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Invisiblizing Trans Homelessness
The Prefiguration of Cis Homelessness through Homelessness Counts
Rendre les transgenres en situation d'itinérance invisibles
La préfiguration de l'itinérance chez les personnes cisgenres par le recensement des sans-abri

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Résumé de l'article

Les municipalités canadiennes recensent régulièrement les populations de sans-abri en vue d'orienter leurs politiques et services. S'appuyant sur 165 rapports municipaux canadiens-anglais de recensement des sans-abri, cet article examine la façon dont on définit au sens large les personnes transgenres, bispirituelles et non binaires (T2SNB), ainsi que le sexe et le genre. Dans la méthodologie et les textes de recensement et de rapport, on préfigure l'itinérance comme étant cisgenre. Pour les recensements subséquents, les services destinés aux itinérants, comprenant les services nouveaux et remaniés en fonction des recensements précédents, servent à retrouver les personnes itinérantes à dénombrer, ce qui accentue la notion et la préfiguration de l'itinérance chez les personnes cisgenres. Dans plusieurs municipalités, ces rapports perpétuent ouvertement et subtilement le modèle binaire du genre. Le fait de rendre invisibles les personnes T2SNB et de les représenter de manière inexacte peut avoir des conséquences importantes qui peuvent se répercuter sur les services et les logements disponibles.

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Invisibilizing Trans Homelessness: The Prefiguration of Cis Homelessness through Homelessness Counts

by A.J. Withers

Abstract: Municipalities in Canada routinely count unhoused populations to inform policy and services. By examining 165 English Canadian municipal homeless count reports, this article explores how trans, Two Spirit, and nonbinary (T2SNB) people, and sex and gender more broadly, are constructed. Homelessness is prefigured as cis within and through the counting and reporting methodology and text. In subsequent counts, homeless services—including new and revamped services based on prior counts—are used to locate homeless people to count thus intensifying the construction of and further prefiguring cis homelessness. The gender binary is both overtly and subtly upheld through these reports in many municipalities. It is argued that there can be substantial material consequences for the invisibilization and misrepresentation of T2SNB people that can impact available services and housing.

Keywords: enumeration; homelessness; homelessness counts; quantitative research; trans

Résumé: Les municipalités canadiennes recensent régulièrement les populations de sans-abri en vue d'orienter leurs politiques et services. S'appuyant sur 165 rapports municipaux canadiens-anglais de recensement des sans-abri, cet article examine la façon dont on définit au sens large les personnes transgenres, bispirituelles et non binaires (T2SNB), ainsi que le sexe et le genre. Dans la méthodologie et les textes de recensement et de rapport, on préfigure l'itinérance comme étant cisgenre. Pour les recensements subséquents, les services destinés aux itinérants, comprenant les services nouveaux et remaniés en fonction des recensements précédents, servent à retrouver les personnes itinérantes à dénombrer, ce qui accentue la notion et la préfiguration de l'itinérance chez les personnes cisgenres. Dans plusieurs municipalités, ces rapports perpétuent ouvertement et subtilement le modèle binaire du genre. Le fait de rendre invisibles les personnes T2SNB et de les représenter de manière inexacte peut avoir des conséquences importantes qui peuvent se répercuter sur les services et les logements disponibles.

Mots clés: recensement; itinérance; recensement des sans-abri; recherche quantitative; trans

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Introduction

There is a backlash against trans communities in North America. In three Canadian provinces and multiple American states, trans and gender non-conforming youth are, or are imminently to be, subjected to anti-trans policies at school (Amnesty International Canada 2024; Trans Legislation Tracker 2024). Medical care restrictions are proposed in Alberta and legislation restricting it, even criminalizing it, has been passed in some jurisdictions and is under review by the courts (Amnesty International Canada 2024; Sherman 2024; Trans Legislation Tracker 2024). As trans/transgender, Two Spirit (2S), and non-binary (T2SNB) people try to live their lives, their identities are recast by the right as "gender ideology."[1] The attempted erasure of trans people is not new (Namaste 2000) with many proponents of the current anti-trans backlash seeking the total erasure of trans people (Withers 2023). Consequently, how the state discursively constructs trans people in policy and how it enumerates (or fails to enumerate) trans people have implications not only for the specific policies in question but also in the larger struggle about trans existence. This paper examines how homeless trans people are (and are not) counted and constructed through municipal homeless counts (HCs) and homeless count reports (HCRs) in Canada.

In Canada, as in the United States, many municipalities carry out HCs every few years. Data from these studies are used for making long-term policy. HCs and HCRs prefigure and produce their objects of study: homeless people. There are profound differences among municipalities in how T2SNB people are counted and described in HCRs. HCRs make homelessness bureaucratically and politically knowable. The choices of those who conduct HCs and author HCRs have implications for homeless policy and, intentionally or not, wade into the ongoing debates about (trans)gender and the gender binary. This paper demonstrates that Canadian municipalities prefigure homelessness as cis through HCs and HCRs thereby contributing to the erasure and delegitimization of T2SNB people and identity.

The enumeration of T2SNB people in homeless counts has not been examined in the scholarly literature. There is near universal agreement in both the literature and in HCs themselves that this enumeration tool undercounts certain groups of people. Nevertheless, there is a sizeable body of literature that supports counting unhoused people. HCs are rooted in the idea that Housing First (HF) homelessness policy's data collection and data-driven strategies will end homelessness (Goering et al. 2014; see also Hwang et al. 2012; Tsemberis and Asmussen 1999). Multiple studies have examined methods of improving the counting of unhoused people within this paradigm (e.g., Hopper et al. 2008; Troisi et al. 2015; Tsai and Alarcón 2022).

There are also critiques of HCs. Jocoy (2013) says that HCs are part of the larger "culture of quantification" which has resulted in resources being funnelled into counting with a focus on measurement rather than interpretation and solutions (398). Schneider, Brisson and Burnes (2016) raises concerns about the waste of resources—especially given his findings that different jurisdictions use varied methodologies, resulting in inconsistent results.

Some scholars have contemplated replacing point-in-time counts with by-name lists (BNLs) (Tsai and Alarcón 2022) or a combination of randomly sampled point-in-time (PIT) counts cross-referenced with BNLs (Weare 2019). BNLs provide real-time administrative data from institutions. BNLs are easy to generate once homeless databases have been created. Regardless of the method, homeless counts are neoliberal surveillance technologies that construct and make homeless populations knowable (see Willse 2008). Evolving techniques, including methodological innovations (Hopper et al. 2008) and the use of artificial intelligence (Richmond 2021), drones or helicopters with thermal imaging, and street cameras, are intensifying this surveillance in some, primarily US jurisdictions (Tsai and Alarcón 2022). These tactics will

identify individuals who have evaded previous counts (Williams 2011). The drive to count, to quantify, overrides unhoused individuals' intention and consent.

Both PIT and BNL counts are designed to capture individuals who are considered to be in situations of "absolute homelessness" —sleeping outside, in the shelter system, or, in some jurisdictions, those with no fixed address in other institutions (jails and hospitals). It is not designed to count the "hidden homeless"— people trading sex for a place to stay, couch surfing, squatting, etc. Some communities attempt to include hidden homelessness in their PIT counts but this methodology in itself is incapable of adequately counting this population (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004; Smith and Castañeda-Tinoco 2019). High rates of violence experienced by women and T2SNB people (who are also disproportionately Indigenous, Black, and people of colour) is one of the factors influencing experiences of homelessness, including high rates of hidden homelessness. Because of the high rates of hidden homelessness, unhoused women and T2SNB people are less likely to be counted in homeless counts. Focusing on absolute homelessness, therefore, disproportionately represents (white) cis men's homelessness.

Additionally, neither *homelessness* nor *trans* are fixed concepts; rather, they are socially determined and have changed over time (Currah and Stryker 2015; Willse 2008). With respect to enumerating trans people, Currah and Stryker (2015) say, "The definitional lines of the concept are 'moving targets'" (4). What constitutes and is counted as homelessness is contested.

Beyond critiques of the counts, enumeration of trans people is problematic because "one can be trans* without necessarily having a trans identity" (Ingraham, Pratt and Gorton 2015, 139–40)— much like how a man can have sex with men and not *be* gay but identify in multiple ways. Consequently, there will likely be fewer trans respondents than there are "trans" participants. Disproportionately, poor and BIPOC people do not identify with the word "trans" (Doan 2016; Valentine 2007). Nevertheless, supporters of trans enumeration argue that these projects are important to identify trans experiences, bolster rights claims, and get service improvements (Doan 2016; Trans PULSE Canada n.d.).

Quantitative studies may not be suitable for the small T2SNB population. Further, HCs, which are designed to collect demographic information, do not collect information about the unique needs of the community. According to the City of Halifax's (2018) HCR, T2SNB people need "different methods of data collection and analyses" (4). Given that there is urgent and obvious need for deeply affordable housing and increased social assistance rates, it is not unreasonable to argue that the energy put into HCs is better spent elsewhere; nevertheless, as HCs continue, there are concrete measures that can be taken to improve the counts for T2SNB people and interrupt the cycle of prefiguration of homelessness as cis through HCs and HCRs.

Methodology

In this study, 165 publicly available English-language Canadian municipal homeless count reports were reviewed. Where available, the years 2015/2016, 2018, and 2020/2021/2022 were reviewed (search ended Jan. 1, 2023). These dates were chosen based on federal government funding cycles. If more than one report was available for the 2015-2016 period, 2015 was used; if more than one was available for the 2020/21/22 period, the most recent report was used. I used content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) and critical discourse analysis techniques to analyze the reports and identify key themes.

Background: Homeless Counts and Reports

HCs are federally funded and directed assessments of the population of unhoused people at a specific point in time in Canada (Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report 2022). They are made up of PIT counts, registry periods, BNLs, or a combination of these. PIT counts are the physical counting and surveying of the population and may include the collection of administrative data; they are conducted within a 24-hour period. Registry periods are several days to a week-long period in which data is collected through magnet events (gatherings designed to attract community members), the shelter, and other administrative systems. Registry periods may involve conducting a survey of unhoused persons and typically involve collecting non-anonymous data to register people into homelessness data surveillance systems – including BNLs. BNLs are the extraction of population data from the federally mandated and approved database.

The same core questions have been used in HCs since 2018. Nevertheless, there is significant variation in methodologies and written reports among municipalities—making inter-jurisdictional comparison unreliable (see Schneider, Brisson, and Burnes 2016). Nearly all HCRs report Indigenous identity while the majority do not report racial identity, even though this data is collected. The HCRs are typically prepared by not-for-profit and/or municipal staff, although provincial government staff, consultants, and academics have also prepared reports (see Homeless Count Reports Cited). Reports typically have an infographic visually depicting key data followed by a longer report that includes a methodology section and may include an appendix with the survey instrument(s); some reports only include an infographic or report and some may not include any methodological information. Four provinces issue reports containing information for multiple cities (Alberta, British Columbia (BC), New Brunswick, Quebec). Methodological and reporting variations lead to uneven approaches to how people are counted and, ultimately, who is counted.

Part I: Undercounting

T2SNB people are in virtually every community. According to Statistics Canada (2022), one in 300 people in Canada 15 years old and over (0.3%) are T2SNB.[2] Yet homeless count reports often report zero unhoused T2SNB people. T2SNB people are systemically undercounted in many homeless enumerations because of the formulation of the question, survey conditions, and use of administrative data.

Undercounting: The Question

The question people are asked shapes the answer. The formulation of HCs' most common gender question delegitimizes binary-identified trans people's identities. Since 2018 (and typically before that), all municipalities outside BC attempt to capture trans populations by asking participants: "what gender do you identify with?" Unhoused people are shown a list of possible answers: "man," "woman," "two spirit," "transgender man," "transgender woman," "non-binary (genderqueer)," "not listed: [insert answer]," "don't know," and "decline to answer." Many trans people choose "man" or "woman" because they are men and women – resulting in an undercount (see: Ingraham, Pratt, and Gorton 2015; Rohrer 2015). Consequently, while Peterborough reported no T2SNB people in 2018, it recognized this was "not indicative of a lack of transgender people" (24). Questions formulated this way both fail to capture many trans people and delegitimize trans people's identities as a real "man" or "woman." Indeed, two HCRs (Huron County 2021 and Peterborough 2021) report the number of "cis men" and "cis women" even though there is no data collection about cisgender identity. Peterborough went from acknowledging how the question erases T2SNB people in 2018 to, in 2021, foreclosing the possibility that trans men and trans women are "men" and "women" at all.

There is ample evidence that shows a single gender identity question does not adequately capture trans populations (Holzberg et al. 2017; Puckett et al. 2020; Reisner et al. 2015; The GenIUSS Group 2014). Instead, a two- (or three-) step question is considered to be best practice for assessing gender identity and enumerating trans people while not confusing the majority (cis) population and creating "false positives" (Reisner et al. 2015; The GenIUSS Group 2014). One form of two-step question asks people (1) what sex they were assigned at birth and (2) what gender they identify as today. However, this question can be experienced as "dehumanizing" (Smith quoted in Puri 2022) and it reinforces the sex gender binary, problematically biologizing sex. BC uses the other form of the two-step question and asks people (1) gender and (2) if they have "trans experience." Because it is most likely to be poor and BIPOC people who tend not to claim "trans identity" or "trans experience" (Doan 2016), the lack of claiming will be especially skewing for unhoused communities as they are almost universally poor and are disproportionately BIPOC.

Undercounting: The Context

Beyond the questions asked during the count, T2SNB people face violence and discrimination for being who they are. Some people will, therefore, be reluctant to disclose their identities/experiences at all. Disclosure may be context-dependant for others. Factors that can reduce T2SNB responses include:

1. Surveys conducted verbally with little or no privacy at service sites or outdoors;
2. Simultaneous collection of personal information to enter into systems databases such that participants
    2.a feel they have to provide consistent information but do not want to be identified as T2SNB in non-anonymous data;
    2.b are not asked gender more than once in the suite of surveys because survey makers/takers perceive gender to be fixed;
3. Fear of discrimination. Discrimination and refusal of services against T2SNB trying to access homeless services is well documented (e.g., Abramovich 2017; McCann and Brown 2021; Pyne 2011);
4. Inaccurate parental reporting of gender identity of their dependent children.

These contextual factors likely lead to a substantial undercounting of trans people in HCs.

Accuracy of counting may also depend on who conducts the survey. Multiple HCs used frontline workers and volunteers as survey-takers; they may have dual relationships with some of the respondents. At least five homeless counts involved uniformed officers (police, by-law, etc.) as survey-takers or accompanying survey-takers, while others had police present at magnet events. Systemic mistreatment of T2SNB people (especially sex workers) by police is well documented (e.g. Stenersen, Thomas, and McKee 2022). The majority of T2SNB people worry about police/security stops and/or harassment – especially BIPOC trans people (Trans PULSE Canada 2021). Non-status individuals, criminalised individuals, and those who are otherwise fearful or cautious of police and parapolice may also avoid participation in homeless counts entirely.

Administrative Data: Systematic Erasures

Some jurisdictions suppressed the numbers of T2SNB people in their reports because they used administrative data rather than survey data. The erasure within administrative data occurs through misgendering – an epistemic violence. Correction systems typically operate in gender binaries. Winnipeg (2021) observes

that there were participants who identified as nonbinary in the HCs "while being identified as either male or female in administrative data" (13).

Using administrative data, the province of Alberta (2016) makes two claims about unhoused trans people:

1. They "made up less than 1% of the total Alberta homeless population" and
2. There were "a total of four individuals province wide" (19).

After asserting these two statistical "facts," the Province acknowledges that "most administrative data sources did not report [the] category" of transgender. This is an impressive statistical maneuver: a subjective recognition of an erasure preceded by an "objective" statement of fact - a quantified number of trans people in two ways: percent and number of individuals. Qualified as they are, embedded in the statement of fact that there are only four trans people in the province is the assumption that everyone of the 4,823 people whose administrative data was collected is cis. This is statistically improbable. This HCR, while acknowledging some T2SNB, does the productive labour of constructing homelessness as cis.

Administrative data that records trans identities as an option may allow homeless enumerators to become overconfident in this data. Federally funded municipalities use a homeless database for publicly funded emergency shelters and, in some jurisdictions, for people sleeping outside. This database provides a single question on gender identity (including in BC) (BC Housing n.d.; Homelessness Learning Hub 2021), resulting in the same undercounting issues described earlier. T2SNB people who can pass as cis (as the either gender they identify with or were assigned) may not identify themselves as trans for administrative data – making it especially unreliable with respect to this group. Lastly, some people's identity/expression may have changed since the administrative data was collected or updated and the HC will not reflect this change. Administrative data is particularly vulnerable to undercounting T2SNB people because of the unique issues faced by trans men who may withhold their trans identities to remain in women's spaces where they feel (and likely are) safer.

Although administrative data may be even less reliable and more likely to suppress data counts with respect to enumerating T2SNB people, changing from the PIT count to administrative data enumeration, or to a combination of primarily administrative data coupled with a small random sampling PIT, has been proposed (Tsai and Alarcón 2022; Weare 2019). Many of the municipal HCRs proposed this at the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic; at least one has permanently adopted this form of data for its homeless count reports (Polly Smith, email communication to author, May 7, 2022).

Known Locations—Unknown Populations

It is impractical for most municipalities to cover their entire geographic area in a 24-hour period. Therefore, communities typically conduct counts in "known locations." This may undercount T2SNB people because these groups may avoid cisheterosexist services and spaces and because T2SNB homelessness is misrecognized. Further, unhoused populations are made knowable through homeless counts and their subsequent reports. Previous counts are used to help identify these known locations (additional sources may include police and front-line workers). If homelessness is prefigured as cis though previous HCRs and cisheteropatriarchial relations and practices, T2SNB "known locations" may not be knowable – they may not be identifiable using these methods or by these practitioners and, therefore, may exclude many T2SNB people.

This section has provided a brief overview of four key mechanisms through which unhoused T2SNB

people are undercounted/erased. This takes place through the construction of the question, the context in which the count occurs, the use of administrative data, and the reliance on "known locations."

Part II: Delegitimization

The gender binary is an ideological construct in which there are two opposing genders: man and woman. Some HCRs report sex, others gender, and others use the two concepts interchangeably. For this reason, and that the concept of sex is also an ideological construct mediated by and produced through social relations (Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2020), "the gender binary" encompasses sex in this article. Many HCRs uphold and reinforce the gender binary in overt and subtle ways, primarily through practices of exclusion, delegitimization, and reification.

Exclusion of T2SNB People

Exclusion is a form of outright erasure and the most overt of the practices of upholding the gender binary. Many municipalities only report how many men and women are represented in the unhoused population; Two Spirit and nonbinary (2SNB) people are unreported, as are those who report their gender identities as "trans man" or "trans woman." Because of the lack of data transparency and the many variations in reporting, there is no way of knowing how common it is that T2SNB are counted and recorded in the homeless counts but do not appear in HCRs. Without clearly indicating there are no participants outside the gender binary, report authors reify the gender binary by negating the possibility of unhoused nonbinary people.

Some jurisdictions intentionally exclude participants who do not hold binary gender identities. Sault Ste. Marie's 2021 HCR provides 2018 2SNB data not included previously. In 2018, the city reported only "male" (56.3%) and "female" (28.1%) populations, leaving 15.6% of the unhoused population unaccounted for. The 2021 report revealed that 3.1% of the unaccounted for 15.6% was "other i.e. Two-Spirit, Non Binary" (11). In another instance, T2SNB people are not present in the reports but are mathematically discoverable. Thunder Bay reported in 2018 that "63.5% are male and 35.2% are female (0.9% did not respond*)" (4). This totals 99.6%; there is an erasure of 0.4%. This 0.4% is most likely one T2SNB respondent—one stubborn challenge to the gender binary and a tidy infographic. Thunder Bay (2016) listed T2SNB people in 2016; however, acknowledging T2SNB people in the 2018 HCR would have challenged the binary design of the infographic: male/female; straight/LGBTQ; veteran/non-veteran (each with a little "did not respond*"). Here, it seems that the city prioritized aesthetics over inclusion which is, in itself, an ideological position. Without assessing and analyzing the raw data for every municipality that did not report T2SNB people, it is impossible to know how many municipalities that only listed "man" and "woman" did so as a choice rather than as a representation of the enumerated population. Homeless populations are made known by these HCRs. Therefore, the HCRs both reify the binary and produce cis homelessness.

Trans Identities as Illegitimate: Ontological Fact and Self-identification

Cis people, like T2SNB people, have a gender self-identification. However, the normativity, congruence, and common absence of self-examination of cis people's gender identities often means their self-identification is rendered invisible. Indeed, that cis people do not have gender self-identities, and that gender is inborn and natural, is key to upholding the gender binary and trans oppression (Bettcher 2014; Stone 1992). Nineteen HCRs consistently indicate the number of "men"/"males" and "women"/"females" in the population while using a precursor (most often "identified") for T2SNB people (another five do so inconsistently).

For example, Sudbury (2021) reported:

> **Women comprised** 37% of those who indicated their gender as male or female, while **men comprised** 61%. Persons who **self-identified their gender as two-spirit, transwoman, transman, genderqueer** or don't know comprised 2%. (6, emphasis added)

The populations of "women" and "men" are put forward as uncomplicated ontological facts. However, T2SNB people "self-identify" that way; T2SNB do not exist beyond their own individual claims to these identities. Durham (2021) also establishes cisgender as an ontological fact: "58% of the survey respondents **were male**; with **women accounting for** nearly 36%." However, non-cis people provide an answer rather than being "real": "2% of the respondents **provided another gender identity**" (11, emphasis added; also see Grande Prairie, 2018 which uses "reported"). These HCRs reify (assumed cis) binary gender identities while undermining T2SNB ones.

Some reports do refer to "men" and "women" as "identifying" as such. However, word choice can still be used to undermine T2SNB identities in these instances. In six reports (three of which do so inconsistently), less legitimate verbs are mobilized to describe T2SNB as a discrete choice. Where cis people "identified," T2SNB people "selected" (Barrie 2020), "reported" (Edmonton 2021; Vancouver 2018), "provided" (Winnipeg 2018; 2022), etc. T2SNB people are denigrated in HCRs by the reification of cis identities. The language used in many reports suggests that "man" and "woman" are ontological facts, natural and immutable, while there is an element of choice implied with respect to T2SNB identities—even when language of "identification" is used for cisgender people.

Observation as Reification

Some municipalities also reified gender as an ontological fact by determining it to be an externally observable phenomenon. In at least nineteen HCs, street teams counted the number of people they visually observed and determined their genders. Gender cannot be externally observed or determined by others; consequently, HCs are likely to misgender T2SNB people, and the possibility of nonbinary identity is foreclosed in most instances. In these instances, nonbinary people are misgendered (categorized as "male" or "female"), made strange (categorized as "unknown"), or literally othered (categorized as "other"). People are often misgendered based on social cues and there is a pervasive stereotype that trans people look different from cis people (Wittlin et al. 2018). This practice of observing gender is ripe for misgendering people; it also gives space for the misrecognition of binary-gendered trans people as not "real" men and women – something that the survey instrument has already instilled in those doing the tallying. This practice may be individually harmful by misgendering people. It also tends to reify the gender binary and further undercount 2SNB people by allowing only binary opinions and/or by erasing T2SNB people through inaccurate "observation."

Delegitimization Conclusion

HCRs are used to delegitimize T2SNB people and identities in multiple ways, including several that are beyond the scope and word limit of this article. Some HCRs exclusively use male and female visuals or emphasize these images (e.g., Halifax 2018; Halton 2018; Fort McMurray 2018; New Brunswick 2018)—reinforcing the gender binary even when they acknowledge the existence of trans people. Heteronormative families are also often depicted (e.g., Halton 2018; Victoria 2020). Also, in this study, there was near universal listing of 2SLGBTQ+ people under sexual orientation in HCRs even though the "T" for trans is not a sexual orientation and was not part of that question. More concerning, eight HCRs listed sexual orientation as a gender identity, listing "men," "women," and "2SLGBTQ+" (or a variation thereof) as the

genders with which people identify. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not interchangeable, yet they are treated as such in these HCRs. T2SNB people are excluded from HCRs; T2SNB identities are constructed as an implied choice in contrast to the cisgender identities which are reified by both HCRs and methodological practices of observing gender. The delegitimization of trans people is widespread.

Material Consequences

There are real material and policy consequences of the undercounting and delegitimization of T2SNB people in HCs. Prefigured but always incomplete, cis homelessness is produced in HCRs as the gender binary is discursively upheld and identities/experiences beyond or between the binary are delegitimized. Whether through outright erasure or cues that indicate the invalidity of T2SNB people and identities, these documents make "homelessness" knowable, prefigure it as cis, and make T2SNB homeless unknowable.

The T2SNB homelessness that is made visible in HCRs is always partial. However, the rich and complex lives and experiences of unhoused people are flattened by these reports. For example, they describe women, LGBTQ people, and racialized people but queer women of colour do not exist as people. Quantitative research has a "flattening effect" because it always "treat[s] groups as a monolith" (Wang, Ramaswamy, and Russakovsky 2022, 3). A small number of cities have worked to provide more intersectional analyses (e.g., Halifax 2018; 2022; Whitehorse, 2021). While these attempts are an improvement over the standard approach, they still fall very short of capturing the complexities of people's lives. They also "continu[e] along the path of individualizing people into narrow identitarian subpopulations" (Thompson and King 2015, 155). Some cities centre their intersectional analyses on Indigenous populations (see Guelph 2018; Victoria 2018). On one hand, the disproportionality of Indigenous homelessness warrants closer examination of this population's characteristics to better address its needs. On the other hand, however, when this examination focuses primarily or exclusively on individual characteristics, it can create the impression that Indigenous people's homelessness can be attributed to their individual characteristics rather than broader social issues - this is especially problematic in a settler-colony such as Canada.[3] The "flattening" of people in homeless counts is also reflected in the counts' inability to grapple with or reflect people's reasons for becoming and/or staying homeless, which are often complex, interacting phenomena that can only be elicited through people's stories rather than oversimplified multiple choice responses (Williams 2011; Wright Rubin, and Devine 1998).

It is through prefiguring and producing the homeless population that governments "re-mak[e] homelessness by reconfiguring what needs are allowed to register, and what services can address those needs" (Willse 2008, 248). Services are designed to meet the needs of the unhoused population based on the HCRs. Because Alberta only counted four T2SNB people, there is no apparent need for services that meet the needs of trans communities: perhaps just a few individual accommodations are warranted (even if individual accommodations have been found to be harmful to trans people [Omercajic & Martino, 2020]).

HCRs create a cis construction and production cycle (see Figure 1). T2SNB people and identities are undercounted and delegitimized through an initial HC and HCR, using some or all of the techniques discussed in this article. The policies and services based on the HC and HCR then prefigure homelessness as cis because they do not reflect the size of the T2SNB community (and may have negated them entirely). New counts that are designed based on prior data take place at service sites that are inadequate for T2SNB people and in "known locations," even though prior reports and counts have rendered T2SNB homeless somewhat (if not entirely) unknowable. Each HC and HCR produces and prefigures homelessness as cis. If unremedied, this cycle will be intensified with each count.

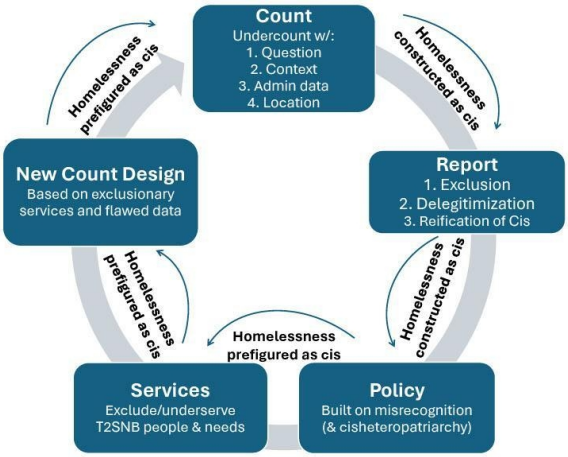

Figure 1: Homeless Counts: The Construction and Cis Production Cycle

Willse (2008) says of homeless-database technologies: "The individual becomes drawn into the possibilities of life determined by biopolitical technologies. The individual must come to reflect the population, not the other way around" (248). This is not to say that all unhoused people must do so; Bacchi and Eveline (2010) observe, "Policies *elicit* forms of subjectivity; they do not impose them" (120 emphasis in original). It is to say, however, that governments are more likely to produce policies and programs that are exclusionary to T2SNB because of their homeless counts and reports and those policies and programs will, in turn, help to perpetuate the production of cis homelessness in future counts (and, therefore, continue the cycle of trans exclusion/invisibilization and cis production).

Conclusion

HCs and HCRs may make T2SNB homelessness seem less widespread and significant than it is through this group's full or partial invisibilization and delegitimization. At present, many homeless counts and reports construct and prefigure homelessness as cis while reifying the gender binary and undermining T2SNB existence. T2SNB people are a small portion of the overall unhoused population; however, rates of T2SNB homelessness are likely disproportionately high—which may call for additional policy interventions. T2SNB communities also have unique service needs that are not addressed through HCs and HCRs.

This study makes the many flaws in HC methodology and reporting evident. There are multiple, often simple, changes that can be made to these processes to improve them. To begin to address the undercounting of unhoused T2SNB people, HCs must, at minimum, implement a two-step gender question that defines trans-experience (and a variation of this for parents answering for their children), address the survey context concerns, and eliminate the use of administrative data. With respect to count context, discontinuing the use of police and other carceral officers is not difficult; issues of privacy and front-line workers will require much more effort and may not be fully realizable in some jurisdictions. Taking leadership from unhoused T2SNB people on count design may help to address methodological issues, particularly related to "known location." Many unhoused T2SNB persons are living in states of "hidden" homelessness; research that examines hidden homelessness in addition to "absolute" homelessness also needs to be conducted – especially because of the risks of gender-based violence to this population. T2SNB-specific tools should also be used to assess the needs of these communities. Studies that contain a qualitative component

will be the only way to grasp the complexity of T2SNB communities' needs and avoid the quantitative inevitability of identity flattening. HCRs should also, ideally, be written in consultation with unhoused T2SNB people and by those who have trans-equity training. It is evident that HCR authors do not have basic T2SNB literacy in many municipalities.

While there are many ways to improve HCs, it is important not to confuse research and remedy. Urban Indigenous people in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside describe being "researched to death" (Goodman et al. 2018, 1). Research can act as both a mechanism and a justification to postpone meaningful action. Decent housing, income, and appropriate, well-funded services and supports end homelessness – data does not. Improving HC methodologies and making them more T2SNB-inclusive must not be used to delay the influx of urgently needed resources.

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Endnotes

1. Two Spirit (2S) is an Indigenous-specific term that is inclusive of Indigenous LGBTQI persons and people who have both feminine and masculine spirits inside them (Cameron 2005). In this paper, it is used specifically to refer to Two Spirit persons who are not cisgender. Indigenous homelessness does not fit within settler definitions of homelessness in a straightforward way (see Thistle 2017). This can lead to further erasure of both 2S people and the colonial relations that cause 2S homelessness.

2. This is likely also a significant undercount.

3. Official count projects were advised by the federal government to partner with Indigenous organizations and/or Indigenous homelessness communities. Independent of these official counts, Indigenous groups are actively engaged in data collection and policy formation creation rooted in decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty (Newhouse et al. 2023; Thistle 2017).

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