in for an intake interview. The intake interview serves a dual purpose: (1) it allows the workers to assess the suitability and eligibility of tenants for SouthPort housing (this assessment largely involves assessing whether they can live independently, without support services); and (2) it provides the worker the chance to explain the housing to potential tenants and to see whether they are interested in this kind of accommodation. This information is collected to allow the housing

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7 SouthPort manage 12 family flats properties which were not part of the study. In total, SouthPort manage 283 properties.
worker to make an informed decision regarding placement of the individual into an appropriate property. SouthPort provide a non-discriminatory service, ensuring that all individuals who would like accommodation are provided with housing.

Once the unit becomes available, potential tenants are contacted and asked to come in to inspect the unit being offered. Upon accepting the offer, the tenants can move in to the property when best suits them. Upon entering SouthPort housing, they are provided with a welcome pack which includes a Residency Agreement developed by SouthPort. The Residency Agreement outlines rent requirements, duties of the resident and house rules. The welcome pack also provides a range of household items to aid the tenant’s transition into housing. Often, because tenants have come from directly from experiencing homelessness, they do not have basic items, such as a cutlery, crockery, pot and pans, which the welcome pack includes. They are also provided with a $20 food voucher.

Independent living is a core philosophy for SouthPort. The tenants are required to feed themselves, keep their properties clean, and act appropriately in public areas, by not displaying acts of violence (whether physical, verbal or threatening). Once tenants have moved into the property, contact with SouthPort is limited and dependent upon the tenant. Tenants have the option to ‘drop in’ to the office or call if they need to speak with staff regarding rent, maintenance, issues or community events. SouthPort will conduct a property inspection, in principle, twice a year in each dwelling. Tenants can be upgraded to more desirable properties when there is space. Eligibility for upgrades will depend on their rent history and behaviours during their time at SouthPort. Independent living, without constant observation, is important for tenants to be able to regain stability, privacy and routine (Diner, 2017).

SouthPort and the tenants can take one another to VCAT if there are any disputes. The main cases that SouthPort are involved in at VCAT are rent arrears, although cases can involve behavioural issues within the properties such as violence, prostitution and drug dealing. As evidence is required to obtain compliance or possession orders, behavioural issues are often dismissed. During the fieldwork period, only three tenants were given an immediate Notice to Vacate, as they engaged in acts of violence against other tenants or staff which had been reported to the police.

Tenants can leave SouthPort housing at their own discretion. To do so, they return the key to the office. Once they have left, SouthPort conduct maintenance on the dwelling to make it ready for the next tenant.

2.6.2. Support Services

The SouthPort Housing Program do not provide any official support services. Support services can include, but are not limited to: counselling, medical and dental treatment, Centrelink benefits, case management, education, drug rehabilitation, domiciliary services and recreational services. SouthPort residents access a majority of their services externally with local service providers, such as Inner South Community Health, neighbourhood centres, etc.

Although the Housing Program does not provide official support services, they do provide a form of compassionate support to tenants. This can involve providing lifts to tenants, aiding tenants with their apartments, and offering a drop-in centre and the functions run by it.
2.6.3. Property Management

Property management is a key service provided by SouthPort. Maintenance can be categorised into three main areas: responsive; cyclical; and structural. Responsive maintenance addresses incidents that occur randomly in properties. When something is broken, or in need of repair, tenants call up SouthPort and log a maintenance request. This is the most common form of contact that SouthPort has with tenants. Cyclical maintenance is planned, and deliberate maintenance initiated and conducted by SouthPort. Structural maintenance includes renovations, upgrades or building of apartment complexes. For state-owned properties, the government provides this form of maintenance and, for SouthPort-owned properties, SouthPort is responsible.

In summary, SouthPort are a local organisation that provides housing to single people on government benefits who have a connection to the area. Their focus on hands-on tenancy and property management allows the organisation to be active in tenants’ lives, whilst allowing them to live independently. Without official support services connected in with SouthPort, the organisation takes an active role in tenants’ lives and the development of community. This allows for tenants to regain some social networks they may have lost. SouthPort are active in renovating and upgrading properties, to allow for tenants to live comfortably within their housing. These factors all contribute to tenants’ experience of their housing however it does not shed light onto how they influence their experience. Therefore, an exploration of tenants’ experience of housing as a site of ontological security will allow a deeper understanding of the elements which influence tenants’ lives at SouthPort.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief overview of the context within which this research was carried out. By outlining the scope and scale of homelessness in Australia and exploring the trends in Australian policy responses to homelessness, the chapter sought to draw attention to important recent changes in policy approaches to homelessness and social housing. The chapter also sought to introduce SouthPort as a community housing provider whose creation predated many important shifts in the definition and policy response to homelessness, and yet which also anticipated these shifts in important respects. This context sets the stage for the discussion of the theoretical framework for the research project, which follows in the next chapter.
3. Situating the Thesis

This chapter provides the theoretical context for the research project and explores the key concepts which inform the conceptual framework. Specifically, the chapter looks at how this research understands the concept of ‘home’, particularly in relation to how tenants – and, especially, tenants who have experienced homelessness - might perceive their home. The chapter also explores the concept of ontological security, defining this term and exploring how the concept relates to the sense of ‘home’ and how, in turn, it has been operationalised in the context of homelessness. Finally, it discusses how the concept of ontological security informs the conceptual framework for the research project, and particularly the analysis of the interview data.

3.1. Home and Homelessness

‘Home’ is a multi-dimensional concept whose meaning differs between individuals, cultures and entire societies. In an Australian context, the term is often associated with a detached house and home ownership (Cooper, 2014; Costello, 2005; Mee, 2007). Yet this association risks collapsing the distinction between “house” and ‘home’. These are not interchangeable terms: rather a ‘house’ often refers to the physical structure, with a ‘home’ involving a more holistic approach to meanings attached to physical spaces (Mallett, 2004). Home is a subjective experience and therefore it can be hard to define (Mallett, 2004; Padgett, 2007). This section briefly surveys key conceptions of ‘home’, with the particular goal of understanding how people who have experienced homelessness, might think about ‘home’ in the context of their experience of community housing.

In recent literature, ‘home’ has been explored as a social and cultural construct (Blunt, 2005; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004; Mee, 2007; Parsell, 2012). These studies suggest that there are varying meanings associated with home and house, depending on the individual, their cultural upbringing and surroundings and socio-political context. Home has also been conceptualised and understood as a lived experience. People perceive their home as existing within the space between ideal and real, a tension that occurs within peoples conceptualisation of the home (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2016; Mallett, 2004). Understanding home as a lived experience, allows it to be understood as a ‘state of being’ (Wardhaugh, 1999, p. 95). It is therefore important to understand a person’s background and history to understand their meaning of home.

Home can be understood as a sociol-spatial system central to human lives. Saunders and Williams (1988), for example, argue that home is a socio-spatial system, where social relations and institutionalisation occur within a physical location, design and size. Atkinson and Jacobs (2016) argue that the home is the initial space in which a person develops their cultural understanding and knowledge, and that this forms the basis of social norms. Furthermore, the home is the space in which most of our social relations occur, often associated with the family (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2016). Home, although often the centre of our social system, is not always conflated with family and will differ across countries. Therefore, the home is an incredibly important site. It is a space in which we explore, develop and source individual and social identities.

Studying the meaning of home for currently or recently homeless persons poses a particular set of challenges, and this thesis takes note of other investigations of the meaning of ‘home’
to specific populations. In particular, studies having been conducted into the meaning of ‘home’ for the ageing population (Molony, 2010; Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 1991), including studies of how older people associate and experience meanings of home (Dahlin-Ivanoff et al., 2007), and specifically older women (Gattuso, 1996; Moloney, 1997).

‘Home’ has also been productively explored through the lens of feminist theory. In this context, ‘home’ has been analysed as a gendered concept, with men and women experiencing home differently (Madigan et al., 1990). Home is often associated as a feminine space and a domestic space for chores to occur, understanding home as a workplace for women (Ahrentzen, 1992). This has led to a devaluing of the work that is done at home. ‘Home’ is often idealised as a positive and free space, and yet, for many people, especially women, home can be a site of oppression. Home can act as a prison and often a site of domestic and emotional labour (Darke, 1994). Control, abuse, family, lack of privacy and lack of freedom often lead to people not feeling ‘at home’ - which can often lead to the homeless at home population (Wardhaugh, 1999). Wardhaugh (1999) explores the concept of home as a prison site as part of her ethnographic research into the Three Cities Project where she described women’s experience of home and the lack of control and privacy experienced within the home, which often led them to be homeless. While this thesis does not directly draw on the specific analytical frameworks of this body of literature, it understands this work as important in demonstrating the productiveness of research that understands ‘home’ as a complex socio-spatial system that is central to human lives and that can carry widely divergent meanings for different groups of people. This thesis seeks to apply this insight within the context of homelessness research.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is particularly important to understand the intersection between the experience of homelessness and perceptions of home. The experience of homelessness was explored in Chapter 2.4. Home and homelessness has been studied extensively (Bunston & Breton, 1992; Dant & Deacon, 1989; Dovey, 1985; Somerville, 1992; Watson & Austerberry, 1986), alongside women’s experience of homelessness and the meaning of home (Hill, 1991), rooming house resident experience, (Mifflin & Wilton, 2005), the experience of Housing First (Johnson et al., 2012; Tsemberis, 2010; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Whittaker, 2017).

People experiencing homelessness live in the public sphere, whether that be as rough sleepers, couch surfers, rooming house tenants, or tenants in over-crowded dwellings (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014). This public living is often associated with feelings such as: risk; strangeness; chaos; and a masculinity considered to be an imposing, threatening and dangerous (Parsell, 2012; Wardhaugh, 1999). Being homeless means that people have no privacy and limited capacity to exert control over their environment. They are compelled to live in a space which is governed by public and societal norms, without easy retreat into a space of private autonomy.

Prior research has suggested that, for people experiencing homelessness, home meant, first of all, the physical structure. Parsell's (2012) study in inner-city Brisbane, for example, concentrated on rough sleepers’ conceptualisation of home, discovering that public spaces could not function as a home. Interviewees in his study indicated that home was a physical structure; it was synonymous with house and having a home meant to be one’s own space. The physical structure would enable them to experience agency and control over their lives, something which they are not able to do in public spaces (Parsell, 2012). Furthermore, home
was viewed as the solution to their homeless situation, an ideal which they could work towards. The ideal of home, for people without one, is incredibly powerful.

It is therefore no surprise that navigating the complex nature of living in the public sphere, without privacy, control and safety, means that home is understood as a haven. Home is part of the private sphere and is a place to retreat and relax, providing comfort, security, control, a scope for creativity, order and femaleness (Wardhaugh, 1999). Home is a space in which individuals are free from societal standards. People can do as they please and are not obliged to conform to public standards. The home often has fewer restrictions for the individual and therefore can enable a sense of autonomy (Molony, 2010).

Wardhaugh (1999) argues that home cannot be understood without homelessness; that homelessness is foundational to society’s understanding of home. “The concept of home, as opposed to the physical reality of a house, could not exist without homelessness” (Wardhaugh, 1999, p. 93). Wardhaugh’s understanding of homelessness provides for two key insights into exploring the notion of home: (1) home is not merely a physical structure, and (2) it is through the binary opposites of home and homelessness that we can understand home.

The dichotomous nature of the public and private sphere provides a starting point in understanding home; however, as with any binary position, there are important criticisms to acknowledge. Home is not always a haven, and conceptualising it as such could theoretically exacerbate homelessness (Wardhaugh, 1999). Home is often presented as a clear and ‘neat’ ideal, which does not always exist in practice. Gender differences in the experiences of home are important to note, as home is often been associated with both work and violence for women (Mallett, 2004). The dichotomous view of public and private can provide important insights into homelessness, but the romanticised dichotomy does little more than reify the difference between homelessness and home.

Understanding home as a lived experience enables it to be conceptualised as more than a physical space, but as a process where identity can be formed (Kearns et al., 2000; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Parsell, 2012). Thus, home is a duality. Home can allow for place-based identity to form, which empowers individuals to make choices, provides a sense of mastery, and anchors the comforts arising from familiarity, whilst highlighting personal strength, accomplishment and usefulness (Molony, 2010). Moreover, home can be a space for individuals to redefine, reconcile, re-narrate and reconfirm the meaning of self, with the new space. The home provides a conducive environment to re-conceptualise a new self, whether that be a passive acceptance of past, or a new redefinition of independence (Mallett, 2004; McNaughton, 2008b). This is incredibly important for people who have experienced homelessness and may not have a strong sense of identity because of their past (Padgett, 2007). Home is a place of expression and symbol of self, a space in which people can be themselves and develop their identity (Somerville, 1992). Home fosters the capacity of integration between self and the environment, opening self to the possibility of growth – for this reason, research has suggested that, without integration into the home, homelessness will often ensue (Molony, 2010).

For home to function as a process or a socio-spatial system, however, the physical dwelling must itself provide adequate privacy and security (Kidd & Evans, 2011). Home does not simply occur in any physical dwelling whatsoever; rather it is an active process in which individuals engage with external influences controlling the use of the physical space. Privacy
Privacy is an incredibly important element to housing and one of the most fundamental parts of progressing from a dwelling to a home. However, privacy is more than spatial and visual; it must include more intangible and invisible factors such as noises and smells, as these can be as intrusive and can develop into a physical invasion on privacy (Crow et al., 2002; Gurney, 2000; Mee, 2007). Security and privacy in a home are not a fixed state, but are forever changing based on varying negotiations within the home and outside the home.

One way the home has not been explored in this thesis yet, is through the lens of ontological security. Understanding home through the concept of ontological security provides an overarching framework for the meaning and importance of home for people who have experienced homelessness. Home as a site of ontological security provides an encompassing lens through which to understand how people in community housing create and experience physical spaces and home.

### 3.2. Ontological Security

Home, understood as a socio-spatial system within a given context, lends itself to being understood through an ontological security lens. Ontological security is the capacity for an individual to have trust in the world around them—a trust that, for all the reasons discussed above, can be lost for those who have experienced homelessness. Everyone experiences ontological security in some sense; however, the requirements for ontological security vary across population groups. This thesis is particularly concerned with the factors that enable, or hinder, rooming houses or self-contained units from functioning as a “home-like” socio-spatial system, and in particular how these two different kinds of community housing might differently affect tenants’ capacity to rebuild their sense of trust in the world by experiencing their community housing as a home.

This research uses the concept of ontological security as a conceptual framework to understand key dimensions of how people who have experienced homelessness can rebuild their sense of self and trust within the world. Ontological security was first used by Laing (1965), and later developed by Giddens (1984, 1991), who defined ontological security as,

> The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically closely related. (Giddens, 1991, p. 92)

Giddens argues that ontological security is about consistency, continuity and predictability in an individual’s life, providing the framework to rely on, and feel secure within, their place in society and within themselves. Ontological security allows the individual to have a sense of control over their lives and provides a space in which the individual can understand their position within society. The foundation of ontological security is ‘trust’—specifically, a person’s capacity to trust in the world around them and their self-identity.

Since the development of the concept, ontological security has been applied to areas as diverse as globalisation (Georgiou, 2013; Kinnvall, 2004, 2006), migration (Chase, 2013; DeMaria Harney, 2012; Hutchinson, 2010; Noble, 2005) and human security (Krahmann, 2018; Shani, 2017). Ontological security, as part of international relations, has been used to
understand nation-state identity formation (Mitzen, 2006b, 2006a; Skey, 2010; Steele, 2005, 2008), physical security (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017; Huysmans, 1998; Rumelili, 2015) and conflict resolution (Kay, 2012; Rumelili, 2014).

The application of ontological security as a lens for analysis and understanding of the modern world has extended to a variety of social science disciplines. The concept of ontological security has thus been used to understand such diverse topics as transport consumption (Hiscock, Macintyre, Kearns, & Ellaway, 2002), drug addiction (Vigilant, 2005), psycho-social health benefits (Hiscock, 2001; Hiscock et al., 2001; Kearns et al., 2000), social connectedness and well-being (Ambrey et al., 2018) and the cultural dimension of online searchers (Sanz & Stančík, 2014).

This thesis is particularly concerned with how home can function as a site of ontological security. It builds on a number of prior works, including Saunders (1990) who developed the concept of ontological security more concretely, in order to apply it to the ways in which home ownership allows individuals to develop trust in the world around them and have a sense of ontological security. In A Nation of Home Owners (1990), Saunders presented findings from the Three Town Survey, where he analysed the difference between owner occupiers and council tenants. Saunders used the concept of ontological security to understand owners’ and tenants’ responses to questions on the meaning of the home. Saunders concludes that home ownership is one way we can access ontological security:

“We may suggest that home ownership is one expression of the search for ontological security, for a home of one’s own offers both a physical (hence spatially rooted) and permanent (hence temporarily rooted) location in the world. Our own home is unambiguously a place where we belong and the things we do there have an immediacy of presence and purpose (Saunders, 1990, p. 293).”

Saunders’ key argument is that home-ownership provides the spatial and temporal elements for individuals to have a trust in the world. In particular, owners were more likely to experience feelings of autonomy within their home because they could make adjustments to their space. This autonomy led home owners, according to Saunders, to feel a stronger sense of ontological security than tenants.

Dupuis and Thorns extend Giddens’ (1991) and Saunders’ (1990) work, in order to develop a framework to assess whether people experience ontological security through their homes. Expanding on Saunders (1990) theory that the built environment can enable routine to occur through time-space paths, Dupuis and Thorns (1998) argue that home can function as a ‘locale’ where people can work to attain ontological security. They argue that individuals can use the home to attain ontological security if the following four elements are present:

- Home as constancy in the social and material world
- Home as a spatial context for the establishment of Routine
- Home as site where people feel most in control of their lives because they feel free from the surveillance that is part of the contemporary world
- Home as a secure base around which people construct their identities

(Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 29)

It is important to note that central to their framework of understanding ontological security is the understanding that this can be achieved through home ownership. Like Saunders, Dupuis and Thorns (1998) argue that home owners have a greater sense of stability than
renters. Home ownership has thus been a major focus of research into the relationship between ‘home’ and ontological security (Colic-Peisker & Johnson, 2010; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Saunders, 1990; Saunders & Williams, 1988; Vassenden, 2014), with researchers since Dupuis and Thorns often arguing that ontological security can only be obtained through home ownership. Yet an important stream of the subsequent literature has disputed this sole focus on ownership, arguing that owner occupiers are not the only individuals in society who can achieve ontological security through the home as ‘locale.’ Everyone needs ontological security and has the capacity to experience home as a site of ontological security through their shelter, but an individual’s background and capacity influence their ability to realise that capacity.

In this vein, researchers have explored ontological security in a variety of contexts beyond home ownership, including: young people and housing (Natalier & Johnson, 2015; Rowe & Savelsberg, 2010); elderly Australians and marginal housing (Colic-Peisker et al., 2015); social housing residents (Fitzpatrick & Watts, 2017; Mee, 2007); affordable housing (Hackett et al., 2018); private rental (Easthope, 2014; Luginaah et al., 2010); rebuilding home post a natural disaster (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011); and housing stress’s effect on mental health and well-being (Robinson & Adams, 2008). Most importantly, researchers have begun to link ontological security with people who experienced homelessness (Johnson & Wylie, 2011; McNaughton, 2008; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Newton, 2008; Padgett, 2007; Parsell, 2012).

Johnson and Wylie (2011) draw attention to the problem of homelessness, discussing the lived experience of people experiencing homelessness in relation to ontological security, arguing that people who experience homelessness have low levels of ontological security due to their lack of control of their lives. This low level of ontological security arises because there is little structure or routine in their lives, which are characterised by the experience of constant upheaval, a lack of privacy, constant fear and worry and general uncertainty due to their living environment (Johnson & Wylie, 2011). Homelessness can thus exacerbate mental illness, create further instability within individuals and generate negative health impacts (Koegel & Burnam, 1992; Shaw, 2004). The lack of ontological security for homeless persons can thus have significant negative effect on individuals – but, by the same token, access to a ‘home’ can provide an individual with the necessary requirements to establish their ontological security.

Research suggests that everyone requires ontological security and has the potential for home to function as a site of such security; however, people have different standards and experiences which lead them to experience their capacity for ontological security differently. This thesis seeks to add to this growing literature, by exploring the difference in forms of ontological security amongst rooming house tenants and tenants residing in self-contained units in community housing.

3.2.1. Ontological Security & Homelessness

For people who have experienced homelessness, home ownership is not often obtainable. Fortunately, the literature suggests that ontological security does not depend on this sole factor, but can and does differ between social contexts (Giddens, 1991). Due to ex-homeless tenants’ previous unstable environment, their route to ontological security is different to that of home owners, or even private renters (Mee, 2007; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Padgett, 2007). People who have experienced the uncertainty of sleeping rough, for example, will place a higher value on shelter itself, than those who have yet to experience this (Parsell, 2012).
Therefore, the following section focuses on how ontological security, which has been mainly understood through home ownership, can be experienced by people who have experienced homelessness.

Ontological security is experienced subjectively, and therefore it is imperative to understand how the concept has been applied to people who have previously experienced homelessness. Here the literature offers a number of useful insights. Kearns et al. (2000) focused on the link between psycho-social benefits of the home and ontological security in social renters compared to owner-occupiers, arguing that, overall, households within their study were able to gain psycho-social benefits from their home, without much a of a divide between tenure lines. Hiscock et al. (2001) used the same framework as Kearns et al. (2000), arguing that, although tenure may not be the causing factor of difference between owner-occupiers and social renters, there was often a difference in psycho-social benefits that could be due to wealth, neighbourhood, quality of housing and relationships. Padgett (2007) argues that, for people with a serious mental illness, housing was an important element in regaining ontological security. However, she notes that just because home can enable recovery, it does not mean it will: it merely provides the platform to work from. Mifflin and Wilton (2005) concluded that rooming houses were not a space where tenants could be provided with ontological security. Mee (2007) argues that public housing has the capacity to provide ontological security to its tenants because of the constant, affordable and predictable nature of the home, based on her study of medium density estates in Newcastle, Australia. Newton (2008) argues that, although tenure arrangements are objectively experienced, residents in her studies subjectively experience ontological security as trust and emotional attachment are re-gained through safety, security and happiness experienced in the caravan park. As this overview suggests, the research investigating ontological security in people experiencing homelessness is quite varied. It does, however, suggest that the type of accommodation the person is living in makes a substantial impact on the capacity for ontological security. Moreover, it is important to note that home was able to function as a site of ontological security if certain factors were met.

Informed by this research, this thesis seeks to explore how community housing can function as a site of ontological security and what factors help or hinder tenants from developing a sense of ontological security in rooming houses or self-contained units. To pinpoint some key dimensions of community housing that might be expected to influence the developing sense of ontological security, this thesis adapts Mee’s (2007) discussion of how ontological security is focused on one key element: constancy; safety; or relationship to health. In the context of this study into community housing, the thesis had mapped these elements onto three key dimensions of ontological security for tenants: **Stability**, **Control** and **Safety**. I turn to each of these dimensions below.

### 3.2.2. Ontological Security Framework

**Stability**

The experience of home is subjective and based on an individual’s prior experience, as (Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017) explore:

> Conversely, if a person’s housing situation is chronically unstable, even if it is due to the behaviour of another member of the household, and the person leaves that housing situation, his or her experience of subsequent housing situations will be through a lens of seeking stability not only in the material circumstances of housing,
Ontological security is based on the trust that individuals have in the world around them, as well as the consistency with which we expect to continue to experience this trust. To support the development of ontological security, home must therefore be constant so that we can have trust that it will remain the same and be reliably available for us (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). It for this reason that Dupuis and Thorns (1998) argue that home can only be a source of ontological security through home-ownership, because home owners do not run the risk of getting evicted. To translate this to a context relevant to community housing, however, we can argue that ownership is not the essential quality, but rather the things normally obtained via ownership – namely, the home must be secure and stable without risk of eviction. As Woodhall-Melnik et al. (2017) note, in a study which explored meanings of housing stability for men in a housing first program, the researchers “discovered that permanency and affordability were both important components of housing stability” (p. 372). This intuition is supported by a number of studies that have demonstrated that constancy can be achieved through public housing (Marston, 2004; Mee, 2007). This thesis explores how such insights can be extended to tenants’ experience of stability in community housing, using the two main lenses established in previous studies of public housing: affordability and security of tenure.

Affordability is pivotal for tenants to be able to trust that they will not lose access to housing for financial reasons. People who have experienced homelessness are often not able to enter the private rental market due to the high rent costs and would therefore remain homeless without an affordable housing option. Furthermore, a lack of affordable housing results in housing and financial stress (Yates, 2007). Therefore, examining whether tenants have access to affordable housing provides an indication as to whether tenants can trust that they can remain in their housing over the long term.

Security of tenure is imperative for home to function as a site of ontological security for tenants. As Colic-Peisker et al. (2015) argue, “in the context of a homeownership society, housing tenure seems to be a key factor determining the ontological (in)security)” (p. 182). Furthermore, housing tenure has a clear link to ontological security and tenants’ capacity to experience their living arrangements as stable (Bentley et al., 2016). Insecurity of tenure, like lack of affordability, can cause unnecessary stress on tenants, most especially in private rental (Morris, 2018).

Security of tenure is not an absolute concept and reflects cultural norms (Hulse & Milligan, 2014). This research will understand security of tenure as the capacity for households to continue occupying their property as they wish (Hulse & Milligan, 2014, p. 22). Hulse and Milligan (2014) utilise the concept of security of tenure as a part of a secure occupancy framework, through a legal perspective, which this thesis adopts. The chapter on security of tenure will therefore explore the Residential Tenancies Act, alongside the management of the property, to capture how SouthPort work within the legislative framework.

**Control**

Feeling in control of one’s environment is imperative to ensuring that people are able to be ontologically secure. Dupuis and Thorns (1998) argue that this control comes from being free from surveillance that may exist in public spaces. Therefore, the capacity of a home to
function as a secure private space is integral to its role in anchoring ontological security. As Ilesanmi (2011) explains:

*Home as heart also includes the notion of home as privacy, that is, the ability to control one's control boundaries – ability to control access to and surveillance of a personal space, thus creating a safe and secure place* (p. 96).

As Kirkpatrick and Byrne (2009) argue, "A home gave a sense of place for participants to stop, to have a feeling of control. Home was not connected to the specific place as much as to a dwelling that provided opportunities" (p. 73). For people who have been forced to live in the public realm – whether literally, or through loss of privacy from precarious or shared living arrangements that offer little control over personal privacy - the private realm is exceptionally important to ensure that individuals are able to regain trust in the world.

Control can occur through altering the physical environment or through exerting control over one’s own space. Dupuis and Thorns (1998) argue that control comes from the capacity to be autonomous within the home itself, and specifically from the ability to control the physical environment. This can be seen through physical alterations to the property, customising housing to occupants’ likes and dislikes. The particular form in which autonomy is expressed by homeowners has been studied extensively through the literature, with studies suggesting that there is a direct correlation between autonomy and home ownership (Saunders, 1990). This thesis argues, however, that altering the physical environment is not the primary concern for people who have experienced homelessness, but rather the privacy afforded in housing enables a tenant’s experience that they have the capacity to exert control over their living space.

Privacy, being central to ontological security, can be understood through three territories: primary, secondary and public (Altman, 1975). The primary territory is a space which individuals have complete control over, free from others, such as houses, apartments, gardens. The secondary territory are spaces which individuals have partial control over, such as hallways and communal areas whilst the public territory are communal societal spaces where people have no control (Altman, 1975). Understanding privacy through varying territories allows physical spaces to be understood as containing different levels of privacy and therefore control.

This thesis will explore how the kinds of private space vary between rooming houses and self-contained units and analyse how these differences enable or hinder tenants’ feelings of control, and the potential for different forms of community housing to function as sites of ontological security.

*Safety*

Safety in an individual’s house is imperative for a person to have a sense of trust in the world. Safety is the foundation to succeed in our motivation (Maslow, 1943). This is particularly true for people who have experienced homelessness, as the experience of homelessness is often unsafe and violent (Johnson et al., 2008; Murray, 2011). For home to function as a site of ontological security for tenants who have experienced homelessness, it is important to recognise that they have often come from violent and unsafe environments with little to no control over those environments.

As Whitley et al. (2008) suggest, the “issue of safety and security is prominent in maintaining ontological security within individuals” (p. 168). Therefore, the provision of safe housing is
imperative for the home to function as a site of ontological security. For a person who has experienced homelessness, the home must be safe and secure for it to function as a site of ontological security (Kearns et al., 2000).

Safety is experienced differently amongst various population groups, and therefore a person’s perceptions, background and experience of homelessness will affect their understanding and feeling of safety in their home. Woodhall-Melnik et al., (2017) studied the meaning of home for women who had experienced intimate partner violence, and discovered that, for these women, stable housing meant feeling safe from violence and this contributed to housing playing a role in rebuilding ontological security. Kirkman et al.’s (2015) research into women and children also concluded that the main driving factor for women was a safe, stable home for them and their children, indicating that their experience had altered their perceptions of safety.

Different forms of housing have different safety concerns. Mee’s (2007) research into public housing in Newcastle, Australia, discusses safety concerns experienced by tenants and the impact that safety has on their ability to experience ontological security, concluding that safety was perceived and could change overtime. Hiscock et al. (2001) conclude that owner-occupiers are less likely to feel unsafe compared to social housing tenants because of the neighbourhood location.

Regardless of a person’s previous background or their current situation, safety is needed for home to function as a site of ontological security; however as will be explored later, safety is often difficult to establish. This thesis will explore safety through tenants’ perceptions of the presence of violence, illicit substances and fire and door safety, again looking for whether and how rooming houses and self-contained units might differently aid or hinder the development of this component of ontological security.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, in spite of the bias that the literature has towards home ownership as the basis for ontological security, components of ontological security are potentially available even where ownership is not possible. Everyone has the capacity to be ontologically secure and for home to function as a site of ontological security; however, the capacity to realise a sense of ontological security will vary depending on perceptions and previous experiences. This is particularly salient for people who have experienced homelessness. To explore home as a site of ontological security, this chapter has suggested three main lenses through which to analyse: stability, control and safety. This established the basis for a comparison and contrast between two different forms of community housing, rooming houses and self-contained units, and whether either can function as a site of ontological security. The next chapter will provide more detail on the method of the research, before the thesis then moves on to data analysis chapters.
4. Method

4.1. Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, this thesis explores how tenants living in rooming houses and self-contained units experience ontological security and how their environment enables or hinders their capacity to be ontologically secure. Given the subjective nature of ontological security, a qualitative case study approach – using both participant observation and interviews - was used to explore tenants’ perspectives while also gaining important insights into the views of housing staff.

This research began through a collaboration between SouthPort and RMIT University to carry out evaluation research, which culminated in the production and publication of an industry report titled *Housing and Homes: Understanding social support and ontological security among South Port Community Housing Group tenants* (Diner, 2017). This report sought to answer three questions:

- **Research question 1:** What are the key features of SouthPort’s current tenancy model which provide community housing to low income single people who were formerly homeless?

- **Research question 2:** How do SouthPort’s tenants perceive and experience their housing?

- **Research question 3:** How is SouthPort effective in providing housing to formerly homeless low-income people?

The evaluation research project relied on both interview and descriptive statistical analysis, and sought to understand the tenancy model, tenant perceptions of housing and whether and how the model was effective, using concepts of ontological security and social supports as key analytical tools. From the beginning, however, SouthPort also agreed that the data generated for this evaluation research project, as well as data collected during a seven-month-long period of participant observation, could also be used for an academic research process that included the production of an MA Thesis. The project received ethics approval from the RMIT CHEAN subcommittee of the HREC on 3rd of February 2016 and individual interview participants were advised of both the academic and industry components of the research project as part of the consent process. This thesis, which re-evaluates the data collected through an academic lens, seeks to explore in greater depth the issue of how ontological security is supported or hindered within community housing, with a particular interest in what we can learn from contrasting tenants’ experiences of rooming houses (either through SouthPort or other providers) and self-contained units. Three sub questions are used to guide this re-analysis:

- How do tenants experience different types (rooming houses & self-contained units) of community housing?
- What factors enable tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure?
- What factors hinder tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure?

The remainder of this chapter outlines the research process, including a discussion of the way data was collected, a brief discussion of how data was analysed for the separately

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8 See 10.2. Appendix B for Notice of Approval.
published evaluation report, and then a description of how data was reanalysed for this thesis. This chapter will specifically look at the overarching case study research strategy, the use of ethnography and active participant observation, and the use of interviews to provide a voice for tenants. It will also focus on the ethical conduct of the researcher, the data analysis approach, demographics of participants, and key limitations.

4.2. Research Strategy: An Ethnographic Case Study

The Housing and Homes (Diner, 2017) evaluation report focused on a single organisation and how they operate and manage their housing within the community housing sector. A single case study research strategy was chosen to understand this organisation’s housing policy and a re-analysis of the data for an academic thesis was appropriate given the complexity of the housing which that organisation provides and the richness of the data collected. The case study method was attractive for both stages of the study due to the value of bringing together multiple sources of rich data, as Yin (2003, p. 2) explains,

*In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events - such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries.*

Because the evaluation research was focusing on the real-life events of the housing organisation, a case study approach allowed for a comprehensive focus surrounding the complexity of the organisation’s operations and processes. This method is ideal for answering how and why questions for research that is being done in the present day by a researcher who cannot control variables. Yin provides a useful technical definition of case studies as a research strategy;

*A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigated a contemporary phenomena within its real-life context especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

The case study inquiry copes

- with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003, pp. 13–14).

Although case study research can lend itself to various quantitative and qualitative methods in exploring the research questions, and some basic descriptive quantitative data was collected and analysed during the field work period, ethnographic research was particularly relevant for the evaluation research project. A case study method can therefore be considered the overarching research strategy, whilst ethnographic observations and
interviews were the primary methods used to collect data and develop interpretive strategies to understand the real-life context.

Ethnography is a specialised form of qualitative research, seeking to provide an in-depth understanding of culture and society — delving into the intricacies of a specific culture or society. As Spradley (1980) explains, “Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view (p. 3)” For the purposes of this research, the relevant culture was that of the housing organisation, and the ‘natives’ were housing workers and tenants.

Ethnography is characterised by the first-hand study of a specific culture, organisation or people, over a long period of time, often supplemented by open-ended interviews aimed to explore the people’s perspective of the culture, organisation or people (Hammersley, 2006; Murchison, 2010; van Maanen, 2011). Ethnography’s strength lies in its capacity to provide an in-depth exploration of a culture, whereas more structured and bounded methods are more helpful to generate statistics that provide an overview (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

At the same time, opportunities for participant observation tended to be restricted to the professional staffing side of the housing environment. Therefore, to truly explore how tenants experience their housing and develop or fail to develop ontological security, this study also used in-depth interviews, supplemented with insight from the participant observation work (Murchison, 2010). Home and ontological security are subjective, phenomenological concepts, which makes ethnography and qualitative interviewing particularly salient as they allowed for tenants to express meaning in their own terms, and increased the likelihood that their subjective experiences would be understood.

The process of ethnography is particularly important to understand, as this is what makes it a distinctive method of inquiry. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) outline specific features of ethnographic research which were adopted as part of the approach to collecting data. Firstly, research is conducted in the everyday context, rather than a controlled environment. Participant observation and informal conversations are a principal form of data, although data can also be collected in other manners, such as interviews. Importantly:

*Data collection is, for the most part, relatively ‘unstructured’, in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3).

Although, in this context, there was a clear direction for the researcher to understand the organisation, and the initial stage of this research was guided by the goals of evaluation research, the researcher did not enter the environment with a strict research design nor with pre-designed categories for interpretation. Consistent with best practice in ethnographic research, these were developed throughout fieldwork.

Hammersley and Atkinson also articulate that ethnography is “fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). However, most importantly, ethnography is the about the analysis of data, which “involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Ethnography, as an approach, allowed for flexibility in understanding
the organisation, and the interaction between tenants, staff, the wider community and the social context within which community housing occurs. With the overarching research strategy being a case study, the ethnographic method of participant observation and interviews was used to guide how the research was conducted on a day to day basis.

4.2.1. Data collection

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were the main forms of data collected as part of the ethnographic case study research strategy. Participant observations were used to gain an understanding of the organisation, its operations, the apartments, and the overall sense of the place (Neyland, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009), whilst the interviews provided more detail and were also a space to probe for insights – particularly from tenants – which the observations were not able to capture (Atkinson et al., 2001). Interviewing allows participants to explain in their own words what the researcher witnesses, allowing the observations accrued through active participation to be understood in greater detail (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The original evaluation research project also included a database analysis, which produced descriptive statistical information about entries, exits and length of tenancy to be captured. Although this thesis draws most heavily on the interview data, insights from the participant observation period have informed the interpretation of this interview data, and aspects of the quantitative study will also be discussed where relevant to understanding issues raised by the interviews.

4.2.2. Participant Observation During Fieldwork

Participant observation is a distinctive and important approach to ethnographic research. Spradley’s (1980) approach to participant observation was used to inform this research. Participant observation, compared to ordinary participation, has a dual purpose, “(1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation” (Spradley, 1980, p. 54). Therefore, to gain an understanding of the housing program at SouthPort, I conducted fieldwork from February – August 2016, at the SouthPort Office in South Melbourne, where I enacted my role as a participant observer. The dual purposes of participant observation were particularly relevant for fieldwork. Firstly, it provided a means for me to witness, experience and understand the practical components of the housing program, whilst also gaining insight into the inner intricacies of the program through a staff member’s perspective (Neyland, 2008). This meant that the explicit awareness needed to be a participant observer, to ensure that the researcher becomes aware “of things usually blocked out to avoid overload”, was particularly essential (Spradley, 1980, p. 55). Secondly, this role allowed me to build rapport and relationships with tenants over an extended period, aiding in the recruitment of interview participants (James, 2006). The intention with this research was to blend in with “native” members of the organisation; blending in, however, and obtaining complete participation status, proved initially difficult.

There are varying levels of participation in ethnography: non-participation, passive, moderate, active and complete. This research aimed to achieve active participation as a form of observation, in order to get the most comprehensive understanding of the organisation that was possible as an external researcher. "Active participation begins with observations but as knowledge of what others do grows, the ethnographer tries to learn the same behaviour" (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). The process of active participation, beginning with
observation, occurred naturally on fieldwork, as it took some time for me to get the knowledge to integrate effectively within the organisational culture.

The first period of fieldwork can be categorised as an observational period. Given that my role within the organisation was to conduct a research project, I began research without a specific role or purpose within the organisation. I did not have set days, or times, that I was required to be present, and there was little to no structure to the day. I worked largely autonomously. The lack of a defined role, structure and purpose made it difficult for staff and myself to work together, as I had no practical purpose for the housing team (James, 2006). Since I was an outsider to the organisation, there was an understandable reluctance to hand over daily work tasks, as staff were unsure of my actual role. Therefore, I spent the first couple of months orientating myself within the organisation, learning the various staff member roles and observing the work that was done by the housing program. Although my final goal was to be an active participant, I had to spend time observing, and learning the roles and functions that are relevant for staff. It was during this period that I was able to gather valuable information regarding the dimensions of organisational culture such as staff roles, functions of the housing program, daily routines, community events, staff meetings, interactions between staff and tenants, forms of de-escalation and the physical housing itself. These couple months of orientating myself within the organisation and observing, allowed me to become immersed within the organisation as an active participant.

During the month of May, I took a short break from fieldwork and, upon returning to SouthPort, I entered a different environment. It was during this latter period where I was able to be immersed as an active participant observer within the organisation (Gans, 1999). The transition to active participant was aided by a few factors: (1) the organisation was understaffed during this period; (2) I understood the organisation and staff roles in a greater detail; (3) most importantly, I took a more active role as a participant observer and immersed myself into the organisation as a worker. I was able to move away from merely observing staff interactions, to begin interacting with tenants as a staff member / researcher. I assumed a variety of roles in the housing department, depending on the day. As a housing worker I would attend properties to check on tenants, allow tradespeople in, and investigate any concerns. I would organise maintenance repairs, answer phone calls and attend social meals. As time progressed, I was often located on the reception desk, which involved greeting tenants, answering phone calls, aiding tenants with their inquiries and supporting staff in the office. Being on reception provided me the means to have direct contact with tenants. Towards the end of fieldwork, I coordinated the annual SouthPort Street Party. These various roles allowed me to be an active participant observer within the organisation and gain an insiders’ understanding of the housing program, organisational processes, staff roles, housing provided – and, importantly, the strain of being a staff member.

4.2.3. Insider / Outsider Status

Although I was able to become an active participant observer at SouthPort, I had to negotiate the insider / outsider realm and the role ambiguity that followed. As Spradley explains, “the participant observer, on the other hand, will experience being both insider and outsider simultaneously” (1980, p. 57). Over the course of fieldwork, I was able to integrate well into the organisation, becoming a relied-upon team member. I was however always aware that I was doing research, and everything around me was viewed as an object of study. It became even more complicated during and after interviews due to role ambiguity.
Role ambiguity became an issue at times during fieldwork. Adam (2013) defines role ambiguity as, "role duality (being the researcher and the colleague), and role conflicts (doing research work and helping with participants’ work), which are often claimed to be part of an insider-researcher’s journey." During fieldwork I was both the researcher and the housing worker (role duality) whilst conducting research and aiding tenants as a housing worker (role conflict). This became evident during fieldwork, where the role duality and role conflicts caused conflict during interviews.

To combat this during interviews distinctions between housing worker and researcher became imperative to clarify, as I wanted to ensure that the interviewee understood that information provided in an interview would remain confidential and not leave the room. At the beginning of every interview, I would go through the Plain Language Statement and outline that everything that was said during the interview would not be passed on to the housing program and therefore no action could be taken to change the situation, unless it fell into an area where I would be legally required to escalate an issue. I would make sure that participants understood and agreed to the PLS. Although many tenants understood this, there were a few tenants who initially seemed to understand, but got upset when I later said they would have to report it themselves. These issues mostly evolved around maintenance and neighbour concerns. In these cases, I maintained my calm demeanour, articulated my position and ensured they understood. Once explaining a second time that I was currently in my role as a researcher, not a worker, they seemed to understand, even if they were still frustrated. Even though I was able to manage these behaviours, my insider, active participant model did present issues when doing interviews given the role ambiguity present within this project.

4.2.4. Field Notes

Keeping an ethnographic record is fundamental to ensuring that ethnography and participant observation is a useful research tool. Keeping an ethnographic record consists of anything that documents the social situation under study: field notes, voice recordings, pictures, artefacts and videos. However,

The major part of any ethnographic record consists of written fieldnotes. And the moment you begin writing down what you see and hear, you automatically encode things in language. This may seem a rather straightforward matter, but the language used in fieldnotes has numerous long-range consequences for your research (Spradley, 1980, pp. 64–65).

The style of language used in field notes is particularly relevant for studying in non-Western countries, where anthropologists traditionally work; however, it is also important within the context of ethnographic research in organisational anthropology and sociology, particularly given the social/power dynamics and class difference between myself and the tenants. Identifying what language is used in field notes is important so that the researcher does not "overlook language differences and thereby lose important clues to cultural meaning." (Spradley, 1980, p. 65). Given that I was able to take field notes whilst at work, assuming I had the time, I approached notes with the intention to use concrete language, describing observations without using generalisations and writing as much detail as possible (Spradley, 1980). During fieldwork I took consistent field notes, recording events, daily interactions, conversations, personal feelings and sensations that I experienced as an active participant observer (Emerson et al., 2011; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). These notes provided a
prompt for memory, as well as a record of the observational data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The observations provided the foundation to understand the organisation, how it operated and what it did on a day-to-day basis, whilst the interviews provided the tenants’ perspectives and details which the observations could only hint at.

4.2.5. Interviews

Ethnographic interviewing allows rich and detailed data to be gathered directly from those observed in the research site. Hammersley and Atkinson argue that participant accounts can be used for two purposes: “First, they can be read for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer. Second, we can analyse them in terms of the perspectives they imply, the discursive strategies they employ, and even the psychosocial dynamics they suggest” (2007, p. 97). Hammersley and Atkinson’s understanding of interviewing provided the foundation for this research project, which was supplemented by Spradley’s (1979) characterisation of ethnographic interviewing as “a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (Spradley, 1979, p. 58). These can consist of informal conversations in the field or formal interviews. Informal conversations and formal interviews served different purposes within this research project. In general, informal conversations with tenants and staff provided me the basis to understand the organisation, whereas formal interviews were used to delve deep into particular issues that were raised during fieldwork and informal conversations.

The formal interviews used a semi-structured interview approach to ensure that the research questions would be answered. Spradley (1979) clearly outlines three elements which should guide ethnographic interviews: explicit purpose; ethnographic explanations; and ethnographic questions. Explicit purpose required me, as the researcher, to inform the interviewee of the purpose of the research (which was done through the use of a PLS) and to steer the interview to allow for “the cultural knowledge of the informant” to be discovered (Spradley, 1979, p. 59). As a researcher, I was always keenly aware that I had to offer explanations for my actions, explain the project, articulate how I would record notes, and explain particular questions within an interviewing environment (Spradley, 1979).

Spradley’s (1979) exploration of types of ethnographic questions was used as a basis to develop the interview schedule. The interview schedule developed over time and consisted of descriptive questions, structural questions and contrast questions. Interviews were conducted with tenants, as well as with one ex-tenant, to attain a qualitative understanding of the tenants’ perspective of issues such as: the dwelling and the immediate surrounds of the dwelling; early housing history; finding housing; comparison with previous housing; utilisation of the dwellings and their interaction with the housing provider9. Interviews with staff and the community worker attempted to acquire information regarding the service provided by SouthPort, exploring the values, processes and realities that underlie the housing program10. These interviews were specifically designed to answer the Housing and Homes report research questions, and therefore deliberately did not prompt participants on questions related to ontological security. However, the interviews nevertheless provided an in-depth insight into the tenants, their lives, their life stories and their views on the housing

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9 See 10.3. Appendix C for the Interview Schedule for tenants
10 See 10.4. Appendix D for the Interview Schedule for staff
The semi-structured interviews allowed tenants to speak about their past and present more freely and on their terms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 tenants, 1 ex-tenant, 4 staff members and 1 community worker. 25 of the interviews were audio recorded, supplemented by contemporaneous hand-written notes, while one was recorded solely through interviewer notes. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes through to 1.5 hours, determined by the interviewee’s willingness and openness to cooperate. Interviews were conducted at a place convenient to the interviewees: a public space, the office or their unit. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

The mechanisms used to ensure confidentiality were explained to all participants of the study. Transcripts and recordings are free of any personal names. Pseudonyms are used to protect interviewee information, and, in some cases, this was sufficient as the data and quotes being used were not identifying (Lofland & Lofland, 2006). However, due to the small size of the organisation and the staff knowledge of all tenants, as well as there being a very small organisational staff, amalgamation of interview data was required in some circumstances to ensure that the identifying personal information was appropriately masked. This thesis has its own set of pseudonyms and amalgamations, distinct from those used in the evaluation research report, to further reinforce confidentiality.

4.2.6. Recruitment

The study used a convenience sample for selecting participants. As Robinson explains, convenience sampling works “by way of locating any convenient cases who meet the required criteria and then selecting those who respond on a first-come-first-served basis until the sample size quotient is full” (Robinson, 2014, p. 7). Given this research was a case study of a local, small scale organisation, participants were selected based on who responded. A clear recruitment strategy was developed at the beginning of the project, supplemented by additional strategies to ensure there were enough participants. Tenant advertisements were pinned up in the reception area of the office and placed in every tenant’s letter box on two occasions; six tenants were recruited this way. The researcher also utilised contacts established during the observation period to recruit participants; ten tenants were recruited this way. The snowballing technique was also adopted for this project, where the researcher asked interview participants at the end of the interview to recommend a fellow tenant to partake in the interview; four tenants were recruited this way (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). A $30 food voucher to the local markets was used as an incentive for tenants to participate in the interview. Although there has been criticism of using payments or honorariums to recruit participants due to possibility of bias, it is common practice in social and community research (Sosin et al., 1990).

Ex-tenants, staff and community members were recruited differently. When tenants left the program, I contacted them to ask if they would be interested in partaking in an interview; however, only one ex-tenant agreed to participate. This tenant has been grouped in with current tenants throughout the presentation of data. Staff were asked directly by the researcher to participate but were not obliged to participate. Recruitment of community workers occurred through contact with community workers, research contacts and organisation contacts; however, only one worker responded.
4.2.7. Ethical Conduct

The study was submitted to the appropriate subcommittee of the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee for approval before fieldwork or interviews were conducted. Each interviewee was provided with a Plain Language Statement (PLS) before the interview. Prior to the interview commencing I went through the PLS verbally, to ensure each person understood the process. It was explained that all interviews were voluntary, and that no information provided in the interview would affect their tenancy or job status. It was made explicitly clear that information provided during the interview was for the sole purpose of research and would not affect SouthPort procedures or policy directly. Complaints or issues with housing would have to be taken up directly with the housing program. The PLS further explained how the information provided would be used, how confidentiality was maintained and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and all interviewees were required to sign the consent form to ensure they understood the research process.

A key element of ethical practice and validity within ethnography is reflexive practice (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Reflexivity asks the researcher to be honest about their position in the research project and acknowledge key biases and assumptions (Foley, 2002; Pellatt, 2003). This provides the reader with the tools to understand the researcher's perspective, most especially regarding observations. Hewitt (2007) focused on the ethics of the researcher-researched relationship and the importance of acknowledgement of bias that an interviewee has, articulating that,

1. Closer examination of the personal qualities that researchers bring to interviews, including personal presence, values, and beliefs.
2. Explicit acknowledgement that research findings do not represent objective reality, but a co-constitution of knowledge influenced by context and the belief systems of the researcher and participant (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1155).

Furthermore, who the researcher is affects their relationships with tenants. “The factors that have been recognized as influencing the relationship between researchers and participants include age, appearance, social class, culture, inequalities of knowledge and power, environment, and gender” (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1150). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my various roles and upbringing: I am a white, homosexual male, born into a middle-class household. I attended private school for several years but completed schooling at a public high school. I attended a Jewish youth movement from the ages of 8-22, which largely informed my worldviews around equality and social democracy. Throughout this piece I will mention various biases and assumptions that I made in the field that affect the way I understood specific situations. I used reflexive practice to ensure that the reader understands my biases and assumptions to counteract the subjective nature of ethnography.

Furthermore, as a researcher “there is also the issue of the power differential which exists between researcher and informant. This is almost always an issue in research, but the polarity is intensified when white middle class researchers work with some of the most marginalized groups in our community” (Booth, 1999, p. 97). Power imbalance is particularly important when researching vulnerable populations and my roles as researcher and housing worker further complicated this.
One technique used to combat the power imbalance in the interview was to use Booth’s technique of adopting the learner status. “My thoughts on this are to ‘shift’ the power to the informant by placing myself in the role of learner. In doing this the respondent has the information and power, and in effect becomes the teacher” (Booth, 1999, p. 97). This seemed an appropriate technique for me. I did this by speaking as little as possible and always stating that I assumed I know nothing, because I did not know their perspective and I am most interested about their thoughts and their beliefs.

Another technique I used to combat this power difference was using the strategy adopted by Goode (2000) to build rapport with vulnerable populations, but also to make them feel comfortable. Her approach was, “where respondents were interested in discussing my personal background, I answered all questions fully and honestly […] The only questions I would not answer related to my full name and address, for security reasons” (Goode, 2000, p. 6.3). If tenants were interested in my personal background I would answer as honestly and fully as I could, without breaching my own personal boundaries.

Furthermore, the interviews would often bring up issues that were sensitive for tenants. If the tenant became distressed, I would respond by using my background and training of working with vulnerable populations. I would sit quietly and listen empathetically (Goode, 2000). If the distress continued, I would stop the interview and only continue if the tenants agreed and had calmed down.

4.2.8. Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview and ethnographic field notes for the Housing and Homes report (Diner, 2017), whilst a theory-based thematic analysis was used for the purpose of this thesis.

The Housing and Homes (Diner, 2017) evaluation research was specifically seeking to answer three pre-determined questions, and therefore its data analysis was guided by this goal. Interviews were originally coded according to SouthPort outcomes, identified from their strategic planning document; however, these outcomes were too broad and restricted the analysis. To combat this, Fetterman’s (2010) approach to understanding patterns was used to code the data to allow for analysis. According to Fetterman, “Ethnographers look for patterns of thought and behavior. Patterns are a form of ethnographic reliability. Ethnographers see patterns of thought and action repeat in various situations and with various players. Looking for patterns is a form of analysis” (2010, p. 97). These patterns, as Brewer explores, “requires searching for the patterns within the data and explaining the relationships between segments of data […] There will be patterns of several things within the data, and several patterns to identify” (2000, pp. 113–114). Patterns allowed data to be understood as a relational process, as part of the bigger picture. Using patterns that were identified in interviews and field notes, themes emerged were grouped into broad categories and analysed.

After reviewing the concepts and patterns that became apparent in the first 5 interviews, a general code for interviews was established. The first code consisted of 21 sub-categories which fell under 11 main categories. After 10 interviews were coded in this manner, the researcher revaluated the code, developing a second coding system which was more reflective of the themes and patterns that were becoming apparent through the interviews. After 6 interviews were done in the fashion, the researcher redevelopment the codes again into very specific concepts, with 11 main headings and 37 subheadings. This allowed the
researcher to be very specific with coding data. These categories were: dwelling/building; mental health; affordability & choice; external service provision; maintenance; SouthPort & staff; security of tenure; safety; community; local area and outcomes due to housing.

These broad categories allowed the interview data to be understand in a manner which reflects the outcomes. The above categories were then analysed against three key concepts: ontological security, social support and house & maintenance. These key themes allowed the data to be understood as part of the broader literature and was the basis for the Housing and Homes report.

It is important to recognise the limitation of using coding as a form of analysis, and the thought processes that are required when undertaking coding. As Dey (1993) explains

> Classification is a conceptual process. When we classify, we do two things. We don't just break the data up into bits, we also assign these bits to categories or classes which bring these bits together again, if in a novel way. Thus all the bits that 'belong' to a particular category are brought together; and in the process, we begin to discriminate more clearly between the criteria for allocating data to one category or another (p. 46).

As a researcher, I had a pre-determined purpose for the evaluation report and, therefore, when allocating data to a category, categories chosen were based upon concepts that worked within the framework of an evaluation. This necessarily influenced the sort of interpretation and data analysis possible for that first stage of the research.

For the thesis, it was important to move away from the evaluation framework used in the Housing and Homes report. Observational and interview data was therefore re-analysed, with the key theoretical idea of ontological security as the basis for understanding data. Given that I had extensive knowledge of the data already and had produced a report, I approached the analysis understanding that ontological security was central to the interpretation of the data, and therefore used concepts from the literature on ontological security as a framework for exploring the data in a deeper manner.

With that framework in mind, I focused on key tensions in the interviews and field notes to develop a deeper understanding of key themes, including: homeless experiences; normal day activities/routine; positive rooming house experience; negative rooming house experience; social supports; positive experience of living in self-contained units; negative experience of living in self-contained units; and factors influencing ontological security. These codes allowed the data to be understood in a new manner, with the key focus on tenants’ experience in different properties. It was through the analysis of these tensions that it became clear that stability, control and safety were the key issues for this thesis.

4.2.9. Tenant Interview Demographics

The main focus of the current study were tenants residing in SouthPort housing at the time of the interview. Having used a convenience sample for selecting participants, this section focuses on the tenant interviewee demographics, to provide insight into who was interviewed and how this shaped the results.

All tenants identified as experiencing homelessness when entering housing, according to the cultural definition of homelessness adopted by this thesis. Of those tenants’ interviewed, 13 identified as male compared to seven who identified as women. The mean age of tenants was 51 years old, with 13 interviewees aged below 55. Length of tenancy was varied from
having lived in SouthPort for less than a year, to tenants who have lived at SouthPort for over 15 years (Table 3).

Overall, 10 out of SouthPort's 16 properties were represented in the interviews. Five tenants lived in a one-bedroom flat, 13 lived in a bedsit and two lived in the rooming house at the time of being interviewed (Table 3). According to the cultural definition, rooming houses are regarded to be unsafe and inadequate housing, and therefore those two tenants are considered homeless. To ensure confidentiality for those tenants, the research does not explicitly draw focus to their experience as homeless in housing as there were only a small number of rooming house units available.

Of all tenants interviewed, 17 out of 20 had lived in a rooming house at some point in their lives, with two still living in a rooming house environment (Table 3). It is important to acknowledge that tenants' discussion of their rooming house experiences is not limited to SouthPort's rooming house but may also include experiences from other rooming houses where tenants had lived in the past. Conclusions drawn about rooming houses are therefore not intended to apply specifically to SouthPort's rooming house property.

Table 3: Tenant Interview Demographic Information at Time of Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Tenant Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously homeless</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Tenant Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (years old)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (below 55)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (over 55)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of tenancy*</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Tenant Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-11 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-23 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-59 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-119 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120-179 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 - 240 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Property at Time of Interview</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Tenant Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Bedroom in Rooming House</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Contained Unit</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.10. Limitations

This project has various limitations that should be acknowledged, together with a discussion of how their impacts were minimised.

Modern ethnography is limited by its lack of access to a more holistic view of a broader and multifaceted culture. As Hammersley argues, “We sometimes tend to treat people as if their behavior in the situations we study is entirely a product of those situations, rather than of who they are and what they do elsewhere” (Hammersley, 2006, p. 5). This is particularly relevant for this thesis as the ethnographic work I conducted was confined to work in the office, with an occasional trip to the properties. I did not live in a property, nor was I immersed into the housing. Therefore, the ethnographic element of this piece was about office culture and the organisational management of housing, rather than the experience living in the property. The use of interviews has necessarily been the main element of data that has informed the analysis of tenant experiences, with ethnographic observations supplementing this knowledge. The ethnographic inquiry, however, led to the exploration of issues within the interviews, and assisted in the interpretation of the interview data, and therefore forms an integral component of the research overall.

As with most ethnographic studies, this study is also limited by its lack of generalisability and its lack of capacity of replication (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Although this is a concern, this research was a specific case study of an organisation and makes no direct claims to immediate generalisability to a broader population. The intent of both the evaluation report and this thesis was “concerned with a case that has intrinsic interest, so that generalization is not the primary concern” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 32). This research specifically speaks about the 20 tenants and the 7-month active participant observation. The goal of the thesis is to explore potential factors that aid or hinder ontological security in this case study site, rather than generalise about all community housing organisations. Once such factors are identified, however, they can potentially become the subject of more extended or comparative research projects, whose designs could be more adequate to questions of generalisability.

Another important limitation of the data itself is lack of data about tenants’ personal lives outside of their housing. This research focused on tenants’ housing and how they experienced their housing and their surrounding environment. The focus was not on their past lives or current/previous mental health status. Therefore, any data that emerged about these issues was offered spontaneously by tenants in interviews, and they were allowed the space in the semi-structured interview to explore such concerns. Where such data emerges, it is often extremely interesting and suggestive. Given that this was not the complete focus of the study, however, this present study presents what is known about tenants’ past lives, without assuming their past life in a set way. If information is not known, it is not offered. It is
assumed, based on the service provided by SouthPort and their mission of housing single people who have experienced homelessness or are risk of homelessness, that all interviewees fit within a broad definition of homelessness, but it is not assumed that tenants have any more specific experience of homelessness, unless they raise this issue themselves. For this reason, a great many potentially interesting avenues of research must be deferred for future projects.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methods used to explore how tenants living in rooming houses and self-contained units experience ontological security, and whether their environment enables or hinders their capacity to be ontologically secure. This chapter analysed the benefits and limitations of exploring these questions through an ethnographic case study conducted at a single organisation based in South Melbourne. The ethnographic study used active participant observation and interviews to provide an insight into the housing program, and used the concept of ontological security as an anchor in thematic analysis. This chapter articulated how the conceptual framework of ontological security was embedded within the method to allow for a comprehensive review of ontological security for people who have experienced homelessness. The remainder of this thesis will focus on presenting the results according to three main concepts outlined in the framework: Stability, Control and Safety, understood as three key elements of ontological security.
5. Stability

5.1. Introduction

Homelessness is often an unstable environment. Consequently, stability in the form of shelter is the first step to ensuring homeless persons can regain constancy and trust (Ponic et al., 2011; Robinson & Walshaw, 2014). For ‘home’ to function as a site of ontological security, tenants must have a stable environment to live in. Stability allows tenants to have a sense of trust in the world around them. Home for people who have experienced homelessness is therefore important in rebuilding their sense of trust in the world around them.

This chapter focuses on stability in SouthPort housing by comparing rooming houses to self-contained units. Three main elements of stability are explored: affordability, security of tenure and tenants’ experience. Affordability is imperative to ensuring that tenants trust that they have the financial capacity to afford their housing over a long period of time. The discussion of security of tenure in this chapter focuses, first, on the Residential Tenancies Act, concentrating on differences between rooming house legislation and self-contained units. SouthPort’s management of housing is then explored to determine what dimensions of practical management might not be fully captured in the discussion of the Act. Lastly, this chapter investigates how tenants experience stability within their housing, specifically comparing rooming houses to self-contained units, and concluding that a number of factors generate greater stability in self-contained units, allowing this form of housing to function as a site of ontological security for people who have experienced homelessness.

5.2. Affordability

Housing affordability is key to long term renting and stability. Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable due to rising rental prices in Melbourne (Colic-Peisker et al., 2015). Housing affordability has therefore become central to housing policy within Victoria (Daley et al., 2018). The affordability of a unit is one element which allows tenants to have a sense of stability and trust, as they can afford housing on a long-term basis. Without affordable housing, residents live under housing stress without the capacity to feel a sense of trust in the world (Yates, 2007). Therefore, for tenants to have a sense of ontological security in a rooming house or a self-contained unit, they must have access to affordable housing. SouthPort use the same method to calculate rent for both self-contained units and rooming houses, and therefore there is little distinction between the two with reference to affordability.

Housing affordability, within Australia, is commonly determined by using the 30:40 indicator. If you are in the bottom 40% of income earners within Australia and are paying more than 30% of your income on housing costs, you are deemed to be in housing stress and in unaffordable housing (Yates, 2007; Yates & Gabriel, 2006). SouthPort tenants are low income earners, on government benefits and therefore in the bottom 40% of income earners. Determining whether housing is affordable, both in a rooming house or self-contained units, requires an analysis of tenants rent costs and whether this is more or less than 30% of their income.

The 30:40 indicator provides a guideline for rental calculation; however this guideline is complicated in its application due to factors such as whether to include service fees and similar expenses in the housing expenditure figure. For SouthPort, this translates into a
decision over whether to include the service fee that SouthPort tenants are required to pay, which covers all council rates and utility bills.\textsuperscript{11,12}

The Housing Registrar of Victoria (HRV) is the governing registration body that outlines how community housing organisations calculate rent. The HRV stipulates affordable rent costs at 25-30\% of gross income and 100\% of Commonwealth rent assistance received by tenants (Housing Registrar of Victoria., 2015, 2016b). This policy allows SouthPort to charge an additional service fee. Using the HRV calculation for affordable rent, housing is deemed affordable. All tenants, regardless of property, pay the same amount of rent with an additional service fee charged. There is no difference between rents in a rooming house or a self-contained unit or flats, but a price difference arises from the service fee charged. Nevertheless, SouthPort provides affordable rent to all tenants, both in its rooming house and its self-contained units. This suggests that both rooming houses and self-contained units have the capacity to be a stable environment for tenants to live. Housing affordability, according to the financial analysis, is not a distinguishing factor in how SouthPort tenants experience stability and ontological security.

Housing may be deemed affordable according to HRV calculations; however, tenants must also perceive their living situation as affordable to have a sense of stability. If tenants perceive their housing to be affordable, they can feel a sense of trust that they can afford to remain in housing long-term without being in financial and housing stress. Tenants must be on government benefits when they enter SouthPort housing, but they can seek employment subsequently to have a higher income. All tenants interviewed were on government benefits at the time of research and were not working.

Interviews suggested that most tenants perceived their housing to be affordable, enabling them to have trust that they could remain in housing long term. Harrison, a 55-year-old man, lived in private rental his whole life. He never felt the desire to purchase property; instead he was content renting. After years of working, however, he suffered from mental health concerns which prevented him from continuing employment. Living on a disability support pension, Harrison could not afford his rent when his landlord decided to substantially increase it. Harrison spent the next six months of his life couch-surfing at various friends’ houses, after which the relationships broke down. With nowhere to turn, he lived in a rooming house for a few weeks before entering SouthPort housing in a self-contained unit:

\textit{From the point of view of here, it makes me feel very content, that you know, I’m secure financially, secure, [...] its reassuring to know that you have got a roof over your head [...] the place I was in there, there was always the impending sense that at some point I would get priced out, I just knew it was going to happen at some point, I was surprised it hadn’t happened earlier.}

\textsuperscript{11} Except one building (where tenants pay their own electricity), utilities and services fees are included in the overall housing costs.

\textsuperscript{12} For a complete breakdown of rent paid according to the two main income types - Newstart allowance and the disability support pension - refer to 10.5 Appendix E: Appendix E: Rent Calculations. These calculations do not consider tenants who have extra income from work, as rent is determined on a case-by-case situation, depending on their income.
Harrison did not want to be displaced again, and his sense of financial security at SouthPort meant that community housing could function as a place that would be his home through retirement.

A number of other tenants made similar comments. Isabelle is 44-year-old woman who, after raising her children, got into financial debt. After this she began to get involved in the drug subculture, which led to her experiencing homelessness in a caravan park. Isabelle then spent a year couch surfing but, after violence from her host, she started living in her car. It was at this point that Isabelle contacted SouthPort for housing. Isabelle, who is limited in her finances, comments that the affordability of her unit is pretty good. I think it’s pretty good. I get rent assistance, so it sort of fixes itself up [...] Yes, it’s definitely affordable. Because you’re paying your rent and that pays your water, gas, electricity.

Clay, a 50-year-old man, used to live with his father before the apartment was sold. Clay had no housing options and could not afford private rental due to his financial situation. Therefore, Clay applied to various community housing organisations, before he was able to move directly in to a self-contained unit at SouthPort. Clay believes that SouthPort housing is cheap and he enjoys the fact that it is all inclusive: the rent's cheap and you get – they – the electricity and gas is taken out with your rent, so you don't have to worry about bills and it's reasonably cheap and they're good units. This means that tenants do not have to worry about paying bills on time.

Maxine, a 63-year-old woman, who has been living at SouthPort for nearly 20 years, further explains, Well, I like the fact that I don't have to worry about paying my bills. That they've decided that that's all in, apart from my phone bill, because that's all inclusive in the rent. I like that aspect. This allows tenants’ costs to be at a minimum. For people on low incomes, especially fixed government incomes, low and predictable costs are incredibly important for preventing housing or financial stress.

Liam, a 60-year-old man, struggled to make friends and find work when he moved to Melbourne in his 20’s. Without any supports, he moved around Melbourne and Victoria, living in different rooming houses, including eventually into a SouthPort rooming house. Although he planned to use SouthPort housing as a stepping stone to find accommodation with other people his age, he was not successful for a variety of reasons. After years of living with SouthPort, Liam got the opportunity to move into a one-bedroom apartment, where has lived ever since. Private rental was not possible for Liam and the affordable rent allows him to spend his money on other, important costs, as he indicates, the only costs I've got are basically rent, transport, food, and very, very occasionally, clothing will be an item I need to buy, or maybe something needs to be done to the car.

These interview comments suggest that SouthPort’s practice of combining rent and bills, alongside the affordability of the rent, has meant that tenants can feel more secure in their housing and that tenants trust that rent will not increase to a degree that places them under financial stress. It further means that tenants have the capacity to spend money on other living costs. Tenants’ views of affordability did not differ based on their accommodation type at SouthPort – tenants in both rooming houses and self-contained units made similar comments on affordability - but tenants’ views can vary based on their income level.

It is important to note, however, that government benefits are not very generous, and tenants will often feel financial stress because their income is so low. Although it is not a requirement to remain on benefits once housed, a majority of tenants are unable to work for a variety of reasons. For example, Aiden, a 43-year-old man, had only recently moved to SouthPort
when interviewed. After a physical assault which prevented him from working, Aiden’s anxiety levels increased to a debilitating level. Without the capacity to work and living on the NewStart allowance, a relationship breakdown left him with nowhere to go, and he ended up without a home. For Aiden, the NewStart allowance makes everything unaffordable, as he explains, Well, it’s reasonable, I think given for what it is, you know, but when you’re on NewStart, you know, nothing is affordable really.

As well, the amount of rent paid by tenants increases according to changes in government benefits. This is often where tenants can feel some pressure. Emma comments, Yeah, rent is going up again. I think rent should be cheaper. I really do, yeah, compared to – like I’m on DSP and I think like every time we get a small rise on DSP, the rent goes up. The precarious nature of government benefits will always induce a sense of stress, given the small amount of money that tenants are required to live off (Morris & Wilson, 2014). This is an important consideration for people exiting homelessness. Although individuals may feel a sense of security and trust because they are receiving an income, as long as they are on benefits, they will be under financial stress.

A limitation in the results here is that tenants, when speaking about affordability, did not distinguish affordability in their housing specifically: they merely spoke about their current living costs overall. It is also important to note that that tenants were mostly in self-contained units at the time of interviewing.

Affordability of housing is imperative to ensure that tenants feel secure and trust that they can afford their rent over a long period of time. Confidence in the continued affordability of their homes allows them to feel a sense of ontological security. Affordable housing is the foundation to ensure that they have a constant environment where they can exert control and build trust in the world. The analysis shows that affordability, however, does not vary between rooming housing or self-contained units, as rent was calculated in the same manner for both rooming houses and self-contained units. Moreover, tenants not only received affordable housing, according to standard definitions adopted in Victoria, but they also perceived their housing to be affordable. SouthPort have enabled an environment where tenants have a sense of trust in their rent and utility bills. Affordability, however, is just one element however in ensuring that tenants have a secure environment and to achieve ontological security. Security of tenure is also incredibly important.

5.3. Security of tenure

The capacity for tenants to know that they are secure within their housing, and that they do not need to leave, provides for a space in which tenants can build routine, establish normalcy and exert control. Providing long-term accommodation to tenants is an explicit goal of SouthPort in its efforts to combat homelessness. Security of tenure can be understood as a tenant’s “Control over length of stay and timing of moving out of dwelling (subject to meeting tenancy obligations)” (Hulse & Milligan, 2014, p. 26). Security of tenure contributes to the health and well-being of tenants, provides a sense of stability, reduces residential mobility, decreases stress levels and contributes to social cohesion (Lewis, 2006). Furthermore, it provides a sense of reassurance needed so that tenants trust that they have a secure place to live. Security of tenure is fundamental in ensuring that tenants are able to be ontologically secure and develop a sense of trust in the world.
This section seeks to explore whether tenants feel a sense of security in rooming houses, as compared to self-contained units, and it also explores whether their experience of security of tenure enables them to feel ontologically secure. This section will first discuss security of tenure from a legislative perspective, followed by an organisational management perspective.

5.3.1. Legislation

Legislation needs to be considered when focusing on security of tenure and whether the legislation enables or hinders tenants’ capacity to have stability and security of tenure. The Residential Tenancies Act 1997 is the Victorian legislation governing rental agreements within the state of Victoria. Rooming houses are governed by Part 3 of the legislation, whilst self-contained units are Governed by Part 2. Understanding the difference between the two forms of tenancy is imperative to understanding whether rooming house tenants have more or less security of tenure compared to self-contained units. The following section will focus on the similarities and differences in the legislation between rooming house legislation and self-contained units.

It is important to point out that this section does not aim for a comprehensive analysis of the legislation. Rather it has targeted key elements of the legislation that are relevant to SouthPort tenants, selected based on issues that arose during observation and interviews. The key issues were: using rooms for illegal purposes, such as prostitution and drug taking; damage to properties; violence and aggression in properties; and non-payment of rent.

There are more legislative similarities between rooming houses and self-contained units than differences. Sections 59 and Section 111 focus on tenants and visitors on using their rooms or the premises for illegal purposes. Both provisions result in the same outcome, which is the authorisation for a landlord to evict tenants. Sections 246 and 281 stipulate that failure to pay rent can result in a termination of tenancy. Sections 258 and Section 282 specify that tenants must comply with a VCAT order or face eviction. Sections 249 & 289 specify that landlords are able to issue a notice to vacate, if the tenant has successively been issued two breaches on the same issue/breaches because the tenant does not comply with Part 5 of the Act. Sections 253 and 283 explain that a landlord has the right to issue a notice to vacate, without a reason, with the tenant having 120 days to evacuate the premise. These sections, in other words, provide the same conditions for tenants in rooming houses and self-contained units. They articulate the same rights for tenants and landlords. The only major difference is the time that tenants have to vacate, with self-contained units receiving a 14-day notice and rooming house tenants receiving only a 2-day notice.

There are, however, a few differences in the legislation which are important to note. The danger and damage clauses in the legislation differ slightly. Although landlords have the right to evict a tenant if they or a visitor cause damage to the property or endanger the safety of their neighbours (Section 278, 279, 243 and 244), the legislation places more onus on a rooming house owner to ensure that properties are secure (section 123).

Quiet enjoyment is another section of the Residential Tenancies Act that differs between self-contained units and rooming houses. Landlords in rooming houses and self-contained units must take all reasonable steps to ensure that tenants have the capacity to enjoy their rented premises in quiet enjoyment (Section 67 and 122). However, tenants in rooming houses have more stipulations and considerably less security. Rooming house residents and guests are responsible for ensuring that they do not interfere with the privacy, peace and quiet of the rooming house (section 113). The largest difference, however, is the capacity of
the rooming house owner to terminate a tenancy, on that day the notice to vacate is given, if a resident or their visitor seriously disrupts the rooming house (Section 280). This places rooming house tenants at greater risk of tenancy termination compared to tenants in self-contained units, because SouthPort has more authority under the Act over rooming houses.

Determining quiet enjoyment without an onsite manager is incredibly difficult. A lack of quiet enjoyment, damage to the property and danger to tenants was a constant issue during field work. The maintenance housing worker often spent time at the Rooming House repairing a range of damages done to the property. It was through these encounters that staff learnt of the danger experienced by tenants and the lack of capacity tenants have for quiet enjoyment. On one Monday morning, for example, staff were informed that, over the weekend, one of the tenants had decided to rip up the carpet and lift the floorboards underneath. SouthPort did not know who did the damage, so, even though this kind of incident legislatively provides ground for termination of tenancy, using this legislative authority was rarely so clear cut. Even when there is clearer evidence, such as violence being reported, it can still be difficult to issue such a termination notice because there is a lack of proof.

To summarise: this section explored whether there were similarities or difference in the Residential Tenancies Act between rooming houses and self-contained units. Tenants in both rooming houses and self-contained units have similar legislative rights. One major difference relates to the greater legislative control SouthPort has in exercising and acting on quiet enjoyment in rooming houses, compared to self-contained units. This could explain why tenants prefer self-contained units and remain in such units longer.

The legislation itself provides a framework for landlords and tenants to work within, and as long as tenants follow the law, they are not at risk of eviction. The legislation posits an ideal environment, however, and, as later chapters will explore, the situation on the ground, in both rooming houses and self-contained units, can be vastly different from this ideal. In practice, tenants often breach the Residential Tenancies Act and, therefore, in practice their security of tenure is at greater risk. By letter of law, however, tenants in rooming houses and self-contained units both have secure tenancies assuming they live within the law. The legislation is therefore an enabling factor that can enable tenants to experience security of tenure. At this point, it is worth turning to SouthPort's implementation of the legislation for greater insight into whether there is a difference in organisational practice that could lead tenants in rooming houses and self-contained units to different experiences of ontological security.

5.3.2. SouthPort Management of Security of Tenure

SouthPort’s implementation of the legislation and their management of tenancies directly influences the security of tenure experienced by tenants. The lease itself, alongside the management style of SouthPort, are two key factors which enable tenants to experience security of tenure in practical terms.

All tenants sign an ongoing lease agreement with SouthPort when they enter housing. With no fixed term or end date like many private rentals, SouthPort tenants are able to remain in their housing as long as they desire, provided they adhere to the legislation. This is a key reason that tenants are able to feel a sense of security in their housing, as they understand they will not be randomly evicted or need to seek new accommodation in a year’s time. Private rental housing in Australia offers little security, as leases are fixed term and often between 6-12 months (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2013). Therefore, tenants can develop little
ontological security as they have no capacity to know where they will be living. However, social housing has been shown to have greater security of tenure because of the ongoing lease agreements available to tenants (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2013; Hulse et al., 2011; Marston, 2004). Social housing has therefore often been seen as a more secure form of tenure than private rental. The mixture of affordable housing and ongoing tenancies provides a space for tenants to have tenure security and feel in control.

As discussed in the previous sections, SouthPort are governed by legislation and by the regulating community housing body, Housing Register of Victoria. SouthPort must work within the confines of the policy environment to manage their properties and provide tenure security for tenants. SouthPort have the same policies governing management of tenancies in rooming houses and self-contained units. Therefore, their response to tenants does not differ based on property, but rather assesses the individual cases. As one of the staff members explains,

*If a little bit of financial flexibility for a couple of months because some financial crisis has arisen, whether it's drug-related or not, can help people stay in their housing rather than on the street, then I think we have a responsibility to do that, and I'm not sure that every community housing organisation sees things that way... I'm not saying it's a good thing for the organisation. It's probably not, but it's a good thing for people who are facing homelessness.*

The staff at SouthPort understand that the decisions they make affect a vulnerable population where eviction results, more often than not, in a return to homelessness. Therefore, they work alongside their tenants to facilitate their remaining long-term in housing. However, evictions can and do occur, either for severe violence or severe rent arrears. Rent arrears evictions are a lot less common because staff try heavily to work with tenants to pay back their arrears slowly. As one staff member indicated

*But every now and then you do have a tenant that despite, you know, despite staff writing to or calling that person, speaking with that person over and over and over again and try to work with them to get their rent... We're guided by the Residential Tenancies Act like any rental property. So, it means that we do – we do have to attend [VCAT] from time to time. I have been a part of evictions for rent and it's not fun. It's not something that we like doing.*

Staff will often take tenants to VCAT with the intention to put in place a payment plan and, whilst I was on field work, no tenant was evicted because of rent arrears. During the field work period, staff would work with tenants to make sure that they could pay back an affordable amount each week, ensuring that it would not impinge too much on their life. The desire to work with tenants in rent arrears, is in stark contrast to the private rental sector, where a failure to pay rent often results in an eviction (Hulse et al., 2011). The willingness to work with tenants is a demonstration to the tenants themselves that they can have a sense of trust that the organisation wants them housed and will work alongside the tenants to ensure they can remain in housing. It allows a sense of trust in an organisation to be re-built.

Violence was a much clearer concern for staff and, during field work, three tenants were evicted for severe acts of violence for tenants in the rooming house. One of the staff members explains why,
The main reason that we would evict anyone is for violence. The only other reason is like a severe failure to pay rent… I mean, that’s a really, really, really sort of clear legal issue that if someone commits any form of violence, we're exposed as tenancy managers unless we do something...

Anti-social behaviours and violence against staff, tenants and associated workers, are a clear concern for SouthPort in how they manage tenancies. Although staff are often willing to work alongside tenants in managing anti-social behaviour, violence is a clear legal issue to which they must respond. As seen in the discussion of the legislative above, SouthPort have the responsibility to provide a space free from danger where tenants can live in quiet enjoyment, and violence poses a clear and direct conflict with that responsibility.

Observational research and staff interviews therefore suggest that SouthPort enables tenants to develop a sense of security within their housing by providing ongoing lease agreements, and by their commitment to work alongside tenants to resolve rent arrears. Tenants are able to have security of tenure assuming that they follow two main guidelines: paying rent and not being violent towards staff or fellow tenants. This finding holds for both rooming houses and self-contained units. The next section explores whether tenants’ experience of security of tenure matches what is suggested by staff interviews and observational data.

5.3.3. Tenants’ Experience

Ongoing lease agreements and SouthPort’s approach to security of tenure indicates that they pursue the goal of longterm tenancies. Evidence that they are succeeding in achieving this goal, can be seen in quantitative data on the length of tenancy, but is also expressed in tenants’ understanding of their housing situation. Tenants indicated that they feel a sense of security in their housing and that they believe that SouthPort can be their home as long as they follow the rules. For Reed, the most important element was ongoing lease agreements:

So, there's a sense of security around that, knowing that I've got this unit for as long as I need to have it. And unlike private rental, there’s no risk of eviction unless I behave really badly and that’s not going to happen. So, you have to behave really badly to get evicted, I mean really badly. And even then, it's still quite a long process.

Reed understands that he can and will remain in housing, for as long as he needs to recuperate from his past, providing the stability necessary to develop trust in the world. Reed’s interview was one of many that suggested that tenants understood that they had security of tenure if they paid rent and were not violent, which meant that their apartments could be a constant environment. This result was similar to findings from the scholarly literature, where studies of both public housing tenants (Mee, 2007) and caravan park residents (Newton, 2008) have pointed to the importance of tenants knowing that they could not be evicted.

Reed’s comments were echoed by Thomas, a 56-year-old man, who has lived in SouthPort for nearly 20 years. He has lived in many rooming houses over the years, but is currently residing in a one-bedroom apartment. Thomas was homeless for many years prior to entering housing, largely attributed to a long-term heroin addiction which affected his

13 See Table 3: Tenant Interview Demographic Information at Time of Interview
capacity to remain in housing. However, Thomas has been drug-free for over 15 years. Thomas is an example of a tenant who was always behind in rent due to his drug addiction at the time, but SouthPort allowed him to catch up on his rent.

I’d get behind in rent and South Port were always really good for me. They let me catch up. I mean, a couple of times, they tried to kick me out, but they knew – I – I – I explained to them that that wasn’t a good idea and then they’d let me stay.

This flexibility and support has meant that he had a secure place to rebuild his trust in the world over a long period of time, and his housing functioned as a constant in an otherwise tumultuous world. This had a major effect on Thomas, as SouthPort provided him a space to get off drugs and remain sober for 15 years.

Security of tenure often results in long-term tenancy. Among other reasons for long tenancies, secure tenure provides a stable environment for tenants to develop social networks with their immediate neighbours (Arthurson, 2002). This is exceptionally important for people who have experienced homelessness and lost contact with past networks (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Ravenhill, 2008; Solarz & Bogat, 1990; Stone & Hulse, 2007). As Liam explains,

the age and long-term residence– of the residences in the flats – basically, what that means is that most people are gonna stay quite a long time, in theory anyway. The second thing – whereas in the rooming house, you might have quite a nice person, and they might have been living next to you for 12 months, two years even maybe. And they decide to move, and you think, “Oh, no. Who’s gonna move in? Oh, well, I hope they’re gonna be all right.”

Ongoing leases enable an environment where tenants can remain long-term in housing, if they desire. Through this, tenants are able to be rely on their neighbours and build social connections they otherwise might not be afforded, providing a space where tenants can trust their environment will not change dramatically.

Aside from the suggestive material in Liam’s comment above, the interview data did not clearly distinguish between rooming house and self-contained units on this topic, and therefore the data cannot be conclusive as to whether tenants’ experiences differ between rooming houses and self-contained units regarding security of tenure. However, it can be surmised that security of tenure and affordability both contribute to feelings of stability; enabling tenants to feel a sense of ontological security. Tenants perceived there to be security of tenure, which provides stability; however it is important to look more closely at whether and how tenants perceive their housing as stable.

5.4. Tenants’ Experience of Stability

People who have experienced homelessness vary considerably, as homelessness encompasses overcrowded accommodation, rooming houses, couch surfers, temporary accommodation services and - the most visible form - rough sleepers. For people who have experienced homelessness, stability is imperative to allowing ontological security to develop as they have experienced highly unstable environments in their past (Fitzpatrick & Watts, 2017; Mee, 2007). Therefore, focusing on tenants’ perception of stability in rooming houses...
and self-contained units provides an understanding of the differences between the two forms of accommodation and whether they hinder or enable ontological security.

It is important to note that the discussion of tenants’ experience of living in a rooming house, is not confined to the SouthPort rooming house, but draws upon tenants’ vast experience of living in various rooming houses across Melbourne. Therefore, all information regarding which rooming house someone lived in when an incident occurred has been taken out, and this analysis simply refers to a ‘rooming house’ to enable a balanced discussion regarding the tenants’ of rooming house experience. Fieldwork examples do include those from the SouthPort rooming house among others; however, no tenants’ interviews will be linked to fieldwork data directly. Their experience in different rooming houses provides insight into reasons why self-contained units may enable a greater sense of ontological security. Furthermore, it provides the context for understanding safety and security, the improvement that occurs when not sharing facilities and the difficulty tenants have in being motivated to achieve their needs.

As discussed in Chapter 2, rooming houses were transformed from working class accommodation into housing for economically marginalised populations within Australia – a transformation then entrenched by the expansion of rooming houses as social housing in the 1980’s (Dalton et al., 2015). The literature suggests that rooming houses perpetuate homelessness because they are often unsafe, insecure environments without privacy (Chamberlain et al., 2007; McNaughton, 2008a, p. 89). Individuals living in rooming houses are now considered to be homeless due to the unstable and unsafe environment (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012).

The stability (or instability) experienced in rooming houses was not spoken about by interviewees as a concern in its own right. Rather, interviewees spoke about stability in rooming houses contrastively, when discussing self-contained units. Tenants’ discussion of stability in self-contained units demonstrates the lack of stability in rooming house environments. Harrison, for example, had just moved into a self-contained unit and felt a sense of relief that he had not felt in a while,

\[\text{So, this has been an absolute joy compared to the previous 6 months or so, of feeling a bit lost and lonely. I’m glad I’m not on someone’s couch and I’m glad I’m not in a rooming house anymore and dealing with that sort of stuff.}\]

Even though Aiden has many issues with the self-contained units, he can and does acknowledge that they provide enough space for one person, \textit{I mean the one I’m in is certainly suitable for anyone to live in. I mean you can quite easily live in a place like that. You know you’ve got access to hygiene, food, all that sort of stuff, and they’re the basics of life and that’s what I didn’t have in the Rooming House.} Reed likewise highlighted the importance of self-contained units and the lack of stability in rooming houses – and, interestingly, was able to articulate that it was through this stability he has been afforded, that he can then work on himself,

\[\text{That’s my unit. So it’s not just a room in shared facilities. It’s not even a room in a shared house, but it’s my unit. […] this is my opportunity now to rest, to recover and to really assess over the next year or two what my options are, they’re to do with the security of being housed and the security of long-term housing.}\]
The manner in which tenants discuss their experienced stability in the self-contained units suggests that this form of housing is more conducive to stability than what is afforded to rooming house tenants. Self-contained units enabled an environment where tenants are able to grow from their independence and provided the stability needed to ensure that tenants are able to rebuild their lives. For Emma, it has meant that she has been able to be more stable and move away from her previous life and into a new, more stable and secure lifestyle where she is

Much more settled. Like at the time that I moved in, it was right around the time my partner had passed away. So, you know, I was – life was pretty rough at the Rooming House. And then moving in here, yeah, life became much more settled, people that live here you know I’ve got along with people that live here which made life much more settled. Yeah, so I went from being like, you know, depressed and really down to hope, feeling more hopeful, life – basically much more settled in myself. Just became – and started to get to kind of back in the swing of things, doing things, daily things whereas before, I would hardly do anything. And then, like going down to the library, little things like that was a big step.

For Emma, then, self-contained units provided the stability that was not afforded in rooming houses. Whilst Elliot was speaking about his unit, he articulated that, having this, like it stopped – basically it prevents me from doing any crime, stop me from doing more crimes. Self-contained units also functioned as a stable place for tenants to rebuild their sense of trust in themselves and the world around them. For example Jacob, a 50-year-old man, had been living at SouthPort for 4 years. Jacob lived in rooming houses for nearly 2 years before moving into a self-contained unit. SouthPort housing provided Jacob the space to rebuild his life, as

they sort of saw I was getting well, and they started putting in me better places, like they finally put me in one that had a sink, and then they put me in one that had a little kitchen. … I went – I’d gone back to study at RMIT and I started studying. I had some part-time work, struggling with my health.

These interviews suggest that tenants experience stability in their self-contained units which has allowed them to rebuild their lives, and be more settled and stable. Lee explains, I’m more settled. I’m settled now. I was going crazy there for a while but I’m more settled and stable. Yeah, it is. I was everywhere before I came here but now, I’ve been here over a year. It’s good, you know. These tenants describe how the physical space of self-contained units, compared to rooming houses, provided an environment for stability. Stability is fundamental to ontological security and understanding tenants’ past and their unstable environment provides the contextual background that enables their experience in self-contained units to be understood.

5.5. Conclusion

The experience of homelessness is often a chaotic period, resulting in a decline in people’s mental health, general health and perceived self-worth (Koegel & Burnam, 1992; Shaw, 2004; Wardhaugh, 1999). Stability in housing is paramount for tenants to obtain and feel a sense of ontological security. This chapter explored the role that rooming houses, self-
contained units, SouthPort and the legislation play in how tenants experience stability in their housing.

SouthPort provide affordable accommodation in rooming houses and self-contained units, and manage rooming houses and self-contained units with the same guidelines. Tenants are on on-going leases and SouthPort work alongside tenants to manage rent-arrears and most anti-social behaviour. Tenants perceived there to be security in their housing.

An analysis of The Residential Tenancies Act 1997 suggests that people living in a self-contained unit have slightly more security than tenants in rooming houses, because of the landlord’s capacity to evict tenants who undermine the principle of ‘quiet enjoyment’. Another key difference between rooming houses and self-contained units is tenants’ perception of stability. Stability was only spoken about in relation to self-contained units, with rooming houses being mentioned only when discussing the stability of self-contained units.

This chapter shed light on the fact that self-contained units have more elements of stability than rooming houses. Self-contained units enable stability within community housing. Rooming houses, although managed under the same guidelines as self-contained units, do not appear to hold the same capacity to be stable. Stability in self-contained units is one element where home functions as a site of ontological security. Although this chapter sheds light on the fact that self-contained units are more stable, it does not explain why this form of housing is more stable, nor if/how rooming houses are a hinderance. The following chapter will explore these questions more directly, by examining how self-contained units compare with rooming houses in terms of the control tenants possess over their living environment.
6. Control

6.1. Introduction

Control is central for home to function as a site of ontological security, as it permits tenants to take charge of their lives and rebuild trust in the world around them within a physical space. Control allows tenants to build routine and social supports, if they desire. But most importantly, control over space provides a tenant with an area where they can make their own decisions. Pivotal to exerting such control, however, is a tenant’s capacity to live in a private space, where they do not need to negotiate the use of facilities. Control may explain why self-contained units function more as a site of ontological security than rooming houses.

This chapter uses Altman's (1975) understanding of space and privacy to focus on how tenants experience the physical space around them and to examine the varying elements of control afforded in different spaces. Key to this analysis is an understanding of privacy consisting of three spaces: primary, secondary and public (Altman, 1975). Primary space is a person’s immediate living space - the area which they inhabit and have complete control over. Secondary spaces are communal areas which allow someone to meet their basic needs, such as a laundry and gardens. Finally, public spaces are those spaces which are in the public realm (Altman, 1975). This distinction allows privacy to be understood in the context of rooming houses and self-contained units.

This chapter focuses on tenants’ control over their environment, comparing tenants’ experience in rooming houses with that of self-contained units. The chapter specifically explores how tenants experience privacy and how private space enables tenants to exert control over their space. The first part of this chapter will focus on rooming houses and how secondary spaces function as tenants’ primary space, reducing tenants’ ability to be in control. The second part will explore tenants’ experience of primary and secondary spaces in self-contained units and their buildings.

This chapter argues that home is not a site of ontological security for tenants in a rooming house. Self-contained units, however, provide an element of control for tenants, enabling tenants to experience home as a site of ontological security. This sense of control is hindered, however, by intrusions on space through secondary areas.

6.2. Control within Rooming Houses

The primary space for a tenant in a rooming house is their room. In their room, SouthPort provide a bed, a small table and a fridge for tenants in rooming houses. The remainder of the furniture is up to tenants. Primary space is where control is most prominent, as this is a space where you immediately live and have no need to negotiate with others about the use of the space. The concern with rooming house primary space, is that, in order for tenants to access basic necessities to live, they must do so in a secondary space. The lack of a private kitchen and bathroom facilities in a person’s primary space is one aspect of their environment where tenants are not able to exert control. There is a reliance on neighbours when using secondary spaces that is not required in self-contained units. Consistently throughout the fieldwork and the interviews, tenants described a lack of privacy in rooming houses that hinders their ability to be in control. A lack of privacy and control can explain why rooming houses are not an appropriate long-term solution to housing the homeless.
In rooming houses, secondary spaces become central to a person’s living environment and therefore become an instant point of negotiation. Privacy, or a lack thereof, is one difficulty that arises which influences tenants’ capacity to be in control. Tenants describe an environment where the toilets were unhygienic, limiting their ability to use the space to their own desire. Harrison, for example, explains that the toilets were pretty disgusting as well. I mean not putrid, just they are shared facilities and they are not well maintained and not cleaned often enough and not cleaned thoroughly. Reed explains that there was a loss of dignity when using shared facilities, and that, because of their condition, I always remember the feeling of a lack of dignity around doing things just like going to the toilet, like having a shower, just because there was just no respect or concern for the cleanliness of the place by some people. James revealed that you may even find people in the bathroom when you go to use it.

One of the guys had a couple of night girls that used to come and stay in his room during the day and, in the middle of the night, they'd be up having a share and should nap in the bathroom and doing all this before they go out to work and it'd be just absolute pigsty.

The inherent nature of shared facilities in rooming houses means that tenants must rely on other tenants’ desire to maintain a similar standard of toilet cleanliness. A communal toilet, which is often shared with more than 10 other individuals, can make it difficult to have a set standard that everyone will meet. Scarlett, 65-year-old woman, was living in a self-contained unit at the time of the research. When she lost her job, she was not able to afford her three-bedroom house or a new bond. Scarlett spent years living in rooming houses before she was able to move to a self-contained unit, where she has been for 2 years. Scarlett recalled her experience of a rooming house cleanliness, explaining that it was Bad ’cause I believe it [should be] cleaned – nobody else would clean up. Well, a very few of them did. I can’t say nobody did. As Emma similarly explains, when you’re sharing bathrooms and things like that, you got to rely on other people to do the right thing and more often than not, there’ll always be one or two that will just leave it all up to everyone else. It makes it a pain in the backside.

Even though a tenant may consistently clean up after themselves, they must still rely on their neighbours to do the right thing.

Hygiene is often perception based, as Reed describes, it was – the other people in the rooming house didn’t really care about hygiene at all and there’s cockroaches, there’s mice; it wasn’t very pleasant at all. Hygiene standards are based on an individual’s perception and are difficult to coordinate with at least 10 others when sharing facilities. Tenants have a distinct lack of control which affects their ability to live comfortably and in a space where they feel at home and can “pursue ‘normal’ social relations” (Chamberlain, 2014, p. 14). Although tenants may clean up to their own standard, it will often be compromised by the next person. Having toilets in secondary spaces eliminates privacy. These tenants describe an environment that makes it difficult to meet basic human needs, even intimate, personal needs such as going to the toilet. The lack of ability to know what state the toilet is in, and a lack of capacity to maintain personal hygiene standards, further reinforced tenants lack of control over their living environment.

Tenants changed their routines and habits to live within secondary spaces and negotiate with other tenants. As Reed explains, toilet paper would be provided, but people would then steal it because they’d be afraid that there would be none left, so I just understood, I just bought my own. Reed compensated for his lack of control over the behaviour of other tenants, by developing the habit of bringing his own toilet paper when using the toilet.
Harrison similarly speaks of developing new routines to accommodate for sharing toilets. *In the middle of the night if you needed to wee, you couldn’t just wander out of bed and wander through the place in your undies. There is a major sort of procedure of, at least putting a t-shirt on, looking half reasonable as you wander through the house to go to the toilet.* Uncertainty regarding the state of the shared spaces leads tenants to develop new routines and habits to combat the uncertainty and to try and exert control over their environment. Although this could be seen as a positive step in developing ontological security, this routine and control stems from a high level of uncertainty and is merely a coping mechanism (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011).

Control over hygiene standards was not simply a concern of the toilet, but also of the building itself and the kitchen. James could not even enter the kitchen due to his allergies. Because of this, he could not cook or create routine in his accommodation. *I couldn’t walk into the kitchen when people were cooking certain things. I couldn’t use the fridge because there were certain foods in the fridge, and plus, they get missing and everything, but I just couldn’t be in that shared environment.* The sharing of physical space means that tenants must compromise with their neighbours and discuss issues of concern if they are wanting to live in an environment which they deem to be a home. However, given the neighbours, it is also often difficult to take affirmative action towards a better living space, because disagreements often escalated into arguments, as Reed explains,

> Our arguments are around shared facilities. So, it might be an argument around where food is being stored, for example, or it might be an argument around hygiene, like cleaning up after one’s self, like the toilet, for example. Or it might be around the use of the laundry facilities. So, it’s generally around shared facilities.

People will avoid bringing up concerns due to the fear of the argument that may ensue. Sharing facilities means that tenants must make compromises within their living environment, and often change their routine to enable an environment where they feel more secure. The data suggests that there was little difference between men and women in how they experience rooming houses. As Mifflin & Wilton explain, “an inability to control access to, and the condition of, the bathroom as an `intimate space' can be interpreted as a fundamental challenge to the status of a rooming house as `home.” (2005, p. 410). Tenants’ inability to control shared spaces in rooming houses, greatly hinders their capacity to be ontologically secure.

The general environment can also hinder peoples’ ability to perform hobbies and routines in ways that could greatly hinder their mental health. As Reed states, *my writing came to a bit of a halt while I was at Rooming House because of the stress that I was under. Now that I’m a lot more relaxed, the writing’s starting to come through as it was before again so.* The stress of the rooming house did not enable him to write, which was a mechanism for him to be able to understand his environment. Furthermore, Noel, who paints and plays guitar, has found it incredibly difficult to perform those tasks because of the noise levels,

> I should be painting and playing my guitar or something, you know. But living over there in the Rooming House it doesn’t give me any inspiration, you know, <laughs> besides there’s too many thumping going on, you know, like – so, if – if you’re doing that, you have to have it quiet, you know. You gotta have quietness when you doing painting and, concentrate. And all the thumping on that goes upstairs, and – and the
bloody washing machine going on <laughs> it's too distracting, too distracting, you know

This lack of control over the noise levels, greatly affects tenants’ ability to focus and attend to their own private pursuits. However, if housing enabled a sense of ontological security, tenants would be able to do focus better, as demonstrated by Reed, who writes on a consistent basis now that he is in a self-contained unit.

6.2.1. Conclusion

Tenants’ capacity to exert control over their environment is central to housing functioning as a site of ontological security, and privacy is a key element for tenants to exercise control over their living situation in community housing. Rooming houses hinder tenants’ ability to be ontologically secure, as they intrinsically lack privacy and control. Primary space is normally where people fulfil basic human functions, such as eating and going to the bathroom. However, in rooming houses, tenants must complete these functions in a secondary space. Tenants must rely on their neighbours to meet hygiene standards and therefore are unable to exert any form of control over their space or lives. Because they do not afford tenants the capacity to exert basic control over their environment, rooming houses cannot and do not function to enable ontological security for tenants. This is incredibly problematic for vulnerable tenants who have experienced homelessness. With no capacity to be in control of their environment and be ontologically secure, the high turn-over rates experienced in rooming houses are not surprising.

6.3. Self-Contained Units

Self-contained units, by contrast, have private primary spaces that permit tenants to exert control over their environment. This form of control over one’s space is central to ensuring that people are ontologically secure. The exploration of privacy and control in rooming houses at the beginning of this chapter demonstrated that tenants had very little control over their environment and are not able to experience home as a site of ontological security in rooming houses. In comparison, the remainder of this chapter explores whether and how tenants can experience control within self-contained units in community housing and the way this aids tenants to experience home as a site of ontological security.

One of the most important components of the effectiveness of self-contained units is the tenants’ power to control their living space, including how it is used and maintained, without the reliance on another party. Tenants repeatedly mentioned the importance of having their own kitchen and bathroom, and how it was this factor that allowed them to have control.

Self-contained units refer to both self-contained bed-sit units and one-bedroom apartments throughout the thesis, unless otherwise specified. Self-contained bed-sit units range between 20m² and 40.6m², which includes an open-plan kitchen, living and sleeping area with a separate bathroom. One-bedroom apartments range between 40m² to 50m² and comprise a kitchen and living area, a bathroom and a separate bedroom. Clay provides an apt description of the spatial context of his self-contained bed-sit units:

It’s just like your basic bed sitter. It’s got a sofa and my bed, and a single bed in the lounge room. And I got a separate kitchen and bathroom, and it's yeah. It's good, pretty new and good, so I’m happy with it. The appliances are all modern and up to date, doesn’t have anything done on it
for a while 'cause it only two years old buildings. The carpet’s good. And it’s warm in winter and not too bad in summer.

Compared to rooming houses, self-contained units at SouthPort are private spaces where tenants have their own kitchen and bathroom with which to perform daily rituals. People who have experienced homelessness, are consistently having to compromise with other people, whether that be with other rooming house tenants, couch surfing friends or housemates. Therefore, private primary space, which is theirs alone, is incredibly valuable to them (Padgett, 2007).

6.3.1. Primary Space

The primary space of a self-contained unit includes the kitchen and bathroom and, unlike rooming houses, tenants can complete basic human functions without the reliance on neighbours. Self-contained units mean that tenants have privacy, on a daily basis, which lets them exercise control over their space.

As Emma explains, having your own kitchen and bathroom enhances her experience of her unit, the fact that you got your own kitchen area and your own bathroom makes it heaps better. Not having to share. Therefore, the provision of self-contained units has a greater capacity to enable control because it does not require the tenant to negotiate space, allowing for tenants to use their primary space as they wish. For Reed, it has meant that he has greater dignity because he is able to have control of his space, so while I've got less space, which has meant that I've taken out some storage, I've got less space. That's something that I'm prepared to bear because I've got my privacy back, I've got my dignity back, and it's my unit. Reed, who was worried about hygiene and fights in a rooming house, was no longer worried about such things, and he felt he had received his privacy and dignity back. For Harrison, the greater privacy afforded by a self-contained unit has meant that he is not feeling confined to his room or in someone’s way, which means that his mental health is improving, and he can feel at home and ease, 

since I’ve moved here and some of that is having privacy but also not feeling like I have to lock myself away as I was doing in the rooming house or be absent, so I wasn't in my friends faces 24 hours a day, when I was couch surfing.

Not only was he grateful for his privacy in a direct sense, but he was also grateful that he could use his privacy to exert control. Harrison’s situation clearly demonstrates the effect that privacy can have, and the effect can also lead to a virtuous circle. Consistent with Kirkpatrick & Byrne’s (2009) study of individuals who had moved from homelessness to permanent housing, more privacy enables greater control, which led to more independence. The privacy provided by self-contained units can allow tenants to exert control over their environment, which is central to ensuring that home functions are a site of ontological security.

One way that control presents itself in self-contained units is through the lack of engagement with tenants when fulfilling basic personal or intimate needs. Tenants do not need to worry about other tenants’ actions and levels of hygiene. As Scarlett articulates, I don't have to worry about what other people doing with my kitchen, do I? I don't have to worry about people leaving their pubes in the bloody bath and sink when they have a shower. Lee described how she no longer had to negotiate with other tenants to fulfil his hygiene standards. Because of your personal hygiene. You know your own standards and you don’t
have to amalgamate with someone you don’t want to. Like you don’t have to wait on someone to cook something or you don’t have to wait to use the toilet. For Lee, that was heaven, Oh, it was heaven. My own kitchen, like I said, my own bathroom, my own space, not worrying about anyone. Parker, although a little more vulgar in the manner he described it, agreed that it was important to have your kitchen and bathroom, so you were not negotiating with other vulnerable tenants, at least you’ve got your own shit house and your own kitchen… you know to go to the toilet or to go to kitchen [in a boarding house] might be a fucking, might be just like a fucking headache, you know, a real strain for them to do that. For James, who has serious health concerns, the reliance on other peoples’ good nature to clean facilities meant he risked a serious allergic reaction. Therefore, having his own kitchen and bathroom were imperative for his physical health, I didn’t have to go and have a special dinner up at the mission or anything like that. I can actually make my own proper meal and I don’t have to worry about what it was or anything like that. In a rooming house, James had to change his behaviour due to his lack of privacy in a primary space, however now, he is able to fulfil his needs and exert control over this space and life, due to the privacy that is provided.

Tenants were able to stop worrying about negotiating with their neighbours when they had private primary space as it provided the space for home to function as a site of ontological security. As Mee explains, “The value of privacy results in complex negotiations between neighbours aimed at achieving an appropriate distance while still appearing neighbourly” (2007, p. 209). Self-contained units increased the odds that tenants could retreat into private space – although, as I will explore later, privacy and a sense of control over personal space can sometimes break down even in self-contained units.

One of the key elements of self-contained units and the control they can exert is that tenants are able to decide how they inhabit their primary space. Lee, a female tenant, articulates:

Positives are, like I said, you don’t get harassed. You pretty much – you can do what you want within reason, you know. You can do whatever you want. That’s the bottom end of it, yeah […] It gives you a good feeling because you know you’re living independently

Self-contained units provide a space where tenants can live independently, deciding how they occupy their physical space. Reed extends this point, saying “This is my home, this is my unit. And I don’t have to share it with anybody else so there’s no risk of conflict.” For Elliot, the self-contained nature of his unit meant that, when he wanted to keep to himself, he was able to, without needing to negotiate with other tenants:

You’ve got your own space within a space, if you know what I mean. Like, if you stay in here, if I don’t wanna answer my door, I lie on my bed. I’m quite comfortable just spending out a whole day… To me, it’s – it’s – it gives me security. It makes me feel secure that if I want to go hide somewhere or be miserable, or cry, or rejoice, or be happy, or I’ve got a place to go if – if – if everything is bad, I still got a home to go to, somewhere to go.

Elliot valued not having to be disturbed by other tenants, when he did not want to be. He could control his life by determining how he used his space, and this provided an element of security which he had not had previously when sharing spaces. Now he was able to close the door and remain in his unit for as long we desired.
The privacy afforded by self-contained units thus allows tenants to exert control over their own space. Self-contained units provide tenants the ability to decide how they occupy their primary space. Tenants are not governed by social norms, or the need to compromise with their neighbours, and tenants with physical and mental health concerns greatly benefit from the control provided by self-contained units as they provide the privacy and control needed for recovery. This conclusion is consistent with research by Kearns et al. (2000) and Padgett (2007) into control and ontological security with social housing, which found that tenants are able to gain control over primary space which enhances their ontological security. Primary spaces therefore function to provide tenants with a physical space where they can access ontological security.

6.3.2. Primary Space Intrusions

Although the physical space of self-contained units provides tenants the control that they did not have in rooming houses, tenants can be, and are, influenced by their neighbours through secondary spaces. Secondary spaces in self-contained unit buildings are the communal areas of the building: hallways, laundry and gardens. Neighbouring tenants’ actions in secondary spaces can, and often do, influence what occurs in tenants’ primary space, and therefore tenants can still lose privacy and control over their space. Tenants are acutely aware that, even though they can lock their door, they live in an apartment complex with a range of people who can influence their personal space. Tenants also do not feel they are alone, even when they are in their own flat, as Maxine articulates, I’m just – yeah. I just thought their separate lives got a separate – You know, like it’s – Like, you’ve got your own flat. But it’s actually not. Yeah. Neighbours influence tenants’ personal private space in various ways, particularly through windows, doors and noise.

Intrusions on primary space can occur through windows. In Scarlett’s building, the installation of a self-closing front door that provided greater security for tenants meant visitors often knocked on her window to gain access to the building. As Scarlett explains:

*The door closes automatically now and still I get people banging on the window and asking me to let them in because I’ve got to go down and see somebody down there who I’ve never heard of.*

Scarlett never opened the door for random people because of the safety implications of letting strangers into the building. Simply by being in her unit, however, she can easily be disturbed against her will. Although the installation of a self-closing front door provided greater security for tenants in general, it meant that visitors hassled the particular tenants’ who lived near the front door. Part of being at the front of a property, or occupying a property with large windows, is the risk that you people can see inside your room, unless you have the blinds closed. As Harrison articulates, *if you have your windows open, there are some people who sort of take that as an invitation to stop and talk and you don’t necessarily want to. But again, its irritating sometimes, sometimes you are happy to stop and talk to them.* The lack of privacy in this respect, without natural sunlight, makes it difficult for tenants to have a private life whilst exerting control. As for Isabelle, who enjoys her room, an open window meant a neighbour could see into her place:

*The first time I moved in, I copped that [rude finger] and he’s supposed to be like the guy that helps look after this joint I got told and I’ve been petrified of him since I’ve known him, sticking fingers up at me. That’s why I’ve got that scarf up there*
Although it is a simple action, it affected her capacity to be in her primary space. She had to put a scarf on the wall to ensure she has extra privacy. Tenants have private primary space; however, their primary space could still be intruded upon so that they lost an element of control through losing an element of privacy.

Noise levels by neighbouring tenants in secondary spaces also influence a tenant’s ability to feel in control of their environment. Noise functions to enable privacy and control but can also hinder it. As previous research suggests, the lack of noise is often seen as a positive, whilst excessive noise hinders tenants’ ability to live privately and feel in control privacy (Crow et al., 2002; Gurney, 2000; Mee, 2007).

Tenants were able to build routine within the primary space and feel in control when noise levels in communal areas were low, as was seen in Padgett’s (2007) research into ontological security and housing for people who have experienced homelessness. The presence of the door to separate tenants from secondary spaces meant that they could live in quiet, as Clay states:

\textit{We got separate laundry and we got heating in the hallways and then all carpeted, so you don’t hear a lot of people walking around that much when you got the – the door closed.}

The ability to have a quiet environment means tenants can relax and enjoy themselves within the confines of their own home and utilise their home as a site of ontological security. As James indicates, \textit{In this particular place, it’s really nice and quiet 99% of the time. You very rarely hear or see anybody else apart from coming and going.} James’ experience is in complete contrast to his rooming house experience, indicating that he is able to freely enjoy his primary space. Tenants, however, must still rely on their neighbours to be respectful, according to Harrison, \textit{if there was a bigger mix of ages, if there were lots of younger people that would just go out the window, it would just be a noisy place, while it’s not particularly noisy, sometimes you get people talking and you hear people.} Although tenants describe the quiet as a positive, this still required a negotiation between neighbours. The quietness is an enabling factor of control and ontological security; however, it can easily be eroded by an inconsiderate neighbour.

Noise can intrude on an individual’s space, even though it is not a physical intrusion; it still impedes on a tenants’ ability to feel in control of their primary space. As Liam explains, \textit{he and a number of other fellows used to have these sort of gatherings downstairs, and they were so noisy, you know. They used to drink and, I mean, I – they were never a threat, but – but, you know, they were just disturbing after a while.} Although a minimal form of intrusion, it can nevertheless be pervasive, occurring at all times of the day and disrupting tenants’ capacity to be private and exert control (Mee, 2007). Ray, for example, lives in a rooming house, but has a one-bedroom apartment there, and throughout the interview he recurrently mentioned that the building needed an overhaul because it was not soundproof. \textit{It’s just that the place needs a complete overhaul, you know, really &lt;laughs&gt; […] so you don’t have to listen to all the thumping on that goes around.} Aiden, who has high levels of anxiety, spends a lot of time in his room, but is easily influenced by what goes on in secondary areas:

\textit{Oh, the person who lives opposite me started screaming about someone thieving and lots of banging, and crashing, and doors slamming, and running around, and yelling, and with my extreme anxiety disorder, that sets me right off.}
Excessive noise levels by neighbouring tenants can be incredibly intrusive on an individual’s primary space, impeding self-contained units’ ability to function as a site of ontological security, as was also seen in Mee’s (2007) research into public housing.

Slamming doors appeared to be a concern for tenants and affects their ability to feel in control of their environment. Self-contained unit tenants still rely on their neighbours and visitors to keep noise levels to a minimum in secondary spaces, as Jacob explains, “Pow! Pow!” People coming and going – I can – all hours of the night. That's what I mean, that was creating problems for all the residents. Jacob was particularly troubled by the front door continuously slamming as it often prevented him from sleeping through the night. This resulted in a loss of control over his primary space, as the noise intruded into his space. Clay had very few concerns with his neighbours, but his next-door neighbour slamming the door has been a cause of concern for him. I've had a bit of a problem with the girl next door. But it's not too bad now. She – she just slams the door a bit and, you know, people going in and out of the laundry, but that's all right 'cause I'm next to the laundry. That's – I picked the flat I wanted and I'm happy with it. Although this would be no different to private rental or home ownership in flats, these issues are often exacerbated by mental health concerns of the tenants and by the frequency with which incidents occur (Brackertz et al., 2018).

Tenants are thus able to be in control of their physical environment in self-contained units, and yet neighbours can still intrude on a tenants’ primary space through windows, doors and noise levels. The lack of control that can be felt because of these intrusions hinders tenants’ ability to control their environment. Home as a site of ontological security can therefore be obstructed by secondary space intrusions on primary space.

6.3.3. Engagement with Neighbours

The privacy afforded by self-contained units enables tenants to control how they engage with their neighbours. If a tenant desires engagement with their neighbours, they can interact. Otherwise, they can close the door and live as they desire. As Emma discusses, Yeah, I guess if you want to, one thing about it, if you want to – in this place, if you want to mix with people, you can. You know if you seek it out and if you want to be left alone, you can shut your door and you can be left alone, yeah. When Isabelle moved into SouthPort, she was concerned that tenants would always be around and that they would invade her privacy. However, self-contained units can and do enable the tenants to engage on their own terms, as Isabelle discovered,

Yeah, but I like it better that they don’t live in your pocket. Like they’ll knock on the door, “Hi, how are you?” ask how you are but they won’t invade your privacy. They won’t you know. Yeah, they’re pretty good.

Isabelle enjoys the company of her neighbours without them invading her privacy. Scarlett does not want or need to have a huge amount of contact with her neighbours, but she gets to decide how to have that contact, I know nearly everybody a couple I say “hello” to I haven’t met yet then I will see them walking by in now. You don’t have great deal of contact with them at all. It’s like living with your family – with all the joys and exasperation that go with it. Scarlett is not interested in getting involved with the people around her or getting to know them in any great detail. She believes that everyone should mind their own business. But it is her choice how she engages with the other tenants and because she can close her door and fulfil her basic needs, she can exert that control.
For Thomas, who has most of his friends outside of his housing in recovery rooms, where he supports people who are in recovery, he tries and wants to keep to himself, and especially not to get involved in what goes on with other tenants who take drugs, I’m really good at keeping to myself. I actually don’t really talk to many people in the place. If I do talk to them, it’s really superficial. Thomas is not interested in knowing people, and it is within his control to not have to do that, because he has his own place. Liam is very similar to Thomas in this respect:

Oh, it’s certainly good. I mean, you know, I – I – I don’t – how can I put it – I sort of keep to myself a fair bit, and I’ve always been like that. And I mean, I talk to my neighbours when I see them, but I won’t – I won’t usually sort of go in and visit – visit them in the rooms, in the flats.

Liam will be friendly, but he has the choice not to engage with tenants when he does not want to. Secondary spaces do not have to be negative and can function as a positive for tenants, where they are able to meet tenants and develop social support. The important point, however, is that they can control these encounters and decide what level and kind of encounter they desire. Because they have access to a private space to fulfil their basic human needs, they can decide when and if they engage with their neighbours.

Communal areas can also be conducive to developing networks, depending in part on the physical space, but also largely on the tenants in the building. Emma appreciates the setup of her building, because it enables her to speak with her fellow tenants and she does not like to spend time alone:

The way the house is set up, we often run into each other, you have contact with each other which is really good. And this area here, is like a little social area where we can come and sit, and talk or go into each other’s rooms, and talk, hang out for a while, watch a DVD or get on the computer, stuff like that, yeah [...] Well, it’s not good to spend too much time by yourself, to be just cut off from people. I’ve got to have contact with people, yeah.

The secondary space in her apartment block allows for tenants to interact. It is important to note that there are under 10 people living in her building, so she does not have to engage with tenants all too often. But communal spaces can also function to support events. On Mother’s Day, after having just moved in, Isabelle decided that she wanted to host a BBQ for the tenants and her daughters, So, we had a Mother’s Day party downstairs and that’s how I sort of met most of the girls. Everyone showed up except for two people. SouthPort supported her in doing this and by making sure that she had the tools; it thus allowed for a communal space to be a positive environment and function as a way for her to feel in control.

6.3.4. Secondary Space Intrusions

Secondary spaces are inherently a place of negotiation for tenants as secondary spaces are not private. As Mee (2007) argues, “In creating their homes people engage in processes of negotiation with other members of their household, with their neighbours and other people in their neighbourhoods” (2007, p. 972). Although tenants’ intrinsically lose some control over secondary spaces, tenants’ interviews often highlighted ways in which secondary spaces hindered the capacity for home to function as a site of ontological security, when compared with a private rental. The laundry was a key issue of concern in secondary spaces. Control in
secondary spaces is limited, as it is communal space, but control can be exerted by a tenant’s desire to complete washing at their discretion or to enter and exit the property at will. Over the course of the fieldwork, there were various incidents that hindered tenants’ ability to have control in secondary spaces, such as one tenant defeating in the middle of the laundry, causing its closure. More commonly neighbours influence tenants’ capacity to exert control by not completing their washing, as James explains:

But our little hoarder tends to take bags and bags and bags and bags of clothes down there and put some in the washing machine and forgets she’s even started doing the washing, so they can sit there for a week and she’d have the washing machine full in the dryer, full in the sink, and full and then just forgets she’s doing the washing.

James was unable to use the laundry for a week at a time, hindering his ability to exert control within secondary spaces and complete household chores at his discretion.

Laundries can also, however, be a site for interaction, even if tenants may not want to engage. Harrison tries to avoid interaction, because he merely wants to do his laundry, but is not always successful: *there has been a couple of times in the laundry where people have been keen to discuss either issues or individuals, and I’m just not interested getting embroiled in that.* Living in an apartment block requires tenants to engage with neighbours to some degree, but, when engagement intrudes on tenants’ ability to control their own actions, it hinders their ability to be ontologically secure.

It is not just neighbours who require negotiation, however: tenants must also negotiate with their neighbours’ visitors when using secondary spaces, as Thomas explains:

I jump in the lift and there’s four people just running the lift and I don’t know who any of them are. And I know where they’re going – they’re going up to get ice and I just – that can be annoying. The presence of random people makes Thomas feel uncomfortable in the lift and, although he is forced to manage this, he would prefer not to have to engage with random people when he enters his own building. This topic will be further explored in Chapter 7 when discussing safety concerns.

Hoarding is another way where neighbours influence secondary spaces and tenants’ capacity to feel in control. James described a situation where his neighbour is a hoarder, to the point that her possessions take up much of the hallway. Although he wishes these possessions were not there, he understands that they are going to stay, *all that stuff that’s in the hallway out there, that’s the hoarder. So, you get rid of all that today. It’ll be just as much, if not more today or tomorrow.* James is very considered about this, but it is concerning when tenants have to manage their neighbour’s behaviour. Although this is a secondary space intrusion, it intrudes on his personal space within his flat because of the noise that is made.

Neighbours’ general misbehaviour in communal areas can cause distress and a lack of control for tenants in secondary spaces. Orlando, who spends time in the garden, was very upset when a tenant pulled out his plants: *Sometimes I was angry about – yeah – ’cause someone pulled out my strawberry plant and just planted – chomped it down on – on another – that person. Anyway, that was sort of – triggered me off.* Interaction with neighbours can prove difficult for tenants, in ways that undermine their feeling that they are in control and in a private space, as Emma suggests,
And I guess it all depends on who’s living in the house at the moment. There’s all but one person in this house that – I don’t trust him, but I never see him. I hardly ever see him. But, yeah, I don’t trust him, I don’t like him, but I don’t let him affect the way I want to live, you know.

Emma is aware that her capacity to live independently and in control is dependent upon who is in her building. Tenants’ engagement with their neighbours in secondary spaces is difficult for tenants to manage, and although they are able to gain privacy in their primary space, they must still use secondary spaces. Secondary spaces inherently require compromise with neighbours; however, tenants found it particularly difficult to make decisions in their life because of other tenants’ and guests’ behaviours. While some of these concerns may sound like they might apply to any form of multi-unit dwelling, the rate of incidents, and the challenges faced by many tenants due to their experience of homelessness, mean that issues arising in secondary spaces can exert a powerful influence over the home to function as a site of ontological security for tenants.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter compared how tenants experienced control within a rooming house environment, to how they experience control in self-contained units. Control was explored through an understanding of privacy as an enabler of control, and an analysis of how privacy – or its absence - may affect tenants’ ability to exert control over their environment. Given that “Privacy is not a given in a particular dwelling, it is something to be achieved, a goal to be attained. Similarly, ontological security is constantly being reproduced and contested” (Mee, 2007, p. 212), it appears that rooming houses do not achieve privacy or control, while self-contained units offer the capacity for tenants to achieve both, while not always realising this potential.

In particular, the shared facilities in rooming houses meant that tenants were not able to meet basic human needs in the privacy of their primary space, providing little control for tenants. Tenants described an environment which relied on their neighbours’ behaviours to ensure their comfort while undertaking basic functions like cooking or toileting, commonly complaining that these environments were too unhygienic for comfort. Rooming houses were therefore not a space where ‘home’ functions as a site of ontological security, as tenants had no control and no privacy.

Self-contained units, by contrast, provided a primary space which was private and facilitated control over tenants’ living space. Tenants had control to decide how they lived and how they utilised their space, without relying on other residents. The primary space of a self-contained unit meant that tenants were able to engage with their neighbours on their own terms and be in control of that behaviour. In this respect, self-contained units function as a space which can anchor a sense of ontological security for tenants. This was eroded for some tenants, however, through primary space intrusions caused by placement of windows, noise in secondary areas and doors.

Secondary spaces in buildings that housed self-contained units were generally not a space that anchored ontological security for tenants. Tenants instead had to negotiate with their neighbours in secondary spaces in ways that often infringed on their capacity to be in control of their environment.

Control and privacy are therefore both present and absent in buildings of self-contained units. On the one hand, tenants are able to access a greater amount of control over their
primary space, living in a manner which suits their lifestyle without the need to compromise. This capacity to be in control over their immediate primary environment was incredibly important for tenants. Although tenants’ privacy and control can be eroded by intrusions on primary space and through secondary areas, it appears that self-contained units provide sufficient control and privacy for home to function as a site where tenants can develop ontological security.
7. Safety

7.1. Introduction

Home can only function as a site of ontological security if it is a safe environment for the person. Without a safe environment, tenants can find it hard to be in control or to have a sense of privacy. The experience of homelessness is often categorised as unsafe and insecure, due to the exposed nature of rough sleeping or living in overcrowded accommodation, the presence of mental illness and the high prevalence of illicit drug use (Mifflin & Wilton, 2005).

When transitioning into community housing, it is important for tenants to have a sense of safety that can enable tenants to develop the routine and stability not afforded to them during their homeless period (Kirkman et al., 2015). However, the capacity to experience ontological security within the home is not merely contingent on a person’s desire or on the physical space in which they occupy. A person’s living environment, outside of their own apartment, influences their capacity to feel safe. This chapter explores how tenants experience safety in both rooming house environments and self-contained units, to try to understand whether safety influences tenants’ capacity to experience home as a site of ontological security.

As with the previous chapter, the first part of this chapter explores rooming houses, discussing: the experience tenants have when engaging with other tenants; tenants’ experience of safety in the property; and how drugs affect tenant’s capacity to feel safe. The chapter then contrasts this discussion with the safety experience by tenants in self-contained units. The discussion of self-contained units begins by discussing a single property as a case study, followed by other interview data relating tenants’ experiences of their properties. Safety is then explored in relation to physical issues, such as fire and door safety, and also the more subjective matter of how tenants perceive safety.

The chapter argues that rooming houses are experienced by tenants as an unsafe environment and this experience hinders tenants’ capacity for home to function as a site of ontological security. Safety concerns are not absent from self-contained units, but they are highly dependent upon individual perception and on details of the specific property. Tenants in self-contained units have the capacity for greater safety, but are still potentially hindered by neighbouring tenants creating unsafe environments.

7.2. Rooming Houses

7.2.1. Uncertainty creates unsafe environments

Although safety is discussed here as a distinct factor, it should be noted at the outset that tenants’ lack of control over their environment when sharing facilities exacerbates feelings of unsafety felt by tenants in rooming houses. As explored in chapter 6, tenants must engage with, rely on and negotiate with their neighbours and guests on a constant basis in rooming houses. The uncertainty generated by this constant requirement for negotiation, itself creates the feeling of being unsafe, eroding tenants’ capacity to develop a sense of ontological security, as there is no guaranteed consistency in, or control over, their environment. More directly, however, neighbouring tenants and their guests are often the cause of safety issues in rooming houses (Gallagher & Gove, 2007).
The consistent and more frequent interaction tenants have in rooming houses with their neighbours is often the cause of the unsafe environment, where a single person can be responsible for creating the unsafe environment felt by tenants. Reed explains, “It’s a very, very rough environment. And sometimes it only just takes one person to create that roughness. You know, when I was – we’d be getting along really well and then there’s this one person who, for whatever reason, is disruptive, is a disruptive influence. Maxine similarly explained that there were periods when the house was calm, but it could become toxic, which would then have an influence on how you experience your housing.

Then it was only after a few quite sort of toxic dynamic starting. There are periods when it'll be good. I mean there’s some nice people in that house but there are people there that I thought “I don't care what you do.” But then I realised it actually does have an impact. That having the company of those people even if I just, you know, keep it polite "Hello" thing, it does matter. It does have an impact that you’re not aware of like that social stigma.

Tenants’ feelings of safety were also influenced by neighbours’ guests and random people on the streets. Emma explained that people generally, on a whole, a lot of, like people would just walk in off the street. You never know who was there. Oh, a lot of drug dealing going on there, that sort of thing. Emma’s suggestion that many non-tenants were there due to drug taking was supported by other interviewees. Zane explained that she had to wave a bat to kick people out, then another time I think these other two weirdos, I didn’t know how they got in, were in the lounge room walking around and I had to go kick them out, and that was quite scary. [I waived my bat] around and I told them to get out. Zane felt comfortable using a form of physical threat to kick people out, but not everyone would have the same amount of comfort or ability. Regardless, tenants should not have to resort to such measures to feel secure in their own home. James recounts a very vivid experience where, due to his location at the front of the house, he had to cope with a lot of the fall out of traffic, "Because I was downstairs and right next to the front door, the front door was locked which it always was because it automatically closed. They’d be banging on my window to let them in and that was all day and all night, and these were people that didn’t live in the unit, in the building, these were people coming to score off one of the guys that were dealing in the place, and it was trashed.

There was a situation where he was scared for his safety, "the guy that was doing it came to me and apologised, but it was bloody scary because this guy, if he got in, he would’ve killed me. There’s no doubt. I had no doubt in my mind that he would’ve killed me if he could get through the window.

The uncertainty about guests in your buildings can be daunting and fear inducing, presenting a clear concern for personal safety. The unknown is generally feared, and this fear may be exacerbated by the experience of homelessness for many tenants (Johnson et al., 2011; Wardhaugh, 1999). Tenants are ultimately affected by their neighbours, whether they want to be or not, and in various forms, whether that is hygiene, noise or merely not wanting to have to socialise. The nature of the rooming house means that tenant interactions are more common – but also often more troublesome.
7.2.2. Unsafe Environments

Research has recognised that rooming houses are unsafe environments (Adler & Barry-Macaulay, 2009). This could be due to any of a variety of factors: low incomes; being part of the homeless subculture or a member of a drug subculture; or a lack of understanding regarding safety (Ravenhill, 2008). “The homeless subculture is characterised by a 'here and now' orientation" which is similar to that of the drug use subculture” (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 72)\(^{14}\). Regardless of the cause, tenants’ and their guests’ actions are the main cause of concern regarding safety in a rooming house.

Tenants’ use of front and room doors was often noted in interviews as a safety concern for tenants who had lived in a rooming house – a finding consistent with the literature (Gallagher & Gove, 2007). Parker explains that the doors could easily be knocked down. So, the problem with the boarding places, in those days, they aren't safe. Someone could kick the door down. Although Parker later referred to an event of a fire, where he kicked down the door of a ladies’ room, this situation indicates that people who are desperate can easily have access to other tenants’ belongings. This is further exacerbated by people leaving the door open. Liam explained that, when people left the front door open, it meant anyone could get in the rooming house building.

And I mean, there was another example of where the fellows would go – some of the fellows are gonna have a few drinks, they’d leave the door ajar. Couple of fellows came in, went to the room next door to me, because the fellow left his – his room open, took his TV, took his couch, his favourite jacket with his mobile phone in it, took off. So, I used to get constantly stressed about this and I would often check to see if the door was locked for my room, and if it wasn’t, I’d go down and lock it, you know, make sure it was closed.

Liam was active in closing the door to aid in his feeling of safety, but the continuous need to close a door creates an uncertain and unsafe environment which hinders his capacity to experience home as a site of ontological security. Frances, on the other hand, discovered that, even with secure doors, people could still get into his building and room:

the second night, when I came home the second day I had been out, clearly someone had locked themselves out because it was all swipe card and the front door was generally wedged open but it wasn’t on this occasion […] It was quite clear that someone had, the window had sort of been that far open and I can home to find it that far open, and the fly wire screen ripped more.

Doors were a clear concern for tenants who had lived in a rooming house and appeared to be an important factor in hindering tenants’ capacity to feel safe within their buildings. Doors being left open or always locked led to other instances which created an unsafe environment, including as theft, violence and drug use.

Theft is also a key concern in rooming houses. Emma describes a situation where former tenants may have keys to the room, you know thieving, like stuff getting stolen from our room […] So, someone who might have had the room before me could still have the key […] I had quite a lot of things go missing. The theft of items from a tenants’ room is a particularly

\(^{14}\) For a detailed definition and exploration of homelessness subculture, refer to (Ravenhill, 2008)
severe violation, given that the room is the only private primary space a tenant has in a rooming house. Theft is a major invasion of a person’s privacy and has the capacity to greatly hinder a tenants’ capacity to feel safe within their environment.

Violence and mistreatment of property caused by neighbours and their guests is another safety concern that was raised by interviewees. James explains, that was a really scary place to be [rooming house] and it was because of that place that I had to sell my car because it got broken into and had the window smashed, and it got trashed totally. Whilst Aiden was living at a rooming house, he was involved in a physical fight to defend his neighbour, some people had broken in and were attacking him [neighbour] and I went down to help him and got smacked up by them. So, you know, that wasn't too bad but [...] Yeah, ended up in the hospital that night. Aiden was describing his living environment, the place he had to call home. The presence of violence in his building greatly hinders his capacity to feel a sense of ontological security through his housing. Violence is a consistent concern within rooming houses, and often the norm. Reed provides an interesting explanation for his experience of such violence in a rooming house, and how it can be disruptive to a persons’ routine and ability to use shared facilities.

The cooking and washroom facility is shared so, while they are supposed to be just for the use of the tenants in the building, the toilets were used by people from outside as well. They are used for things like – excuse me, like drug taking. There was quite a lot of noise as a consequence of that people will be having their drug taking parties and screaming and shouting and occasionally, if the drug deal went a bit wrong then there'd be noises of violence, people getting shoved at each other and scuffles. It didn't happen often but, when it did, it was a bit hairy, but we were just told – I was just told by the other tenants who'd been there a while to just, you know, keep your door locked when you hear that kind of stuff going on.

Reed provides a very holistic understanding of the type of environment that rooming houses are, the reasons why this is the case, and the solution. Situations happen in communal areas that often involve drugs, and the best way to keep yourself safe, is to remain locked in your room whilst it is happening. Frances also used this tactic to keep safe, I spent an awful lot of time just in my room and not venturing out and also the bathroom facilities were some distance away and pretty disgusting as well. Aiden relates a similar experience, even just like wanting to have a drink, I’d have to take a little jug out down to the bathroom, fill that with water, bring it back into the room, which may sort of possibly [mean] being exposed to the other people that were in there. I tried to keep as far away from them as possible. Individuals who have experienced periods of instability and a lack of safety are often seeking the opposite. Rooming houses provide a glimmer of hope by offering a roof over your head and your own space - but with the continual uncertainty and insecurity that occurs in a rooming house, it can be incredibly difficult to achieve such stability and safety. The uncertainty created by tenants’ neighbours and their guests, alongside the violence, theft and insecure door use, mean that rooming houses are not a space that can easily develop a firm sense of ontological security for tenants.

The housing system limits rooming house residents’ progression to better housing. Often the only place to progress in housing is to another rooming house or a self-contained unit. Interviewees expressed that they struggled immensely with rooming houses and would have preferred sleeping rough (Gallagher & Gove, 2007). As James explores, I couldn’t stand the boarding house and I was ready to go back and stay in my car which has its own downfalls.
Maxine shared this sentiment, *I mean once walking out to a park and thinking, I would rather be – I might have to sleep in this park ’cause I can’t stand to have to walk in to the actual building because you have to share the bathroom, the kitchen or walk past people.* Both James and Maxine were able to move into a self-contained unit and therefore did not resort to rough sleeping, but for many people experiencing homelessness, progression to self-contained units may not be available.

The interview data provided many such illustrations of how rooming houses are unsafe environments for tenants. These findings are in line with current research into safety in rooming houses (Adler & Barry-Macaulay, 2009; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Kikos, 2004), and therefore not surprising. This lack of safety is heightened and exacerbated by the presence of drugs.

### 7.2.3. Drugs

The interviewees expressed that the influence of drugs is pervasive and illustrated how this hinders all tenants of a building, even those who avoid drugs personally. Drugs affect the safety of tenants who partake in the subculture, but they also impact their neighbours, hindering housings ability to function as a site of ontological security for tenants. The presence of a subculture of drugs is often a reason that people do not want to live in rooming house (Gallagher & Gove, 2007). Tenants and their guests using drugs influenced people’s perception of safety, alongside the noise and paraphernalia associated with drug use. Reed, who was not a drug user, explains its presence in a rooming house, and the flow on effects of its presence,

> It's just unfortunate that by its nature, it attracted all of these drug dealing stuff which sometimes led to fights, knife fights, fist fights and the like, and the police would be called around to come and calm things down. So, but yeah, me personally, I didn't get involved in any of that. I just listened to what I was told. Just keep your door locked and it will blow over.

Reed provides an initial insight into the pervasiveness of a subculture of drugs in properties, even if you do not partake. Strikingly, it suggests the influence that the presence of drugs can have over a person’s experience of housing. James, who did not spend much time in a rooming house, still felt its presence, *But the boarding house, I don't know how I put it, there was a lot of night life, a lot of drinking, a lot of drunks and a couple of guys that dealt in things they shouldn't have on a very regular basis and it used to get people knocking.* James was affected by the presence of drugs because people would knock on his window constantly. Brook also recounts her experience of living in a rooming house, as she was beaten when people were intoxicated. These experiences appear to be common occurrences for people living in a rooming house (Gallagher & Gove, 2007; Lazzari, 2010; Leveratt, 2018). Jacob, who is now living in a self-contained unit, reflected on living in a rooming house, *It's ten times worse than here. Ten times what I've described to you. It was an absolute drug den, when I was staying over there.* Jacob’s initial thoughts about his experience with drugs in rooming houses, emphasise its pervasive presence. Elliot expands on this by stating, *People used to shoot up heroin on the stairs. People used to shoot up in the back kitchen... In the kitchen, it was like ice bucket.* Noel goes so far as to suggest that drugs are the main concern in rooming houses, *Well, arguments, fights. You get them going off, you know, it's mainly due to the drug. That's the biggest problem. If you got rid of the drug from rooming house it would be all right.* These examples demonstrate the presence of drugs in rooming houses, and highlight this as a key reason why people feel unsafe - most
especially if they do not partake in the subculture. Feelings of a lack of safety hinder tenants’ ability to feel ontologically secure, and do not provide a conducive environment for rebuilding tenants’ sense of trust in the world around them.

Thomas presents his own story of living in a rooming house, from the standpoint of having been a tenant who partook in the drugs, but who has now been sober for some 15 years. He recalls his experience of the subculture,

> I lived in the rooming houses for a really long time as a really bad heroin addict with a lot of other people who are really – it was really heroin everything and it’s pretty insane actually […] Well, yeah, I had to get out of the rooming house. I was gonna die at rooming house. In fact, I was regularly waking up in ambulances and stuff. Then they transferred – and it was – there were so many people selling heroin at that – at the rooming house. I had to get it […] I keep trying to get well. I keep going to detoxes and – and I’d get behind in rent and SouthPort were always really good for me. They let me catch up

Eventually, Thomas finally got in to: these recovery rooms, which is NA and AA and it took about four years where eventually I got clean and that was like 15 years ago. Thomas is not ashamed of his past; he accepts that is who he was, and that he was part of the drug subculture. However, Thomas raises an important point: tenants living in rooming houses find it hard to detox and stay clean from drugs (Gallagher & Gove, 2007). This can be attributed both to the presence of drugs and to the requirement to live in shared secondary spaces. Rooming houses thus hinder both the substance user and their neighbour from developing a sense of ontological security.

Tenants and their guests using drugs, however, is only one part of the equation which creates an unsafe environment. The use of needles to inject drugs, and the noise that stems from drug affected persons, also affect tenants’ capacity to feel safe. Emma was recounting her experience of living in a rooming house and the difficulty about going to the toilet. You get up in the morning to go to the toilet or to have a shower and there might be syringes on the floor and the bin is tipped over, crap on the floor. Not only is this a hygiene issue, it is also a safety concern. As James also recounts, you go and use the toilet or whatever and it’s just filthy. There’s no toilet paper, there’s needles, there’s syringes, there’s blood – you name it, all over the place, and it was every single night, every night that I was there… it was frightening and scary. James went on to describe how they were shocked and frightened by using the toilets in that condition. This is a very clear safety concern for tenants and hinders their capacity to feel trust and safety in the environment around them. Aiden provides an example of how he changed routine due to the presence of drugs, highlighting some of the safety concerns,

> With my illness, where I need to go to the toilet 8, 10, 12, 15 times a day, it was horrible. You know, having to listen to all the noise and all the drugs stepping over the needles all the time or there were broken taps and sinks and showers all the time, cupboards always hanging off. I was too afraid to even use the kitchen, so I wasn’t eating that much. I still don’t eat that much. It was just, all in all, a very dehumanising experience

This is an example where drug use, noise and cleanliness hindered his capacity to meet his basic needs and have a sense of trust in the world. The use of drugs in rooming houses was problematic for tenants and their neighbours, which confirms current understandings of
rooming houses in the literature (Kirkman et al., 2015; Leslie, 2007; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Smith & Styli, 2007).

7.2.4. Conclusion

Tenants confirmed that rooming houses are unsafe environments, which supports the extensive literature on this topic (Adler & Barry-Macaulay, 2009; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Leslie, 2007; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Wylie & Canty-Waldron, 2004). Uncertainty created by tenants and their guests means that tenants feel unsafe in their building, hindering their capacity to be ontologically secure. The use of doors and the capacity to enter the buildings and rooms were a safety concern for tenants. Theft, violence and a lack of care for the property influence tenants’ ability to feel safe in a rooming house. Finally, the presence of drugs was incredibly pervasive and often the major concern relating to safety in rooming houses. Overall, the secondary areas are a clear issue for rooming house tenants, given the safety concerns that arise. There was no clear gender distinction between tenants’ experience of rooming houses; rather, everyone felt a degree of unsafety.

Tenants have no space in a rooming house to truly feel safe. Tenants’ rooms, their primary space, can be entered by strangers through the windows and by breaking down the door. With secondary spaces, tenants’ neighbours and their guests are often found using drugs and leaving syringes in public spaces. The lack of safety in rooming houses undermines tenants’ capacity to use their ‘home’ as an anchor for developing a sense of ontological security.

7.3. Self-Contained Units

In exploring self-contained units and safety concerns, by contrast, a few things became evident: safety differed between properties depending on who lived in the property and their habits. Perceptions of safety varied depending on the tenant in self-contained units, and tenants expressed views on both positive and negative elements of safety, for different reasons. Positive perceptions of safety focused on aspects of the physical environment like door safety and fire safety, whereas negative elements focused on social factors such as the presence of drugs and prostitution. What is clear is that the tenants considered themselves safe in their primary space, but at times, felt unsafe in secondary areas of the building.

During the interviews, participants were allowed to interpret ‘safety’ in whatever manner they chose. This meant that discussions were wide-ranging and variable, with concerns raised around fire, security, doors, neighbours, locks and disputes. A majority of interviewees stated they felt safe in their personal dwelling but expressed concerns regarding the building or their safety in common areas. Perceptions of safety also varied with the individual, the sex and the building being discussed.

The following section presents a case study of one the properties, where four of the interviewees lived, which exemplifies the issue of tenant concerns about safety in self-contained units and the potential for safety to be a pervasive issue for tenants. It will then focus on other safety concerns raised in the interviews, including concerns about doors and communal areas. Finally, the chapter will focus on a situation that occurred during fieldwork which exposes the issue of violence from a service provider perspective, and explores the limitations of the law.
7.3.1. George Street Case Study\(^\text{15}\)

In one property there were clear concerns about safety. In many respects, this property seemed to present itself as a rooming house, in spite of the availability of self-contained units inside. Tenants in self-contained units were able to feel safe within their primary space, as they could close the door and meet their basic human needs. Concerns for safety arose from secondary areas, mainly doors and hallways, but intruded on primary space as discussed in Chapter 6. Tenant interviewees described an environment where a few tenants caused trouble for their neighbours. George Street therefore provides an interesting case study for exploring the limits of self-contained units to ensure tenant safety.

Clay, who lives at George Street, keeps to himself mostly, and views his building of self-contained units as mostly positive,

> There’s hardly – not everyone’s on drugs or drinks every day or, you know. Most of the people here are on a pension or – or on the dole and – yeah. Of course, you’re gonna have, you know, a bit of noise and that ‘cause, you know, a lot of people here don’t work or – I don’t know – probably half of them, I don’t know, but – yeah. It’s just – yeah – it’s pretty positive really.

Clay points out that people make noise and take drugs, acknowledging this is largely due to the fact that people are often home. Clay expresses that, even if there are concerns, he feels supported by SouthPort, even though they are limited in what they can do,

> Just if anyone’s annoying you on the property or threatening you or – or anything, you can talk to the staff and just ring them up and they’re not far away, and it’s a bit safer than if you were in private place where, you know, you’d have no one to talk to about it. Yeah.

Clay’s perception of the situation provides an interesting insight. Clay acknowledges that there are safety concerns regarding the presence of drugs and noise, yet he feels supported by SouthPort if he has concerns. In spite of his concerns, he still perceives his building to be positive, suggesting he feels safe within his unit. Clay’s neighbour Scarlett, however, had a different perception. Scarlett, when asked explicitly about safety concerns, responded, \textit{Well, they could end up a lot of worse places than this to live in and I mean we’ve got security now which is good. You need security ’cause we got that many hassles from the other before the security was there.} Although she logically believes that she has security now, her experience is a very different one. As explored in Chapter 6, Scarlett’s primary space was often intruded upon by people knocking on her window to let them into the building, which can make her uneasy,

> Well, one person gets in and let six of their friends here and then there was fights on […] I’ll just say, “Go away.” You don’t know, you don’t know they could have a gun or not, you know, it’s obsolete, very unlikely but you don’t know.

Scarlett expressed that she felt it was more secure now than previously, largely because they have installed doors that automatically close. But the above quote suggests that she does not feel safe from outsiders.

\(^{15}\) Pseudonym used for the property.
Elliot felt the same about letting random people in to the building and, although the building has security, Elliot has such little trust in people that he still answers his door with a knife in his hand,

Now, it's secure with security where you can't enter the building unless you ring someone's bell to let you in or unless [tenant] leaves the door open because he says, letting fresh air in, which is quite often. ...If there's a bang on my door, people will say – I do grab a knife and look at my door, answer my door in case there are people that I cannot handle cause I've got one leg, right

Elliot thus believes there is security, yet he does not trust people, nor does he feel safe when opening the door. Furthermore, he himself exacerbated safety concerns in his building by using a knife to protect himself. Security within the building relies on tenants closing the door and doing the right thing, which often does not happen, as Jacob also expresses, Undesirables bashing on your door all the hours of the night. As within a rooming house, the door was a key concern for tenants. Without a closed door, anyone can enter, allowing for secondary spaces to be unsafe. As both Elliot and Jacob express, the opening of the door allows non-tenants into their building, which hinders their ability to develop a sense of ontological security, as they cannot have trust in their secondary spaces.

Neighbours in the same building can also be a safety concern for tenants. Scarlett explains that her immediate neighbour got angry with her and damaged the exterior of her unit. Scarlett was relying on SouthPort to act against her neighbour, as she could not do much against him, but SouthPort were also limited in what they can do.

Oh well, the next door here blew his temper at me he is still here. I've had to leave it up to Southport because I can't say it was deliberately against me... He thought it was me and I've left it up to them because I'm not, it was their property if they wanna complain about...

When pushed about how it made her feel that her neighbour went off at her, she said it don't bother me. Scarlett thus demonstrates both her resilience and her perception of safety.

Concerns for safety, even though they are in secondary areas, still affect tenants’ capacity to develop a firm sense of ontological security in their home. As Jacob articulates,

because of all the junkies here – that's what it's because of. And there's people hooking here. I mean – Prostitution. Okay. All you got to do is have a look at the camera's, whatever. Just undesirables, that don't live here, threatening people. It's not just me, there's been other people threatened in here.

Jacob indicates that he does not want to be involved or surrounded by the subculture; however, he cannot escape it. Although he has control over his primary spaces, the noise affects his capacity to feel safe, which he describes, as discussed in chapter 6, by mimicking the experience of bombardment: You know what I mean, that's “Boom!” You hear that in here at the night time, and it gives me a fucking heart attack, like, no shit. I mean, I can hear it, it rattles, all through the house. This is another example where noise intrudes on tenants’ primary space, this time affecting his capacity to feel safe.

Elliot sheds more light on the safety concerns for the property, exploring issues of drugs and sex work that occur in the property. Elliot explains that the building is used for illegal sex
work, that it shouldn't be used as a prostitute place, for one. There shouldn't be clients coming here, waiting outside, knocking on my window, right. Although the situations Elliot describes occur within the privacy of his neighbours’ units, he is still affected by clients attending the property. Elliot articulates that there are tenants who use illicit drugs, six people, seven people living in the same building using ice, I think it’s very dangerous. People carrying knives outside the building and coming in building carrying knives on ice is a very dangerous thing, all right. Elliot indicates that people are using ice in the building a lot whilst carrying knives, and says that it gets to the point that tenants are being threatened by those using ice, and soon as they get on it, they wanna start threatening people, and abuse people, and fight. This presents clear problems for tenants, as, when neighbours are using ice, there are four people – three people that don’t stay at weekends ’cause they say it’s shit. They don’t wanna stay on weekends. It’s not nice. This is a clear concern for tenants’ safety, and an indication the tenants do not feel safe in their building, most especially in communal areas.

What is seen by this case study example is that safety is perceived differently, by different people, even in the same physical environment, and tenants themselves feel differently about how they experience housing, depending on what they focus on. Moreover, even when tenants may claim they feel safe, their actions often speak louder than their words, and suggest an ongoing and pervasive experience of insecurity.

At the same time, it is important to note that this is one example of a property, and fieldwork observations suggested that not every property was like this one. Some properties had little to no concerns, as will be explored later, whilst others had even more grievous concerns.

Perceptions of safety influence tenants’ ability to experience a sense of ontological security in their home. These findings are in line with current literature on perceptions of safety for social housing tenants (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010; Whitley et al., 2008). Ontological security is more within reach for tenants who do feel a sense of safety than it is for tenants who do not. The next section explores this issue by looking at the interview data from beyond this building.

7.3.2. Other properties

Safety concerns were not exclusive to George Street. Interviewees discussed the impact that secondary spaces had on feelings on safety in self-contained units. As discussed in chapter 6, Aiden, who has high levels of anxiety, spends a lot of time in his room, and can be easily influenced by what goes on in secondary spaces,

"Having to constantly hear the noise and some sounds that they make like when they’re on drugs, they can yell and scream, and so it all just what goes on. They swear all the time, just it’s almost like a unique language between them all, just the way that they interact with each other, and I don’t understand it at all. I certainly don’t feel comfortable with it."

For Aiden, it is serious enough that he lives in fear, it’s generally I live in fear. I’m afraid of what’s going to happen next and not knowing what’s going to happen next. That’s where I stand at the moment. Aiden’s high level of anxiety coupled with the unsafe environment of secondary spaces means that he does not feel safe within his housing. Thomas explains that, even though he lives in one of the one-bedroom apartment buildings, it does not eradicate illegal behaviours from the building,
There’s a bit of meth in this building at the moment, but I – I think there’s a bit of meth in any sort of cheap accommodation. It doesn’t seem to – it’s not up on this floor, so I’m happy, but as you see, I put – I put a security screen door on my door ‘cause I’ve got more stuff than most people have.

Drug dealing and using can create an unstable and unsafe environment in the secondary spaces of a building. This hinders tenants’ ability to be ontologically secure. Orlando also did not feel safe within his building, as there were people running from room to room in his property, causing chaos. When asked if he felt safe within the property, he responded,

*Well, I do when it’s quiet, but no, not really. I think sometime someone’s gonna break in […] There’s sort of a group of hoons that just go from room to room. They keep going past and, you know, for whatever.*

Orlando does not feel safe within his unit unless there is quiet in secondary spaces. His neighbours hinder his capacity to live in quiet enjoyment and for home to enable a sense of ontological security. Reed, however, who lives in the same property as Orlando, indicates the he feels safe, *and at the moment, that’s what I really need while I just go and work out – over the next year or two, workout what my options are for going forward. So, it’s safe. It’s secure. I have my privacy, I have my dignity.* Reed suggests that he does feel safe and secure and is not affected by what goes on in his property. Both these tenants do not partake in the drug subculture, but are wanting the stability that housing provides. This suggests that two people, who live in the same property, can experience their housing differently. Therefore, home can only function as site of ontological security if tenants perceive their housing to be safe.

### 7.3.3. Fire and Door Safety

Self-contained unit tenants, as with rooming housing tenants, often associate safety with doors and fire safety. Tenants within a given property can feel both safe and unsafe, depending on their experience and this can be seen throughout tenants’ experiences. The presence of appropriate doors, locks and gates are major safety concerns for tenants. When asked about safety, tenants often referred to the security and fire systems that were in place to ensure security. Isabelle lives at King Street and explains that the new security system in her property provides her with a sense of security.

*But with the security system that they’ve got here, it’s pretty good because it does stop people from coming in. It does stop… Yeah, a lot safer here, yeah. Because you’ve got the front doors first. You need security to get in…. And then you need different security to get into the bedroom door itself. So, for anyone to get into the room, they have to get through two doors, how many other places have that, not even motels, you know.*

Isabelle enjoys the experience of the security system because it means people cannot get in to her property, viewing safety as an external threat from people. Lee also lives at King Street, believing that Safety’s good. *We’ve got the smoke alarm running downstairs, so if that goes off too many times, someone will come and knock on your door which is really good.* This indicates that for her main concerns of safety are about fire, rather than other tenants in secondary spaces.

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16 Pseudonym used
The belief that doors and gates provide safety, was common amongst tenants. For those living in one-bedroom apartments, there is still a disagreement between the tenants. Liam explains that in his new apartment block people leave the security gate open, but that has not resulted in unwanted people entering the premises,

*I mean – things like the doors been open, whereas now – we’ve got – we got a security gate – it’s not always locked, but we don’t seem to have that problem from sort of unwanted people coming in on a regular basis, you know. So – so, that – that makes a big difference.*

Although Liam would feel safer having a closed gate, this quote suggests that he perceives his property to be safe. Parker feels that the steel frame doors make his apartment safe because he *used to feel very unsafe with not having proper fucking doors.* Parker believes that doors are how people break into apartments, and therefore he did not feel safe until he lived in his apartment with fire proof doors because *you can’t kick those doors down. It would take you about half an hour with a sledgehammer.* Because doors are how people enter apartments, tenants viewed them as an important element of safety. Maxine, a woman, also agreed that the doors played a massive difference and enabled her to feel safe, *even though the people around me <laugh> are the extremely eccentric or non-classifiable or whatever, I still feel – I feel safe. I mean they’re massive fire-proof metal doors, you know, and there’s a lock.* Thomas explained that even though he has a fire proof door, he still decided to put up a security door,

*You can’t get in here. I saw the fireman trying to get a door down once and it took them a while …I know how desperate people can get when they’re coming off drugs, so I do put a – I put a security screen door*

Thomas's experience indicates that, even though you can have a fireproof door, you can still feel unsafe within it. So, there is no ‘one size fits all’ for safety concerns within the one-bedroom apartments, nor for self-contained units.

Emma and Zane also live in the same building, yet have different feelings towards safety. Emma, as mentioned previously, had lived in one of the most notorious rooming houses in Melbourne, where she did not feel safe because of theft from her room. Having moved into a self-contained unit at SouthPort, Emma views her building as safe.

*They’ve changed the locks and everything. I guess security and that here is good, you know the gate and the front door, the types of locks, yeah, it’s pretty good security here […] Like here, I can, you know most of the time, leave my door unlocked or open, like I have trust here. My trust has been kind of brought back.*

The difference between Emma’s perception of safety in a rooming house compared to a self-contained unit is incredible. The progression from feeling unsafe in a rooming house to leaving her unit open, demonstrates that feelings of safety can be achieved in a self-contained unit. It is important to acknowledge that the apartment block she lives in, has under 10 units in it. There is less likelihood that issues will arise from 10 people compared to 40 people, and this difference would therefore influence her ability to place trust in her neighbours. Although Emma has been able to rebuild her trust because home has functioned as a site of ontological security, not everyone felt safe in their new space. Zane also placed importance on doors and locks regarding safety, feeling that she believes that the new locks on the doors are unsafe, and she nearly moved out because of it,
Zane’s property had just converted to a new electronic lock system which she did not trust. It is important to note that the locking system was considerably safer than the old alternative, largely because you can cancel keys, but she perceived it to be negative. The contrast between two neighbouring tenants provides for a particularly interesting analysis. On the one hand you have Emma who has had her trust won back; on the other hand, you have Zane who feels unsafe. The contrast between two women, living in the same small property, suggests that it is largely relative to the individual and their previous experience (Whitley et al., 2008). Gender does come into play when experiencing safety, and based on previous research, it would be plausible to suggest that the females feel less safe, than male counterparts (Kirkman et al., 2015; Wardhaugh, 1999; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017). However, consistently, the women indicated that they felt safer than their male counterparts because of the doors. The majority of women interviewed indicated that they felt safe within their building, compared to many of their male counterparts. This could be due to the sample size and the specific personalities of people, or a genuine suggestion that men are more likely to feel unsafe, because they are more likely to be involved in the drug subculture.

7.4. Conclusion

Safety is a key concern within community housing properties, and tenants experiencing a safe environment is imperative to their capacity to feel ontologically secure within the home. Safety was explored in this chapter, focusing on the differing experience between rooming houses and self-contained units, and the differences raise the question of whether this could explain whether tenants remain in long term housing.

Rooming houses proved to be unsafe environments. Tenants had to engage with their neighbours to meet basic needs, and often these neighbours created a toxic environment where tenants felt unsafe. Tenants did not know who was in their building, creating not only an uncertain and unstable environment, but also an unsafe environment. Tenants experienced theft, noise concerns and general violence, all of which affected their capacity to feel safe. Drugs were also present in rooming houses, creating many issues of safety for tenants. Rooming houses were consistently described as unsafe environment for tenants which hinders their capacity to be ontologically secure.

The concerns of tenants in self-contained units’ around safety were complex and reliant upon perception. The focus on George Street allowed for an understanding of how perceptions influence tenants’ experience of safety. George Street, a self-contained unit building, is a place where tenants partake in a drug culture and in sex work, both of which have the capacity to affect non-participating tenants through their use of communal areas. Some tenants expressed feeling unsafe, whilst others deemed the building to be calm and safe. This divide was also experienced in other properties. Furthermore, fire and door safety were recurrently identified as a key element to tenants’ capacity to feel safe in their units. Tenants in self-contained units have the capacity to feel safety and trust in their environment; however, this capacity is dependent upon their neighbours and on their own individual perceptions of the situation.
These experiences of safety provide an indication of the reasons as to why tenants may feel a greater sense of ontological security in self-contained units compared to rooming houses. Rooming houses, by contrast, provided no sense of safety for tenants, whereas self-contained units provided safety to some and not others, depending on tenants’ perception of the situation. It is important to acknowledge within this discussion that the concerns raised by tenants still seem to suggest that a self-contained unit building can also be unsafe environment; however, given that tenants have the capacity to meet basic human needs in the confines of their own private space, greater privacy may lead tenants to perceive their environment to be safer. The difference in experience of safety provides an indication as to the reasons why tenants remain longer term in self-contained units, compared to rooming houses.
8. Conclusion

Homelessness, within an Australian context, is a growing concern for governments. Although governments have invested in policies to reduce homelessness, the statistics suggest that it has increased by 13.7% from 2011 to 2016 (AHURI, 2018). With recent global trends to adopt a Housing First Approach, combined with local trends moving away from rooming houses as a space for people experiencing homelessness to live, the current research has based itself within a local community to understand the differences between tenants’ experience of rooming houses and self-contained units. It has thereby explored whether and how community housing can enable or hinder rooms or units to function as a site of ontological security for tenants.

Housing is the first step for people who are experiencing homelessness to exit their situation, although it is not the only step. For purposes of this research, home is considered as a social-spatial system within a given context, which points beyond the tendency to understand home only in terms of the provision of shelter (Parsell, 2012). For those who have experienced homelessness, home functions as a haven compared to their previous environment (Wardhaugh, 1999). At the same time, home provides a conducive environment to re-conceptualise a new self, whether that be through a passive acceptance of the past, or a new redefinition of independence.

Ontological security is the capacity for an individual to have trust in the world around them, and the research literature suggests that those who have experienced homelessness have often lost this trust. Ontological security is about consistency, continuity and predictability in an individual’s life, providing the framework to rely and feel secure within their place in society and within themselves (Giddens, 1984, 1991). For people experiencing homelessness, achieving ontological security is crucial to re-building their lives post-homelessness. The current research has drawn on prior work by Saunders (1990) and Dupuis and Thorns (1998), which explores how ‘home’ functions as a site of ontological security, focusing specifically on home ownership. However, since their work, the concept of home as a site of ontological security has been developed in ways that make it possible to understand the meanings of home for people who have experienced homelessness (Johnson & Wylie, 2011; McNaughton, 2008; Mee, 2007; Mifflin & Wilton, 2005; Newton, 2008; Padgett, 2007). These authors have demonstrated that ontological security is subjectively experienced and can be applied to a wider variety of people that are not home-owners – or even tenants in the private rental market. For people who have experienced homelessness, home ownership is not obtainable, and so this work is particularly important in laying the foundation for exploring the conditions for ontological security in ex-homeless populations.

In trying to answer how rooming houses compare to self-contained units within a community housing organisation, with reference to their ability to enable or hinder tenants’ capacity to be ontologically secure, this research has analysed three main foci: Stability; Control; and Safety. This analysis particularly explored tenants’ phenomenological perspectives and experiences of their current and previous forms of housing. While this research supports existing literature on the problems posed by rooming houses, it also explores data that brings into question any simple or single-faceted understanding of self-contained units as a site of ontological security.
At the beginning of this research, rooming houses were not expected to be a site that promotes ontological security, while self-contained units were expected to be incubators of ontological security. However, the analysis of tenants’ experiences complicated this picture. In brief, the data supports a few main conclusions: (1) rooming houses are not a site of ontological security due to the inability for tenants to be in control and have a safe environment; however (2) self-contained units provided greater elements of control over primary space, yet primary space continued to be influenced by secondary spaces and thus hinders tenant control over living environments; and, finally (3) safety was perceived differently amongst tenants and, although self-contained units provided greater safety to tenants, different tenants could experience the same objective environment in radically different ways, which might enhance or hinder their home’s capacity to function as a site of ontological security, depending on essentially individual perceptions. Therefore, I argue that, although community housing has the ability to function as a site of ontological security, this research suggests that the physical environment alone cannot achieve this result, because the capacity to attain ontological security will continue to depend on factors such as individual perceptions and neighbours’ behaviours.

The remainder of this chapter seeks to expand on the argument presented above by providing a clear, succinct summary of the findings and their implications. The first section will summarise the key findings from stability, control and safety and how these impacted tenants’ ability to experience ontological security with the home. The second section will identity limitations to this research. Finally, the chapter will present recommendations for future research and policy implications.

8.1. Key Findings

8.1.1. Stability

This chapter sought to discover whether there was a difference in stability between rooming houses and self-contained units. Stability specifically focused on affordability, security of tenure and tenants’ experience. These factors are directly influenced by SouthPort’s management of their housing.

Given that tenants cannot enter the private rental market on their incomes, affordability of housing is imperative for people experiencing homelessness. Affordability of housing did not differ between rooming houses and self-contained units and was an enabling factor influencing the home to function as a site of ontological security for tenants’. Tenants were able to afford their housing even though they were living on government benefits.

Security of tenure is another key element to ensure stability. An analysis of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 discovered that people living in self-contained units have more security than their counterparts in rooming houses. This is largely because rooming house landlords have more capacity to evict tenants based on the criterion of ‘quiet enjoyment’. Therefore, this legal difference hinders rooming houses from functioning as a site of ontological security, compared to self-contained units. However, the implementation of the legislation is managed by housing providers and, in this case study, SouthPort managed its properties in a way that appeared not to distinguish between rooming houses and self-contained units, with staff trying to work alongside tenants to manage rent arrears and aggressive and violent behaviours. Tenants also appeared to understand and articulate this approach, believing
that they had stable housing as long as they paid rent and were not violent. The management of housing was thus a potential enabling factor of ontological security for both rooming houses and self-contained units.

Stability was afforded to both rooming houses and self-contained units and, from this perspective, both forms of housing were able to function as a site of ontological security, providing tenants the stability needed to begin to trust the world around them.

8.1.2. Control

Control is central for home to function as a site of ontological security as it permits tenants to take charge of their lives and rebuild trust in the world around them within a physical space. This thesis explored how tenants experienced control within their housing by adopting Altman's (1975) framework of private spaces to understand how tenants experienced control in primary and secondary territories.

Tenants in rooming houses were hindered by the lack of primary space and their space was not able to function as a site of ontological security. Tenants were not able to exert control over their environment, because they were not able to complete basic human functions in their primary territory. Furthermore, when accessing secondary territories to complete basic human functions, tenants had to negotiate with their neighbours regarding hygiene, safety and behaviours. Tenants had very little control over secondary spaces and this greatly affected their ability to be ontologically secure. Consistently, tenants described both how they felt a lack of control and, for those that were subsequently able to live in a self-contained unit, the relief they felt upon moving in to a self-contained unit where they had control.

For tenants living in self-contained units, however, the situation was more complex. Tenants were able to exert control over their immediate primary space. Self-contained units, in this respect, enabled tenants to experience more ontological security because they were able to complete basic human functions without having to compromise with other tenants.

However, although the self-contained factor was an enabling factor of ontological security, secondary spaces continued to influence tenants’ ability to be in control of their primary space. The erosion of control occurred because of physical factors such as the placement of windows, as well as social factors such as noise from secondary spaces and slamming doors. Furthermore, tenants had little control over secondary spaces due to their need to negotiate with other tenants, hindering the capacity for their unit to function as a site of ontological security. Although, on first glance, self-contained units appear to provide greater control for tenants, this control is not unconstrained, and tenants’ ability to convert greater control into a secure sense of ontological security still remains contingent on factors beyond tenants’ control. Upon deeper investigation, it thus appears that ontological security remains largely dependent on neighbours and their actions in secondary spaces, in self-contained units like in rooming houses, although more tenants in self-contained units appear to be able to successfully navigate the challenges that environment poses.

8.1.3. Safety

Safety is key for home to function as site of ontological security. Safety, however, was a complex factor for tenants and tenant perceptions of lack of safety, greatly hindered their ability to be ontologically secure.
Rooming houses were uniformly seen as unsafe environments. Tenants described the presence of violence and drugs, which hindered their ability to feel safe at any point. As discussed previously, their need to use communal secondary spaces for basic human functions further eroded their sense of safety, as tenants must continuously negotiate with neighbours. Rooming houses thus actively eroded ontological security for tenants – reinforcing the current consensus that rooming houses should be considered a form of homelessness, rather than a productive response to it.

Self-contained units, by contrast, elicited varying responses from tenants on the question of whether the home was safe, with divergent implications for the question of whether this form of housing created conditions in which tenants could become ontologically secure. Primary spaces within self-contained units were generally considered safe, because people could close the door and still meet basic human needs. However, secondary spaces were perceived quite differently between tenants. Tenants living in the same building often expressed contrasting views regarding safety, with some believing these units to be safe and appearing content with having private primary space, whilst others expressed this form of housing to be unsafe. What can be concluded from these contrasting reports is that unsafe practices occur in secondary spaces, and this can cause a tenant to feel unsafe even in their primary space. Although this is perceived differently between tenants, the presence of unsafe practices hinders self-contained units from functioning as a site of ontological security for all tenants, although they appear successful for some.

8.1.4. Overall Ontological security

This thesis sought to understand whether tenants were able to experience ontological security in community housing; comparing self-contained units to rooming houses and the varying factors that influence this. Based on the analysis of tenants’ experience, this thesis ultimately argues that rooming houses are not a site of ontological security. Self-contained units have the potential to be a site of ontological security, given the individual tenants’ perceptions and experiences in their specific building. There is no building or tenant which is the same, however, and therefore it is not possible to conclude that the physical attributes of this form of housing by themselves suffice to anchor tenants’ sense of ontological security in a general sense. At the same time, this research was able to shed light on the factors that influence a tenant’s ability to be ontologically secure and cast light on the intricacies that community housing organisations face, which may contribute to ongoing work toward the provision of forms of community housing that heighten the chance that tenants can ground a sense of ontological security in their experience of control over their lives in a secure, safe home.

8.2. Limitations

This research has several limitations which should be noted. The size of the research limits its capacity to generalise beyond the immediate interviewees, even within the population of SouthPort tenants. Although the sample was demographically representative of the overall housing program, it was not a large enough to support any statistical generalisations regarding the housing. Rather it is an indication of the sorts of experiences tenants have, in a form that enabled some exploration of how and why questions, which can then provide a foundation for future research.
Furthermore, the focus on just one community housing provider limits the generalisability of the study. Other organisations might provide forms of self-contained units which could have a greater capacity to anchor ontological security, and the findings of this case study should not be taken as conclusions about self-contained units in general. Nevertheless, the findings are suggestive of factors that could be examined in the study of other forms of housing – in particular, explorations of factors that promote or hinder tenant perceptions of safety in common spaces, and of the interactions between incidents in common spaces and tenants’ perceptions of safety in their own private space, could provide a useful lens or set of research questions that could be generalised from this study into the design of studies of other forms of housing.

Finally, one key limitation is the reliance on interviewees to provide truthful accounts of their experiences. This limitation was to some degree minimised by the juxtaposition of interview and observational data, with participant observation supporting much of what was spoken about during the interviews. Even if tenants provided specific anecdotes that may not have been accurately remembered or recounted in all their details, the general thrust of interviewee comments appears representative of kinds of experiences common in the forms of housing under investigation here.

8.3. Recommendations:

This research suggests that community housing organisations need to consider safety as of greater importance, even when housing the hard-to-house, because tenants are not always able to experience ontological security and re-build their sense of trust in the world even in physical spaces that meet current minimum community standards. The solution, however, is not a simple one. Evicting a tenant for creating an unsafe environment often leads to that tenant becoming homeless, because they are not able to re-enter the private market and social housing is limited within Victoria. Organisations therefore need to consider how they can maintain tenancies for tenants who are creating the unsafe environment. One possible approach is through greater support services available to tenants. If tenants had the capacity to work alongside case managers and access important services, this could mean a reduction in violence and drug presence in properties, creating a safer environment.

Rooming houses, although they once had a purpose, should no longer be seen as safe or appropriate places for tenants to rebuild their sense of trust in the world. Self-contained units are better; however, offering properties with fewer units overall, could benefit tenants as they would need to negotiate and compromise with fewer neighbours, and thus provide a greater chance of forming a viable sense of community.

Further research can be conducted into addressing safety concerns so that self-contained units can function more reliably as a site of ontological security. Furthermore, a comparison between housing organisations and the management of housing would provide greater insight into the key elements which affect tenant’s capacity to be ontologically secure and provide a basis for further analysis.
9. References


Eardley, T., & Flaxman, S. (2012). The role of community housing organisations in meeting the housing and support needs of people who are homeless. Melbourne: Australia: AHURI Positioning Paper No 147: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.


play a role? (University of Glasgow). Retrieved from http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/6146


Heart Mission, St Kilda.


Parsell, C. (2010). An ethnographic study of the day-to-day lives and identities of people who are homeless in Brisbane. The University of Queensland.


### 10. Appendices

#### 10.1. Appendix A: Australian Homelessness Statistic Tables

**Table 4: Homeless Persons Australia Wide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough</td>
<td>8,946</td>
<td>7,247</td>
<td>6,810</td>
<td>8,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>People in supported accommodation for the homeless</td>
<td>13,420</td>
<td>17,329</td>
<td>21,258</td>
<td>21,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in temporary accommodation</td>
<td>17,880</td>
<td>17,663</td>
<td>17,374</td>
<td>17,725</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persons in boarding houses</td>
<td>21,300</td>
<td>15,460</td>
<td>14,944</td>
<td>17,503</td>
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<td>Persons in other temporary lodging</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living in severely overcrowded accommodation</td>
<td>33,430</td>
<td>31,531</td>
<td>41,370</td>
<td>51,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>95,314</strong></td>
<td><strong>89,728</strong></td>
<td><strong>102,439</strong></td>
<td><strong>116,427</strong></td>
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(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2018a, p. Table 1.1)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough</td>
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<td>786</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>1123</td>
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<td>3,050</td>
<td>3,933</td>
<td>4406</td>
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<td>Persons in other temporary lodging</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living in severely overcrowded accommodation</td>
<td>3257</td>
<td>3,345</td>
<td>6,022</td>
<td>8930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18154</td>
<td>17410</td>
<td>22,306</td>
<td>24817</td>
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(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2018b, p. Table 1.3)
Table 6: Homeless Persons By Living Area (Statistical Area 3 and 4)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>People in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough</th>
<th>Port Phillip Area</th>
<th>Dandenong</th>
<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>1119</td>
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<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>7172</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People in temporary accommodation</th>
<th>Port Phillip Area</th>
<th>Dandenong</th>
<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>3080</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>727</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>4413</td>
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</table>

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<th>Dandenong</th>
<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>108</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People living in severely overcrowded accommodation</th>
<th>Port Phillip Area</th>
<th>Dandenong</th>
<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1284</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>8930</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Port Phillip Area</th>
<th>Dandenong</th>
<th>Melbourne City</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1127</td>
<td>2103</td>
<td>1721</td>
<td>24828</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2018c, p. Table 5.1)
Table 7: Break down of Homeless Persons in Port Phillip Area by Suburb in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Amount of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert Park</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elwood</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Melbourne</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Phillip Industrial Area</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Melbourne</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kilda</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kilda East</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1127</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highlighted areas are SouthPort's local area

(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2018d, Table 5.3)
10.2. Appendix B: Ethics Notice of Approval

Notice of Approval

Date: 03 February 2016
Project number: CHEAN A&I 0000019804.11/15
Project title: Community Housing Program and its Effectiveness in South and Port Melbourne
Risk classification: Low risk
Chief investigator: Professor Ralph Horne
Status: Approved

Approval period: From 03 February 2016 To 31 December 2016

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment and Application form</td>
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<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment A - Advertisement checklist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment B - Semi-structured interview schedule</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment C - Participant Information Statement (Current Tenants)</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment D - Participant Information Statement (Ex Tenants)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment E - Participant Information Statement (Professionals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment F - Consent form</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment G - Information on support services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment H - SPCHG letter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment I - Bibliography</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>03.02.2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University CHEAN as it meets the requirements of the National statement on ethical conduct in human research (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:
1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by CHEAN. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the CHEAN secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the CHEAN immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of their research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. **Annual reports**
   [Link: Research/Ethics/2016/Letters/Final Approval Horne, R: CHEAN A&I 0000019804.11/15.doc]
Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.

5. Final report
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the CHEAN at any time.

7. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

8. Special conditions of approval
   N/A

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

Professor Joseph Siracusa
Deputy Chairperson
RMIT DSC CHEAN A

cc. Ms Suzana Keracovic (Ethics Officer/CHEAN secretary)
10.3. Appendix C: Interview Schedule for tenants

Semi – Structured Interview

I would like to stress that you do not need to answer all the questions. Say ‘Pass’ if you do not want to answer any question. For this research I’m interested in finding out your experience as a tenant of South Port Housing. We would like to hear about how you came to live in South Port Housing apartment and what it is like to live in one of their apartments.

Main Questions:

- Can you describe a normal day to me in terms of how much time you spend at home and how much you are out and about?
- General probing questions within this for clarification.
- Can you describe your apartment/room to me and what you think about it?
- Can you describe to me the area outside your apartment – the other parts of the building and the immediate neighbourhood – and what you think about it?
- Where did you live before you came to live in a South Port apartment/room?
- How did you find out about South Port housing and come to live there?
- How does South Port housing compare to other places you have lived in recent years?
- What is it like to live in a South Port apartment/room?
- General probing questions within this for clarification
- How much and what type of contact do you have with the people who run the South Port Community Housing Group?

Key Themes:

- The dwelling
- The immediate surrounds of the dwelling
- Earlier housing history
- Finding housing
- Comparison with previous
- Using the dwelling
- Views on housing
- Interactions with providers

Main Questions:

- What does your week normally look like?
- General probing questions within this for clarification.
- How did you find out about it and come to live there?
- Tell me about your experience with South Port?
- General probing questions within this for clarification
- How does SPCHG compare with other service providers?
- What distinguishes SPCHG for you?

Answers being sought / Probing Questions:

- Experience of South Port:
  - How long have you been with SPCHG? How long have you lived there? How long do you plan to stay there?
  - How did you end up with SPCHG?
  - How has your experience with SPCHG been? Positive / Negatives
- What could be improved about the housing provided by SPCHG?
- How does SPCHG compare with other service providers?
- What distinguishes SPCHG for you?

**Property:**
- Could you describe the property you live in? How many residents? The main facilities? What the suburb is like?
- Do you have much to do with the other residents? How much do you need to share facilities?
- Is it easy to have friends, including family, visit you at home?
- What are your thoughts on the location of the property?
- Do you feel safe and secure at home? If so/not, why? Have you had any personal things stolen from your room/van?

**Services:**
- Do you require services provided by external parties?
- Would you prefer the services to be provided by SPCHG?
- What informal support do you receive from SPCHG?
- What are your thoughts on the lack of services provided by SPCHG?

**Other:**
- What are your thoughts on the cost of living in a SPCHG Property? Does it cost a lot? Has the rate changed since you have been here?
10.4. Appendix D: Interview Schedule for staff

**General Homelessness Issues**
- What are some of the issues associated with homelessness?
- What are contributing factors to people being homeless?
- What are some of the problems with housing in Victoria for homeless persons?

**Housing in Victoria**
- What are some of the housing options in Victoria?
- How effective do you believe community housing to be?
- Should it be supported/supportive housing?
- What are the benefits of community housing?

**South Port**
- What is your role at South Port? What is your daily function?
- What are the processes in place to house homeless persons?
- What are the processes in place to move to a bed sit?
- What are your views on the housing that South Port provides?
- How does South Port manage the tenants and tenancy?
- How does South Port manage tenancy issues?
- What services does South Port provide? Official and unofficial?
- What are your thoughts on the community surrounding South Port?
- How does South Port support the community?
- What are the positives of the organisations?
- What are some of the negatives?
- What are turnover rates like?
10.5. Appendix E: Rent Calculations

Section 1, of each table, considers the rent calculated without a service fee, considering their income, their room type and the property and whether this falls under the 30% of income on housing. Section 2, incorporates the service fee into overall housing costs, considering the amount that tenants pay overall for living in SouthPort housing, contrasting different buildings and room/unit types. It is important to note, that commonwealth rent assistance is not considered to be part of the calculation, as this money is specifically designed to pay for rent and is therefore not considered income.

Table 8: Calculations for tenants who receive disability support pension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenants Service Fee</th>
<th>Amount of Rent less CRA</th>
<th>30% of Income</th>
<th>Amount paid over 30%</th>
<th>Tenants Service Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: No service Fee</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 2: Including Service Fee</strong></td>
<td><strong>DSP rent per week, no service fee</strong></td>
<td><strong>DSP rent per week, service fee</strong></td>
<td><strong>Amount of Rent less CRA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DSP</strong></td>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rent Assistance</strong></td>
<td><strong>$119.22</strong></td>
<td><strong>$119.22</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$28.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Fiats</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$30.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$27.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$30.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Rooms</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$15.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6 Flats</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$23.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$26.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8 Flats</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$31.85</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$30.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<td><strong>10 Bedsits</strong></td>
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<td>$28.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$26.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
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<td><strong>12 Bedsits</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
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<td>$65.20</td>
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<td>$26.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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<td><strong>14 Fiats</strong></td>
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<td>$36.15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>15 Flats</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$36.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16 Flats</strong></td>
<td>$397.40</td>
<td>$21.15</td>
<td>$99.35</td>
<td>$65.20</td>
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</table>
### Table 9: Calculations for tenants who receive Newstart allowance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1: No service Fee</th>
<th>Section 2: Including Service Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NewStart Income</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tenants Service Fee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$258.74</td>
<td>$19.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$258.74</td>
<td>$19.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>$258.74</td>
<td>$18.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$258.74</td>
<td>$19.02</td>
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