

# Aging out of place into homelessness



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# Personal journey leading to research questions

- Interest in intersection aging, place and homelessness:
  - Professional experience in home care
  - Research on gentrification
- Began PhD in 2011, with doctoral grants from FQRSC, SSRHC, CREGÉS, and the McGill School of Social Work
- Older adults displaced into homelessness?

# Why is it important to study newly homeless older adults?

- Older homelessness on the rise yet largely **invisible** (Burns et al. 2012)
  - Population aging
  - ↑ cost of living (OAS, GIS not indexed)
- Disjuncture aging and homelessness policies
  - Aging in place policies assume stable housing
  - Homelessness policies target youth
- Two main pathways to late-life homelessness (McDonald et al. 2007; Crane et al. 2005)
  - 1) Chronic ; 2) newly homeless older adults (NHOAs)
- ↑ NHOAs in Montreal shelters
- NHOAs being displaced into homelessness?

# How have place and displacement been understood?

- Place as meaningful space and social construction (Tuan, 1974, Relph, 1976, Rose, 1993)
- Working definition place: a dynamic, politicized, meaningful location
- Aging in place literature (Lawton, 1982; Rowles, 1973, Golant, 2011)
  - Apolitical, quantitative, health focused, lack of agency, rural
- Urban geographical displacement literature (Chernoff, 1980, Fullilove, 2014)
  - Displacement as linear, negative experience

# Research questions

- How do experiences with place and displacement inform newly homeless older adults' (NHOAs) encounters with homelessness?

## Sub-questions:

- How do experiences with place and displacement inform NHOAs' encounters *into* and *during* homelessness?
- How does age affect NHOAs' experiences of place and displacement?
- How do strategies adopted by NHOAs affect experiences with place and displacement across housed-homeless trajectories?

# Methodology & Methods

- Methodology
  - Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014)
- Sample and recruitment
  - Montreal homeless shelters (♀, ♂), day center
  - Aged 50 + years
  - Homeless for the first time in the last 2 years
- Data collection
  - Primary: Semi-structured interviews with 15 NHOAs (11/15 French)
  - Secondary: Service provider interviews, observation, documents
- Analysis
  - Constant comparison, theoretical sampling
  - Sensitizing concepts: place, displacement, home, exclusion

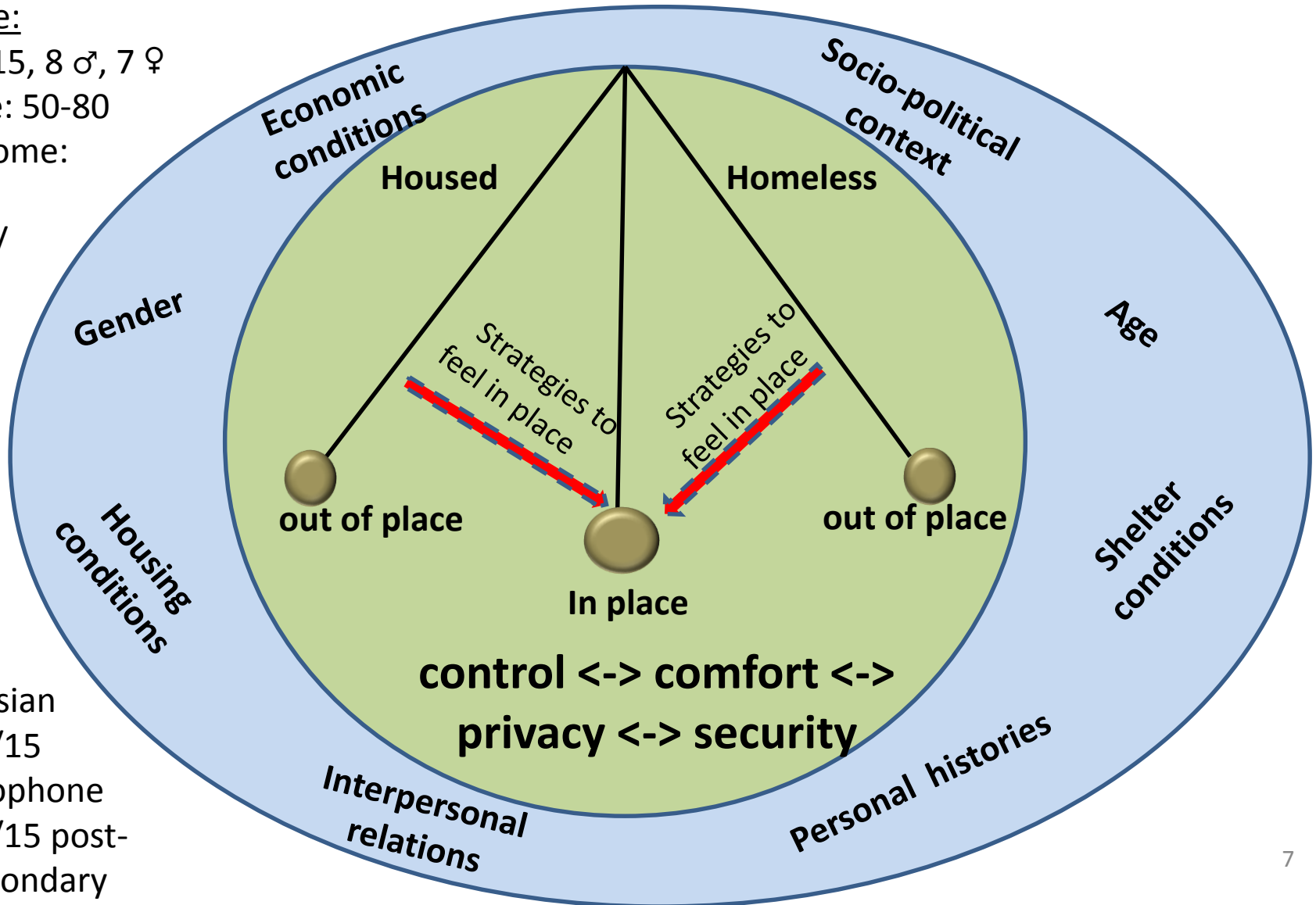
# Main process:

## Oscillating in and out of place across housed-homeless trajectories

### Sample:

- N=15, 8 ♂, 7 ♀
- Age: 50-80
- Income:  
\$600-  
\$2000/  
month

- all  
Caucasian
- 11/15  
Francophone
- 11/15 post-  
secondary



# Oscillating in and out of place pre-homeless (1): Two main pathways of displacement into homelessness

## Gradual displacement (n=8)

Unstable histories

Low-income housing; involuntary stayers/movers

In place strategies (longer)

Tipping point:

Relationship breakdown, poor health, addiction in earlier life

## Rapid displacement (n=7)

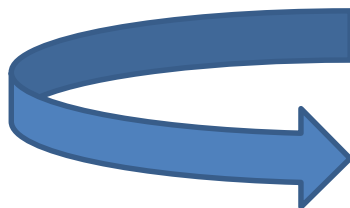
Stable histories

Private market renters, owners; move or stay by choice

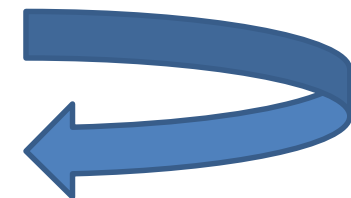
In place strategies (shorter)

Tipping point:

Relationship breakdown, health crisis, addiction in later life



Homeless

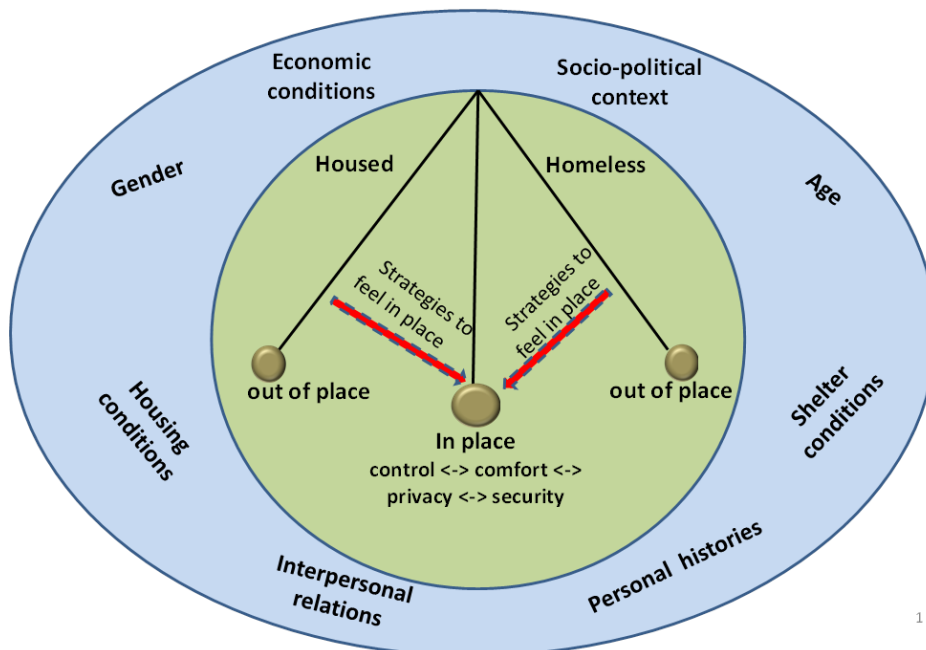




# Oscillating in and out of place pre-homeless: gradual displacement (2)

- Privacy, control, comfort security of private housing and routines led to feeling mostly in place pre-homeless; eventually comfort and security reduced to nothing

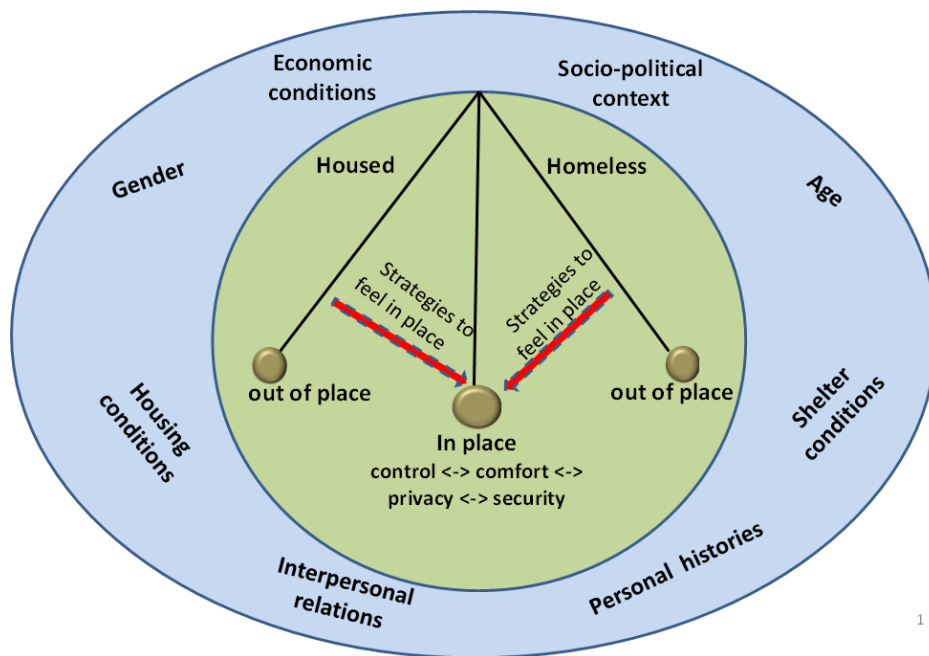
- *I was comfortable enough, up until the end, when I didn't have a mattress. They threw out the mattress because it was infested. So I had a small mattress on the floor. I felt pretty much like a prisoner. And I said to myself, wow, today, that's it, I'm going to commit suicide. (Marc, age 52, on waiting list HLM 7 years, gradual displacement)*



# Oscillating in and out of place pre-homeless (3): rapid displacement

- Intense social losses led to loss of control, comfort, security - feeling out of place while housed

- Everything happened at the same time. Two and a half years ago, there were three consecutive deaths. My mother died first, then my daughter, my oldest, who died second, then my wife was third. All of that in the span of 5 months. Let's just say that it took about a month before it all started. I already had a problem with alcohol, which I had under control for the past 30 years (David, age 70, private market rental 27 years, rapid displacement)*



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# Oscillating in and out of place during homelessness (1)

**Shelter rules, practices (violence) = loss of control, comfort, privacy and security**

- *I had to wait in line again for supper, when they call you by your number. You know, I found that funny, being called by your number instead of my name Patrice, you know what I mean. I found that humiliating, it is something I wouldn't want for my worst enemy (Patrice, age 69)*
- *This story of "sure we'll house you for a month and then get rid of you," you can't do anything in a month. You can't find a job in a month (Carole, age 51)*

**Comfort and security of having material needs met and building social ties with shelter staff and residents**

- *What brings me comfort today? Knowing that I got a place to come every night and that I won't freeze outside....I got a family here [at the shelter]. It's not the same as the family you're used to though (Tiger, age 58)*
- *The shelter is a total comfort and sense of security. And it's fascinating. Hot water all the time, the laundry is done, the meals are made, if you ask for something, you get it right away. It's fascinating (Mathilde, age 80)*

# Oscillating in and out of place during homelessness (2)

## Loss of control, comfort, security and privacy

- *In the dorm, we are about 45 who sleep all together. So when I talk about lacking comfort, that's what I am talking about (Christophe, age 54)*
- *V: How did you feel in the place you lived before coming here?*
- *D: Secure, stable, normal, human, I felt like a human*
- *V: What do you mean you felt like a human?*
- *V: A coffee, a sandwich, a warm place, someone saying it's ok today you don't have to go outside, you can stay here, and here is a coffee, and some TV (Danny, age 50)*

## Regaining control, comfort, security and privacy

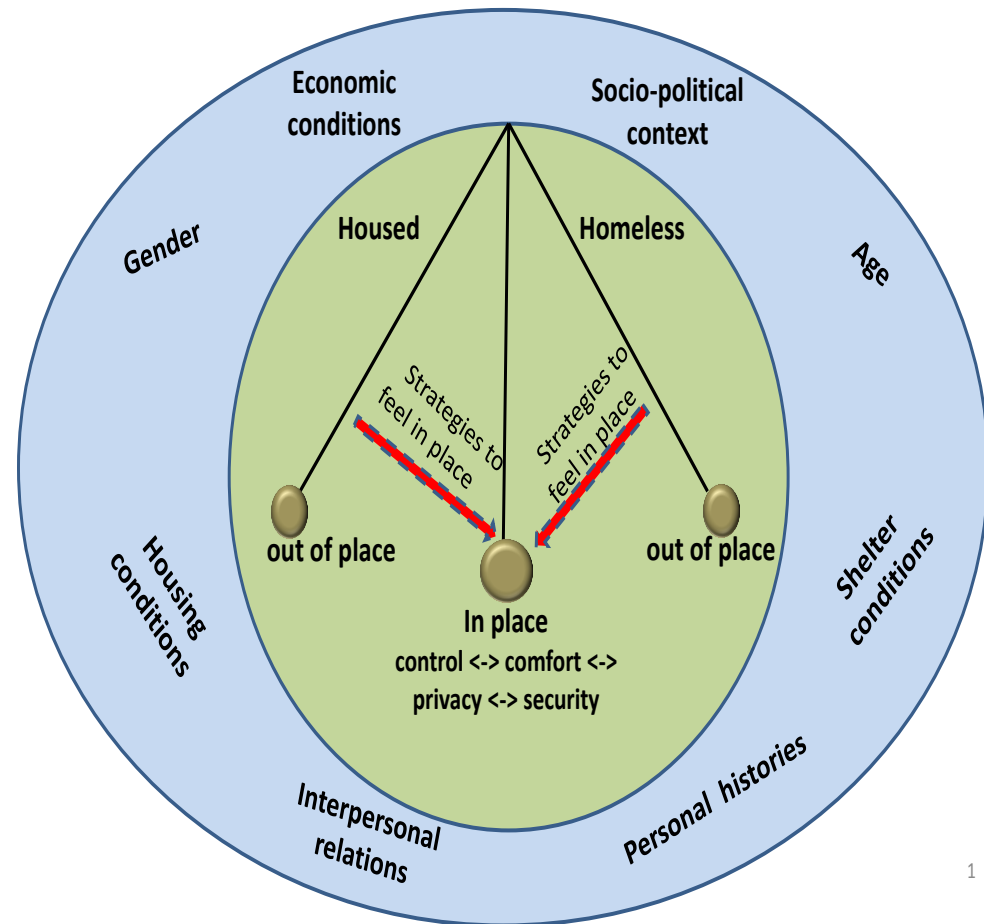
- *As for showering, I arrange it so that there won't be anyone else... it's a shared shower (David, age 70)*
- *I'm not homeless, I'm living the life of a homeless person...it's only a trampoline [shelter] that's what I'm putting in my head and saying oh it's a bouncing place, I bounce (Pete, age 58)*

# Oscillating in and out of place and age

- Challenges (shelter design and policies)
  - *In many shelters, they made me get up very early. But my body hasn't been able to in 15 years. So you do what you can. It won't work, it takes me one hour to de-rust! I need to do an hour of exercise in my bed before I get up (Nicole, age 54).*
  - *When you are older, you can walk for an hour, when you're young, you can walk eight hours (Danny, age 50)*
- Challenges (economic, socio-political context)
  - *I still have three years before I get my pension. It's not easy. Sometimes I clean houses, just to make ends meet. But I still ended up here you see (Florence, age 62)*
- Advantages (interpersonal relations and finding housing)
  - *I'm not sure if it's my gray hair but they would all come to me, I learned a lot from them, like how the shelter system works (Isabelle, age 64)*

# Conclusion and theoretical implications

- Shift from tackling loss of housing to loss of place
- Dynamic framework: Oscillating in and out of place & principles of control, comfort, privacy and security
  - Expands concept of aging in place: links micro with macro, moves beyond static person-environment fit models
  - Moves beyond dichotomy of housed/homeless and displacement as linear, negative (in place while homeless and out of place while housed)



# Conclusion and practice implications

- Prevention
  - 2 different pathways and principles of control, comfort, privacy and security allow to identify risks of homelessness before they emerge
- Improving emergency shelters
  - Rethink shelters using principles of control, comfort, privacy and security (design, rules, regulations)
- Improving rehousing outcomes
  - Shift from Housing First to Place First: Need multiple rehousing strategies that consider principles of place: control, comfort, privacy and security

# Next Steps

- Further research needed on newly older homeless and rehousing older homeless adults
- SSHRC Post-doc funding (2015-2017):
  - Finding home after homelessness: Experiences of rehousing newly homeless older adults in Montreal



Thank you

Questions???

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**SSHRC Bombardier Doctoral Scholarship; McGill School of Social Work Joan Bailin Research Scholarship; CREGES Doctoral Award**

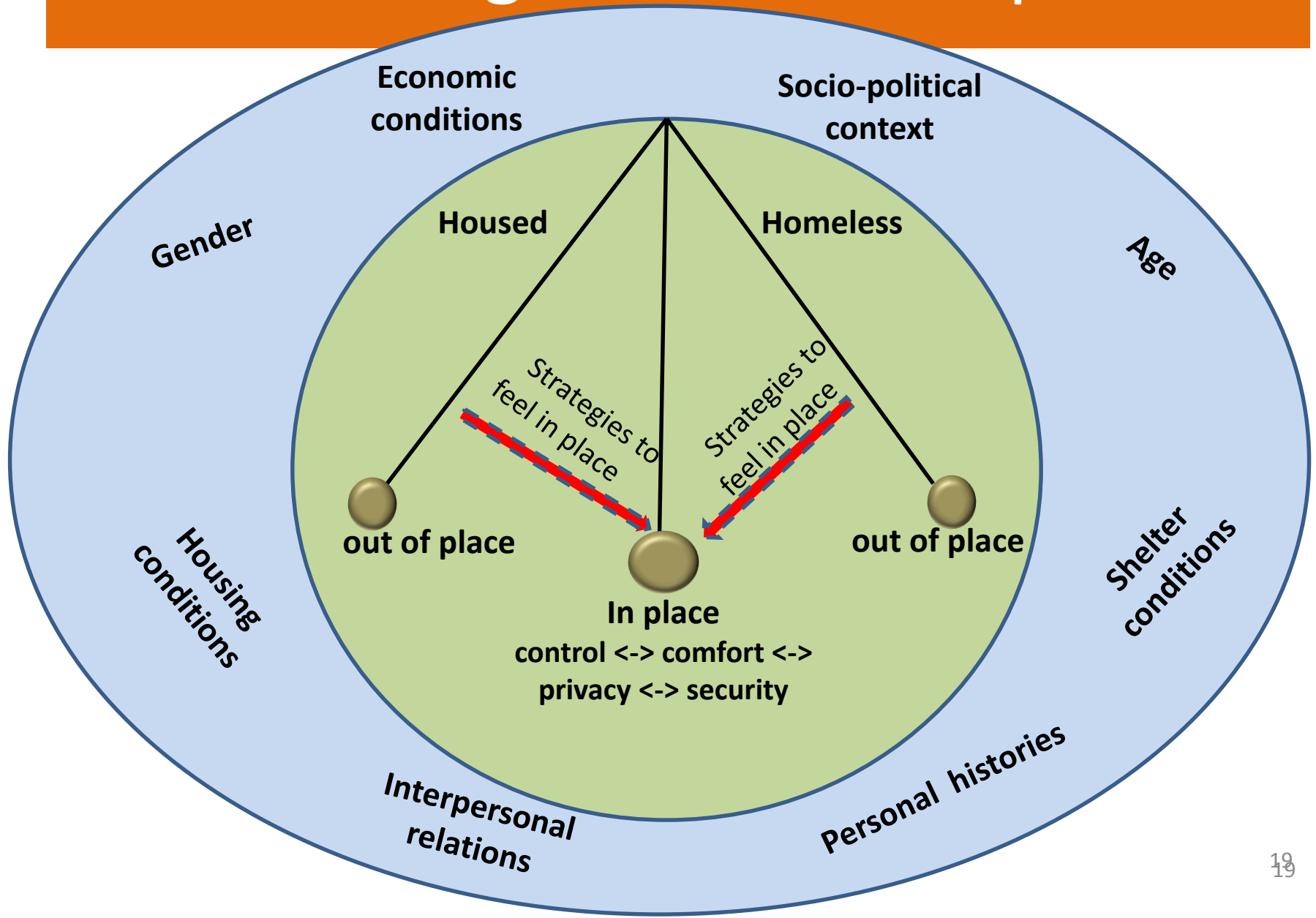
**Co-supervisors: Dr. Tamara Sussman; Dr. Jean-Pierre Lavoie**

**Committee member: Dr. Anne-Marie Séguin**

# Demographic characteristics

- All Caucasian; most French Canadian (13/15)
- Most had few social contacts: (1/8) widower; (6/15) divorced/ separated; (10/15) had children (only 2 maintained contact)
- Most were university educated (11/15)
- About half had stable housing histories of 10 + years and careers (7/15)
- Most (10/15) were under the market basket indicator for poverty in Montreal of \$15 209

# Oscillating in and out of place



# Constructivist Grounded Theory

- Ontologically relativist and epistemologically subjective, ConGT is congruent for a study that does not strive for an objective truth, nor assumes data and theories are “out there” to be discovered (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).
- Flexible than other articulations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) “providing general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2).
- It explicitly takes the socio-political context into account, acknowledging the social, cultural standpoints of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).