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How does it feel to be a problem?
The Diasporic Identity of the Homeless

Abstract In this paper I uncover the identity response of the homeless to structural constraints that are facilitated through objectively produced and mass mediated culture. After an initial period of "liberation," physical deprivation leads the homeless to seek institutionalized help. The "homeless" category constructed by the shelter industry absolves the system of blame and obfuscates the systemic roots of homelessness. In their picking and dropping of identities, and negotiations of meaning without any referential space to root themselves in, the homeless reveal to us the cultural tragedy of the present that affects us all due to rapid social change inherent in advanced capitalism.

Keywords Homelessness; Capitalism; Culture; Identity; Inequality; Poverty

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The stranger is by nature no "owner of soil" – soil not only in the physical, but also in the figurative sense of a life-substance which is fixed, if not in a point in space, at least in an ideal point of the social environment. (Simmel 1908:1)

This article is a story about the homeless. It is also a story about immigrants, those in (virtual) exile as "strangers" within a foreign land, just as it is a story about the indigenous exiles, the everyday people, those whose minds are unable to keep pace with rapid societal change. Most of this entire article is a story about the human condition of mental homelessness (Berger 1974) and identity ambivalence in the 21st century, the physical, both material and cultural manifestation of which are the homeless. It is within the identity negotiations of the homeless that we see the varied faces of humanity in the current epoch, the many dimensions of human existence: the immigrant, the alienated worker, and the impoverished. The homeless are the sages of the present, it is through their negotiations of their environment and their breaching of boundaries that trajectories for social change can be located. In their picking and dropping of identities, in their negotiations of meaning without any referential space to root themselves in (Said 1999), and in their early death through deprivation, both physical and social, the homeless reveal to us the human tragedy of the present. This article is, therefore, primarily a story about us all[1] living within, what is a bureaucratized, identity determining, societal structure.

The homeless "social type" is a boundary violator. As all boundary violators, the homeless are part of the out-group, but this out-group eludes easy classification (Järvinen 2003:217). In other words, the homeless status is one of ambivalence, both for the homeless and for the wider society within which they exist. Instead of an "either/or" classification that functions to maintain clear boundaries, the homeless are a "neither/nor" type, neither among the *normals* (Goffman 1963) nor the (abnormal) *outsiders* (Becker 1966), they occupy a region that is a structural and therefore an identity vacuum, and in studying their adaptations to deal with such a vacuum, we are offered a unique opportunity to study and locate trajectories for social change. The homeless can, therefore, be pictured as our potential liberators. Boundaries in postmodern societies are maintained through "tribalism within modernity" (Hagedorn 2007:61), the hall mark achievement of functional rationality (Marcuse 1991), that has, as part of the functioning of organic solidarity (Durkheim 1997), introduced mechanical type bonding through massification (Mills 1951) and a national ethos, a form of civil religion (Bellah and Tipton 2006:228) that serves to legitimate oppression. The management of alienation and anomie in this manner prevents social discontent and upheaval while maintaining the *status quo*.[2]

The homeless who breach these rationalized boundaries (much like certain immigrants do national boundaries when they cross politically defined borders) are a matter of serious concern for the authorities (Susser 1996:412). Unlike immigrants, the homeless do not have a set social space to which they are assigned within a social structure. They cannot be criminalized with ease because they have not broken any laws, they cannot be deported (or "alienized") because they already reside in the country of their origin and they cannot be ethnically enclaved like immigrants because they are all without homes, no space and no property seems to be theirs. In the raw state of absolute deprivation

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[1] "Labor and participation in the market constitute a primary contribution to society while being housed represents economic independence and rationality. Given the polarities of self/other, citizen/noncitizen, native/foreign, and so on, this dynamic implies a simple dialectical opposition when in fact, just as there are varying degrees of citizenship; there are various versions of homelessness" (Arnold 2004:47).

[2] Describing the homeless as the "lumpen proletariat" or the dangerous class is an erroneous reading of Marx. *The Communist Manifesto* states: "[t]he «dangerous class» [lumpen proletariat] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue" (Marx and Engels 1848). The homelessness that is structurally caused by advanced capitalism does not represent the "old society" with its feudalism as the dominant mode of production.

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coming together unchecked and uncontrolled (as is a potential possibility regarding the homeless) can lead to collective action and mass mobilization. As exiles with a "diasporic" identity, where a conflict brews between "continuity and discontinuity" (Shreiber 1998:277), the homeless are en route to a form of essentialism about themselves and their kind, what Marx would define as "class consciousness" that can lead to resistance and revolution. Therefore, problems are anticipated by the authorities and, as a result, a controlled and controlling space is manufactured for them in the form of the shelter (Lyon-Callo 2004) and its ethos of personalized solutions through imputation of moral and physical inferiority on the victims. Part of these "solutions" is to make those that are so treated politically voiceless and held-in, and much like enclaved immigrants; a disheartening existence is imputed on them, they either do not exist or do so as social scum, the essence of which is captured by Edward Said in his autobiography, *Out of Place* (1999):

> [t]he life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental... (p. 27)

Citizenship in the modern nation state is framed within a dual definition of national identity and economic independence. When people lose their economic independence, they become similar to non-citizens in that through fact they become politically voiceless and dependent. Homelessness is, therefore, a political condition as much as it is an economic condition (Arnold 2004:4). The economically dependent (or the politico-economic homeless) lose their privacy and autonomy in both the private and public arenas of interaction so that even occupying what are generally public spaces

becomes very difficult for them. The loss of citizenship in this manner has serious consequences for those who become politically powerless since only citizens are given the status of human being through individual identity, everyone else is judged more or less categorically. Through economic dependence the system robs the homeless of their civil rights. Those that as a result become non-citizens by virtue of their economic deprivation; much like the immigrant non-citizens are dehumanized in that they are not considered to be on the same level of "humanity" as the citizen (Arnold 2004:10).

The "personal defect model" of homelessness describes the official damage control strategy of imputing character defects on the homeless and using "personal-troubles" (Mills 1959) based explanations (devoid of structural contexts) of boundary violation by the homeless. The personal troubles of the homeless are explained through the narrow circuits of their own life or through character defects and psychological ailments rather than as public issues rooted within the operations of a capitalist social structure. In other words, the homeless are portrayed as victims of "disease and dysfunction" (Lyon-Callo 2004:51).

Such a personalized model of homelessness is culturally promoted by the elite and their media to divide the citizenry against each other, much like natives are pitted against immigrants or whites against blacks. As a manifest translation of these cultural discourses we see the crystallization of the shelter industry that entraps the pseudo-revolutionaries who have broken their shackles of bondage to a confining social structure by experiencing homelessness. I consider the provision of the link between the homeless and the mass so-

ciety whose identity is remanufactured through bureaucratic processes, together with the image of the homeless person as consciousness creator (a pseudo-revolutionary) in an unjust society, to be my main contributions in this paper to sociological knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

> [S]trangers are not really conceived of as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type: the element of distance is no less general in regard to them than the element of nearness. (Simmel 1908:3)

The homeless are "internal" strangers, analogous to external strangers, the immigrants; they defy classification through preformed categories because they don't fit into the social dichotomy of the normal/other. The host society and its members have difficulty in imputing a personal social identity to them. As strangers they are part of a group of strangers for whom a new virtual identity (Goffman 1963:2) is hastily constructed during social interaction. In a society based on ownership, where cultural themes of individualism, workmanship, and family abound (Loseke 2003:64-65), leading to norms of "economic independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency" (Arnold 2004:5), the homeless are socially constructed as deviants who are "problems." It is in such a response to the initially ambivalent social identity of the homeless that a stigmatized social identity is constructed and applied in all official solutions and explanations of homelessness which gets ingrained in the culture of the homeless shelter (Lyon-Callo 2004). As strangers they are not seen as part of the group, the homeless are "homebred aliens" in Veblen's terms

(Veblen 1997:45),[3] through ascription, they are assigned a specific position in the social structure.

The shelter, as a collection point of diverse individuals who, through varied circumstances, have lost their homes, creates an associative space, it imputes the "informing character of a «with» relationship" (Goffman 1963:47) that acts as a source of information for categorical generalizations about the homeless. This "with" categorization is how ethnic/immigrant enclaves are formed and stereotypical generalizations about them mainstreamed. The homeless are typified as "deviant" through medicalization of their troubles or through implied personal character defects, standardized to reflect a particular social type (Simmel 1908), they are not evaluated on the individual level rather they are judged categorically. Categories once formed predispose those that are categorized to relationships with members of their own category leading to group formation and the self fulfilling prophecy that the homeless are a uniform personality type based on group stereotypes (Goffman 1963:24).

My purpose in this paper is to explore how identity is negotiated by the homeless in response to their condition of homelessness. In other words, I want to uncover the identity response of the homeless to structural constraints mediated through objectively produced mass mediated culture. The individual, when he or she experiences homelessness for the first time, has an idea of the stigmatized category that they now enter because it is literarily predefined by the media of mass communication (Goffman 1963:25). Such objective cultural constructions by cultural entrepreneurs through the

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[3] Veblen describes master-less men as opposed to (enslaved) citizens as "...any human material that does not fit into current use and wont" (1997:45) and as "institutional misfits" (1997:45).

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corporatized cultural apparatus that is composed of the mass media and formal education (Mills 1956) and through which a particular culture attains hegemony,[4] serve a social control function through cultural indoctrination, binding the "normals" to the system (Schneider and Ingram 2005:ix) while alienating all that challenge the *status quo* through "otherization." It also, overtime, results in the formulation of norms that allow some to be "… at home politically and others to be excluded, or homeless" (Arnold 2004:35).

Methodology

The theoretical framework I use in analyzing my data relies primarily on C. Wright Mills and Hans Gerth's elaboration of the psychology of social institutions (1964). I also use Simmel's elaboration of the stranger as social type to reflect on the identity ambivalence faced by the homeless during their transition period to homelessness. Goffman's work on the management of "spoiled identity" in his *Stigma* (1963) was also conceptually used because of its explanatory richness. Denzin's (1989) "interpretive interactionism" that differentiates between transitions and adaptations was utilized in differentiating the pre-shelter transitions and post-shelter adaptations by the homeless to their condition. The life history method that I used in conducting interviews allowed me to capture the relationship between the individual and society based on C. Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* (1959). How the individual's beliefs are a reflection of the wider culture (Pinder 1994:210) that exists within which his/her biography is enacted, as well as the social structure in response to which the wider culture arises was captured through use of similar

methodology. Use of the life history method also informed me how people living within the narrow milieu of their daily existence can become falsely conscious of their troubles as personally caused (Mills 1959) due to barriers constructed between the individual, the conditions of his or her life, and its link to the beliefs and values that he or she is able to acquire, that often serve to legitimize inequality for the purpose of systemic reproduction of advantage for the very few through oppression of the very many. This is a form of ecological or systemic power (Abrahamson 1996:27) possessed by the elite. The internal-exile concept that I apply to the homeless is based on Edward Said's extension of the term exile to refer to those that develop a moral alternative to "the massive institutions looming over much of modern life" (Said as cited in Shreiber [1998:275]).

I analyzed the data based on broad transitions and adaptations. Transitions are defined as turning points that lead to in between phases, "the no-man's land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future" (Turner 1986 as cited in Denzin 1989:212). Adaptations are interpretive processes concerned with "social forms that can assist in reconstructing the self and eliminating threats to it" (Denzin 1989:214). The state of well-being where values espoused by people are constantly confirmed by the material reality of their existence is threatened by collapse and a state of panic (Mills 1959). The resulting vacuum and anomie (meaninglessness) leads to adaptation based on social reproduction through the latency function (Parsons 1951) assigned to the social group the person is categorized into. It is for this reason that Goffman states, "…what an individual is or could be derives from the place of his kind in the social structure"

(1963:112). When a person facing the transition into homelessness is institutionalized through the shelter industry and adapts to that role and adopts the identity due to coercion both implicit and explicit and due to the lack of any verifiable alternative, his or her fate is tied to the structure of opportunities available to homeless people, which means that he/she will forever remain at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy. There are also the "hidden homeless" (Pinder 1994:206), those that remain at the level of enlightenment they achieved because they did not seek to be institutionalized through the shelter. They negotiate their environment and survive in a state of liberation from a social structure. They represent the "stranger" that Simmel talked about, those that "come today and stay tomorrow" (Simmel 1908:1) rather than those that come today and leave tomorrow (through the shelter) by adopting a preformed identity, which ensures perpetual failure.

For those homeless that "come today and leave tomorrow," that is, they get institutionalized, I used Edwin Lemert's (1951) distinction between primary and secondary deviance and apply that to the experience of the homeless within an institutionalized setting, like the shelter. The definition of the situation based upon labeling by the authorities at the shelter leads to adaptation (by the homeless) that involves adopting both the label and the character traits that are packaged with it. The homeless individuals due to their transitional experience with homelessness develop an identity vacuum, which ensures, as the "self" abhors vacuums, that what is authoritatively ascribed as their identity by influential authorities will be adopted by them. The culture shock that dislodges a person's identity (and links to a social structure) in times of catastrophe,

the death of a loved one, the immigrant experience, retirement, job loss or becoming homeless leaves a vacuum like condition that gets filled based on social interactions and experience that temporally follow those conditions. Secondary deviance, as Edwin Lemert pointed out, refers to "the social interaction between the deviant and his community" (1951:75). What determines secondary deviance is the time period involved and adaptation that results in adoption of the deviant role.

Those among the homeless who have not spent long enough time on the streets and have not adopted the discredited deviant role of the homeless person, in other words, they have not "role embraced," would try passing and role distancing (Goffman 1963:102,109), including "fictive storytelling" (Snow and Anderson 1987). As the material facts of their existence as a homeless person ensures that even though they haven't role embraced, the validation of their identity that has not yet been discredited through "information management" (Goffman 1963:100) is always precarious because it is in continuous danger of being discredited. Through perpetual (social) "trial," everything the stigmatized say (in this case the homeless) is scrutinized and interpreted with reference to the categorical stereotypes that go with their group membership. Eventually, this information becomes too overwhelming for the person to manage effectively who over time resigns to the fate of adopting the discredited stigmatized identity.

Primary homelessness as a result of this perpetual trial over time evolves into secondary homelessness and through self imposed and externally imposed social isolation results in network-based social deficit. The homeless, thus, prefer associating only with people similarly

discredited; the homeless enclave (within the confining space of the homeless shelter) crystallizes for the purpose of identity verification and self worth maintenance (Goffman 1963; Mills and Gerth 1964). A necessary consequence of adopting the discredited, stigmatized identity is self-blame and low self-esteem, depression, and substance abuse (La Gory, Ritchey, and Mullis 1990). These process-causes ensure chronic homelessness and early death through physical and chemical "mutilation" as a natural consequence of identity "mutilation" by the elite who dominate through ownership, sourcing, advertising, and funding (Herman and Chomsky 2002) the cultural apparatus and produce caricatures of categories of types of people for the purpose of structural reproduction of their advantage. This is a form of structural violence perpetrated on people oppressed within a social structure that then in the form of social scripts attains mass circulation. Such social scripts lead to self-enactment of their own oppression by the victims for the purpose of social reproduction as they "do" what is structurally dictated to them (West and Zimmerman 1987).

I interpret my data using the *Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) that involves situating biographies within their social structural roots, based on the themes listed below. These themes, if supported by the data, confirm various parts of the model that I have presented diagrammatically (see Figure 1), the culmination of which is either chronic homeless on the part of the institutionalized homeless or enlightened, revolutionary and (relatively) "objective" existence among the "hidden" or non-institutionalized homeless (the liberated homeless) who construct their own pseudo communities (Wasserman and Clair 2010).

- The (new) homeless as "strangers" can view objectively the contradictions within the functioning of a society and as a result are "wiser" and more conscious (Simmel 1908). The "stranger" can evaluate comparatively (Goffman 1963:29) and the "stranger" is a skeptic or critical evaluator (Simmel 1908).

- Identity displacement and acquisition of the stigma. A two-phase process: learning and incorporating the point of view of the "normal" and learning in detail the "consequences of possessing" the stigma (Goffman 1963:32).

- The vacuum created by a displaced identity is filled through objectively produced culture that acts as a barrier between structural reasons for homelessness and the actual experience of homelessness. This "filling," in function, is performed by the shelter (Simmel 1900:484; Real 1977:33; Habermas 1987:155).

- The process component of structural segregation of the homeless (via the shelter): a) self-segregation due to negative social judgment (Mills and Gerth 1964:86) and b) external segregation: avoidance by *normals* due to fear of "courtesy stigma" (Goffman 1963:30).

- The institutional mechanism through which disadvantage is reproduced through ascription- the route to chronic homelessness (Mills and Gerth 1964:88-89).

The Data

For the purpose of this paper, an exploratory research into the homeless identity, I conducted in depth interviews of ten homeless people chosen from homeless shelters across Southern Illinois. I also conducted ethnographic field research through passive and semi-participatory observation of various shelters across Southern Illinois. Candidates for interviews were selected from the shelter's roster of adult candidates based on convenience and availability. The interviews were voluntary and confidential and lasted approximately 35 minutes on average. This research project was reviewed and approved by the Southern Illinois University, Carbondale's Human Subjects Committee.

I coded the interviews based on the above mentioned themes using a deductive theory to data approach. The ethnographic part (of field research) involved observation of the shelter and interactions between shelter management and the residents, the physical setup of the shelter, analysis of their rules, social artifacts located therein, as well as semi-participation in eating with the homeless, observing them during meal times and spending time around their living quarters. The data generated from these observations was interpreted based on the emergent role of the shelter in the context of the wider literature and the shelter's functions. This, when cross-read with various interviews, revealed varying levels of internalization of shelter norms by those at various stages of homelessness based on time spent on the street and in various shelters.

I want to clearly state that my data is neither sufficient nor exhaustive to come up with explicit generalizable conclusions. My conclusions were not arrived at using the grounded theory method "from scratch." To make use of the data in the best possible way, scientifically as plausible empirical evidence, I used existing concepts to understand the data based on certain themes that are critical nodes within my constructed model of varying outcomes of the homeless identity, and the homeless personality type. These nodal points, when confirmed empirically, provide plausible support for the basic structure of my model deductively. I used my data not as a beginning point for typification, but rather as empirical evidence to support (or refute) my proposed model's main nodal points based on logically transposed theoretical constructs, thereby contributing to the building of (plausible) social theory on the homeless.

This study is unique in linking the homelessness experience in identity formation and transformation to both the immigrant experience, as well as the life-fate of the mass society within rationalized/bureaucratized social structures, this massification is inherent in the standardization and homogenization inherent in bureaucracy (Mills 1959; Mannheim 1960). My claim is that homelessness as an identity based condition is rooted within advanced capitalism's social structure and affects us all to varying degrees, the cognitive manifestation of which is an alienated homeless mind. I also propose the link that the physical manifestation of this "cognitive" homelessness is the actual homeless people, a way for the socio-structural "organism" to physically reveal social problems. This does not mean that their physical homelessness is caused through a "homeless mind," but rather that in their identity negotiations through their explicit experience of homelessness, the condition of mental homelessness of the general mass of people within advanced capitalism is clearly revealed.
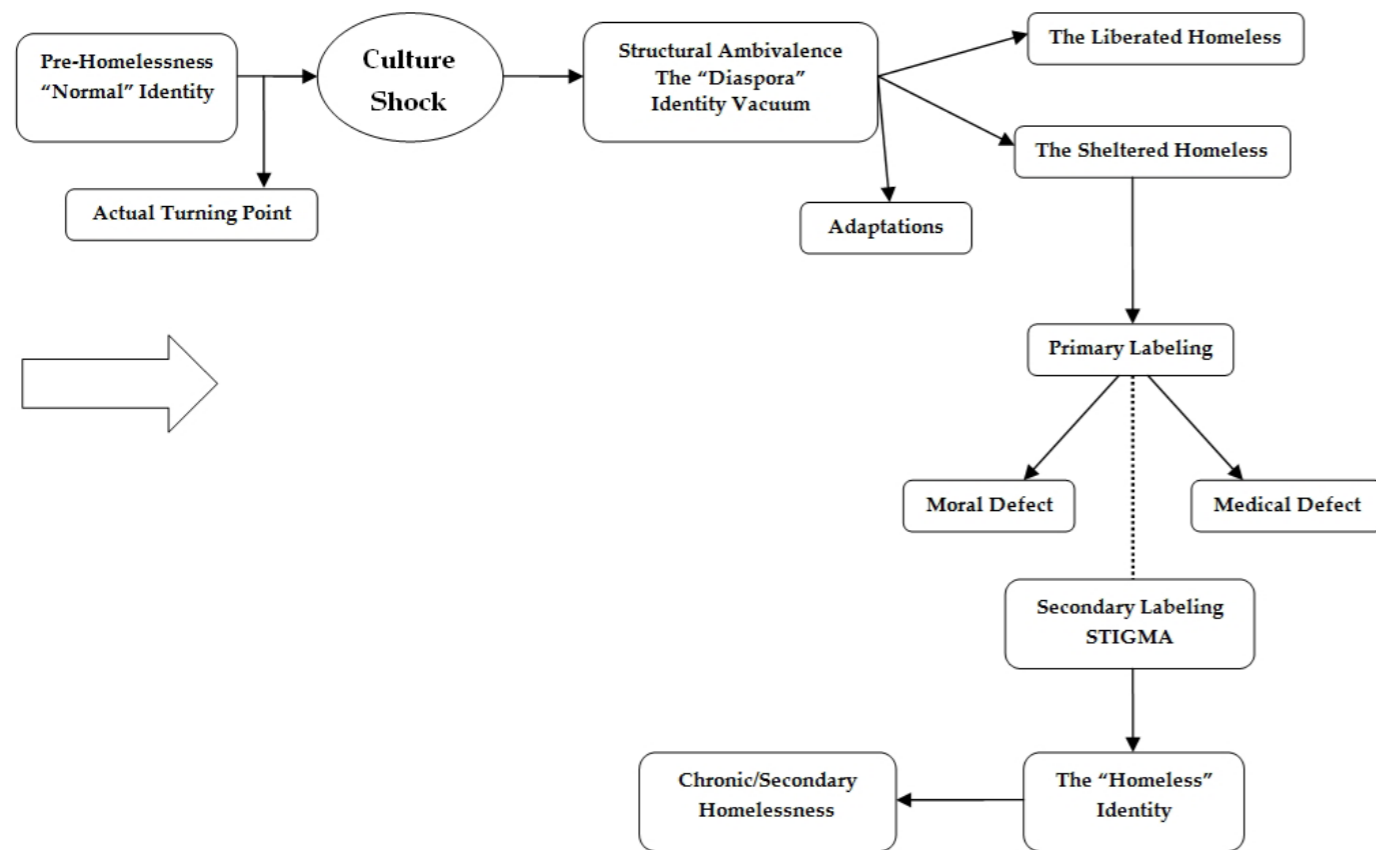
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The Model

Figure 1: The Homeless Identity: Diaspora and Entrapment.
Source: self-elaboration.

Data Analysis

The broad transitions and adaptations theoretically elaborated above and empirically grounded below can be traced in Figure 1.

The Event of Homelessness

The "event" of homelessness results in a dislodging of the structural anchor, which means that the system's rationality does not define reality for the person anymore. The culture shock that precedes such dislodging is a well-known phenomenon among immigrants:

I negotiated the no-man's land between the country of my past and the continent of my present. Shaped by memory, textured by nostalgia for a class and culture I had abandoned… (Mukherjee 1997:34)[5]

In analyzing the data, I expected to find anger rather than sadness in the narration of the recently dislocated, those that have not yet been socialized through the shelter, given the above theoretical elaboration. This was evident in one of the interviews I conducted with a thirty-year-old white

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[5] Kathleen Arnold argues that immigrants are homeless in two other ways besides the identity response: a) politically as they are ignored by the mainstream citizenry and b) poverty and sharing "problems and situations" with the homeless (2004:6).

male with some college education who had in the previous week been released from prison. He was angry at the condition that he was now being forced to face. After having dropped him off at a homeless shelter with only $20,88 in his pocket, he was expected to make it on his own based on the prison's "lifestyle adjustment" training. When I asked him if he had questioned the prison authorities (and their indoctrination) about making it on the outside in his situation with $20,88 in his pocket, were he to follow the rules, he replied:

I think it's one of those deals where the grass is always greener on the other side. When you're locked up, you've got this idea in your head of what it is gonna be like when you get out... When you get out you find out in reality that, when they say life's a bitch, they say that for a reason, you know what I mean? And especially for somebody that doesn't really have anybody, it's hard…

Compare this to the resigned withdrawal of Jonathan, a 56-year-old white male who had been homeless for four years: answering my question about whether he felt the experience of homelessness had made him a better person, he responded:

[i]t made me better, I'm not cynical anymore. I thought things were personal; I didn't like people talking to me. I am not like that anymore. I am not suspicious of people, and I don't care anymore, that's the whole thing.

The homeless individuals I talked to expressed a feeling of liberation when they first encountered homelessness, one even mentioned that in the beginning "it wasn't much of a problem." Jonathan comments on his initial experience upon my inquiry if being homeless translated into a feeling of freedom:

[o]h yeah, sure. You get the feeling that you can do whatever you want, if you can tolerate the cold. Yeah, but it doesn't last long. It is kinda lonely because

I have never been alone for a long period of time…the not being cynical part comes in, the understanding comes in that these people there is something wrong with them…

Keith a 63-year-old white male, ex-Marine, homeless himself, reflected on this heightened sense of freedom among the homeless while commenting on shelter rules:

…[the homeless] don't like [the rules], from what I've gathered, being homeless, you know, you can pretty much come and go where you will, do what you please…

Melvin, a 44-year-old white male responding to a question about how he coped with homelessness when he first experienced it, said:

[w]ell, when I first became homeless, it wasn't really much of a problem, but overtime it really frustrates me, I can't find a job, can't find me another place.

Ties to the Economy and Family

Most of the homeless I interviewed had unstable employment before they became homeless. Their ties to structured employment were sporadic, temporary and even where stable they were in the low paying, low skill, service sector. Having weak ties to the most primary institution within a capitalist structure means that cultural adaptation would result in a cultural outcome different to the mainstream in values and orientation, which would facilitate transition into physical homelessness through initial mental homelessness, what Emile Durkheim defined as a condition of anomie. Melvin, a 44-year-old white male, described his employment history to me as:

[f]or five years, I basically volunteered, after five or six years, my grandfather gave me a pickup truck, that

is when I went to work, first job was pizza delivery… After Katrina…I moved in with [friends] hoping to join the workforce, and then that didn't work out and I have been looking [for a job] ever since.

Craig, a 30-year-old white male, recounted his work with the Carnival after he ran away from foster care with his friend. Recently out of jail, he plans to work for the same Carnival again:

I did it before actually, when I ran away from foster care, I was sixteen, and I lied about my age and a buddy of mine, because we were in a foster home in East St. Louis, and it was just horrible, we lied about our ages and we traveled a whole summer with the Carnival. It was in Illinois, we thought we would stay on with them, but then we both went to Florida, me and him, we were both young and scared so we called on case workers and ended up turning ourselves in.

Jonathan, a 56-year-old white male from Chicago, stated about his work experience:

[d]ay labor, I worked for Jewel foods. Before that I did dock work, I worked for freight, I worked for Boeing…

Together with weak links to the economic institution most of the people I interviewed had weak family ties and/or abusive relationships that formed the immediate context of their experience of homelessness. Weak family ties together with weak links to the economy through insecure employment ensure that primary and secondary socialization outcomes are going to be inadequate, resulting in a reproduction of their initial loose connection to a structure. This loose connection that results in anomie (that is, the cognitive aspect of homelessness) then translates overtime into a greater probability of actual physical homelessness. Jonathan describes his path to homelessness as:

I was visiting my brother, got divorced, that was four years back. We didn't get along, my second wife. That is when it happened. Actually, my first wife of thirty three years passed away…around eight years ago, died of cancer. I went through a lot, you know.

In response to why he did not stay with his brother rather than become homeless, he responded:

…well, he hasn't invited me to come stay over at his place. If it wasn't for his wife, I won't call her his wife because they are not married, if she wasn't there, I'd stay with him.

Keith described his reason for becoming homeless as:

I bought a house…several years ago, eight years ago, and it was a brand new home when I bought it…[my wife] decided to run with her daughter, act like she's twenty one again…and I said enough is enough…

Craig, in response to whether he had any relatives in the area, responded:

I have an older sister, but we lost touch… She moved to Louisiana and got hooked on drugs real bad. I haven't talked to her in years now. My dad, he's dead…but my mom, like I said, I went to foster care, when I was twelve because my step dad was real abusive towards me. I used to go to school beat up… May 8th, pretty much the day I went into foster care and lost contact with my family.

Karen, a 53-year-old white female, in response to a question regarding friendship and ties, replied:

I feel that when I meet people they will either lie on me or do something like my boyfriend…I was with him for thirteen years. He was abusive...

Structural Loosening and Re-entrenchment

Once the transition is made into homelessness and the person's identity is displaced due to cul-

ture shock in that previous role's disintegration, the person's attachment to a structure is loosened; this results in open mindedness and objectivity. This phenomenon is similar to the depiction of Simmel's stranger who can view things objectively from a distance that his/her loose incorporation within a structure allows him/her. This also leads to personal growth due to the expansion of the "I" in Mead's (1967) equation (the subjective part of the personality), since new experiences are encountered for which the memory image based generalized others (the "Me" or the objective part of the personality) are an inadequate guide. All of these changes in personal freedom and objectivity, of course, happen within a context of great pain and difficulty for the homeless through both cognitive and physical deprivation. Those that cannot cope with the "pain" seek help through institutionalization and enter the shelter system. The shelter's "personal defect model" (the "dominant ideology perspective" [Lee, Lewis, and Jones 1992]) of dealing with the homeless, blames the individual for the condition of homelessness either through the imputation of physical defect (through medicalization) or through imputation of moral (or value based) defect.

During my visit to one of the shelters (for the purpose of this study), I noticed a tiny coffee table midway down the main hall of one of these shelter on which were several pamphlets. One was titled "Wellness Ways," informing people how to guard against food borne illnesses. Since the residents at the shelter cook their own meals, the assumption was that they were "at risk populations" for food borne illnesses, in other words, as a total institution, the shelter management ascribes an identity of the "other" to these otherwise everyday people

and tries to re-socialize them into what they deem are good values and hygienic living. One factor often involved in "otherizing" is to consider those that are different to be untouchables and a factor in such shunning is to assume that the "other" is unhygienic and unclean, in other words, "at risk" for illness and disease. Next to the "Wellness Ways" pamphlet was a flyer about an out of school, cultural indoctrination program where the values emphasized were directed towards the lower to lower middle class with the claim that those that go through such cultural training will have stable families and will avoid "teenage pregnancies" in order to lead "wholesome lives." The assumption here was that the homeless (and others among the lower classes) are incapable of parenting (children brought up by them are "un-whole" individuals), just as they are incapable of looking after themselves, that not only are they hygienically defective, they are morally unclean as well.

The resulting low self-esteem due to "otherization" and forced interaction with the shelter staff is revealed clearly through the perpetually apologetic gaze.[6] Case work and not structural adjustment is the preferred solution to their condition by those that offer "help," preferred both by those that dominate the privately incorporated economy and the public officials in charge of system management. The primary assumption held by caseworkers is that the homeless, if they don't work (and many do), don't work because of their personal laziness and inadequacy and not because of structural reasons or economic downturns and recessions. Within such an assumption, the case manager gets to work on fixable "problems"

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[6] Which I noticed among many of the residents of the various shelters I visited for this research.

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that he/she can supposedly fix rather than seeking structural change over which he/she has no control.

The Western liberal tradition, having its origin within bourgeoisie manipulation, situated within the relationships of production of industrial capitalism, is reform and not revolution oriented. As a result, managing the system generated problems at the individual level, the privatized non-profit sector, as a stabilization sector within a capitalist mode of production, manages the system disruption potential of public issues that are related to the operations of social institutions (Mills 1959). Almost all of the institutionalized homeless people I interviewed blamed themselves for their condition of homelessness with the greater emphasis on self blame as against structural causes of homelessness coming from those that had been institutionalized the longest.[7] Melvin, who had been homeless for 4 years, stated:

> [t]he fault is all mine, the main reason, at this point, that I am homeless is, when my friends went down after Katrina, I was working at KFC at the janitorial thing, I just quit there and lost my job. If I hadn't quit and went down there, I would be alright.

Jonathan (homeless for 4 years) stated:

> I'm speaking for myself now, you know, not for anybody else. I can't just get…I fucked it up, you know. I did everything wrong, you know. Between you and me, it is nobody else's fault…

In contrast to the above two who had been homeless for 4 years, Craig, who had just got out of

prison and experienced the shelter for the first time, imputes self-blame, but with an exception:

> I think now, everything that I did is a direct result of my actions, it is all my fault, and that I'm here right now is my fault. I think that when I was younger, there were things that happened to me, circumstances that weren't my fault that were out of my control and they probably helped me become the person I am today, but now I can't blame anybody but myself…

As a result of this adaptation undertaken in order to resolve the conflict between imputation/ascription of blame towards the homeless by the shelter and their own actual condition of homelessness (that is recognized as relatively extrinsic by the newly homeless), self-blame is internalized and a stigmatized "peace" is achieved, what I describe as secondary homelessness based on adaptation of Edwin Lemert's (1951) "secondary deviance." The interim period where this conflict is ongoing and a stigmatized identity has not been internalized, is marked by a period of depression and psychological anxiety (La Gory et al. 1990).

The Path to Medicalization

Many homeless folk complain of depression, usually those that have been homeless for a long time. While the shelter industry imputes middle class values, it is powerless to create structural opportunities, which leads to frustration and a lack of identity verification through jobs and opportunities (Stets and Cast 2007), leading inevitably to low self-esteem where the homeless person is forced to see himself/herself as the problem and worthless because he cannot verify a "normal" identity. As a result of internalization of blame and the resulting low self-esteem, many of the homeless people

I talked to complained of depression, which for some leads to alcohol and drug abuse.

When I asked Melvin if the condition of homelessness had affected his health in any way he stated: "Definitely mental, possibly physical." He linked it to the "frustration of not being able to find a job." The emphasis on jobs at the shelter is linked to personal self worth with those not having a job or not being able to find one get the message of personal worthlessness leading to frustration, depression and low self-esteem, which then translates into poor physical health. This is reflected in the higher mortality rates of those that are impoverished compared to those that make a middle class income.[8]

Keith, the ex-Marine, who was role-distancing and didn't consider himself homeless even though he was staying at the shelter, stated:

> I'd like to stay [at the shelter], at this stage of the game, I'm going through a divorce…I am a recovering alcoholic; I deal with depression, anxiety, and PTSD…

Craig stated:

> I've been here five days now, and actually for the first two days, ah, I get stress related migraines, so Thursday night I went to the hospital since I was having such a bad migraine…

Karen said:

> [w]ell, I get a little depressed sometimes, so I went to get some meds yesterday, anti-depressants…

Among the institutionalized homeless, there are those (based upon how long they have been insti-

tutionalized) to whom an initial label has been applied. In adapting Edwin Lemert (1951), I suggest that they are the primary homeless. These people have not internalized the homeless identity and even though they are homeless, the second phase of the acquisition of the stigma (as suggested by Goffman [1963:32]) has not been accomplished yet. Here, fictive storytelling in order to "manage information" (Goffman 1963:100) is the dominant strategy to protect and salvage the "self."

Keith, the ex-Marine, was a classic case of someone using fictive storytelling (Snow and Anderson 1987; 1993) in order to separate himself from other shelter dwellers. Part of the "passing" (Goffman 1963) as a "normal" strategy is to confirm all the stereotypes that *normals* have about the stigmatized, in other words, validating the caricature of the stigmatized while distancing himself/herself from that role and personality type. Here Keith presents his stay at the shelter as a personal choice rather than a necessity:

> …[my brother and kids] don't have a problem with me [living at the shelter]. I have a $100,000 house sitting there in the country…and I am walking away from all of it, it don't bother them.

In response to my question about why he thinks the homeless in general do not have a place to stay, he responded (confirming the widespread stereotypes against the homeless and at the same time role-distancing):

> [y]eah, they're strung out on them goddamned drugs, you know. There are girls in here that are eighteen years old, mentally she acts like she is about ten… from doing cocaine or crystal meth, ah, yep…and a lot of them get pissed off at a guy like me, well you got this and you got that…yeah, I worked all my fucking life to get it…

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[7] As my parting thought after each interview, I did suggest to the people I interviewed that they know others around the shelter who have had vastly different experiences, yet have arrived at the same end result of homelessness so maybe it is not "personal fault" alone that is the cause.

[8] See: http://healthcare.zdnet.com/?p=973, retrieved March 28, 2010.

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Craig, who had recently been released from prison and was experiencing shelter life for the first time, was similarly role-distancing when he responded:

> I think [homelessness] happens to a lot of people who try to change their lives. I mean if I went back to _____, I probably wouldn't be homeless right now, but I'd probably be back in prison within six months. I mean, I've got friends there, but you know, in prison they are real big about change.

For those that role-distance, eventually their "discreditable" personality (Goffman 1963) is discredited, which leads to internalization of the stigma, imputation of self-blame and chronic homelessness. However, previous identities are not completely displaced and always leave traces, the marks (or "scars") of biographical history. New events similar to past ones that evoke memories can reconstitute those traces and can temporarily lead to a relived experience of the past life. The reconstitution of past identity was clearly evident in my interview with Patrick, a 54-year-old ex-Marine (who had spent three years in the military), who lived at the shelter. Our conversation, which lasted a little over 5 minutes, ended abruptly because Patrick asked me to leave stating that he didn't like "mother-fucking foreigners."

In our preliminary conversation, Patrick asked me where I was from. When I informed him that I was from country X, he responded:

> …[w]hat the hell are you doing here...and us military is fighting your asses back there and you're here… I'm a full-blooded American, I don't like you mother fuckers, okay...go.

The fact that Patrick referred to the military as "us military," told me that he was using his past memories of three years spent in the military to reconstruct his identity as a military man even though now the shelter displaced his identity that becomes salient only when confronted by what he sees as "the other" or the enemy. On other occasions he is a very nice person, as the other residents told me, in other words, he was well adjusted to shelter life. Also evident in his words was the identification of his military identity with being a "full-blooded American." When patriotism gets defined in terms of the military's hegemonic male construct, women, as a consequence, get excluded in the most part from the public arena of decision making that involves the nation-state (Enloe 1993).

The relived-past through a mediating memory event is the stigmatized individual's only route to de-stigmatizing himself or herself. However, since ongoing shelterized roles suppress and control such momentary infractions or veils this now subordinated part of the person's "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1995) as the institutional hold of the shelter on the individual seldom loosens, leads to chronic homelessness as a near permanent condition. Jonathan alluded to this idea of "getting comfortable" with shelter life when he said:

> [w]ell, you're grateful to have a place, yeah, if you've been out there, you're grateful. Then you start getting comfortable…that is how it works.

Conclusion

In a functionally rational society, most people pass their entire lives "living" through mass mediated constructions. Sunk in detached routines in their "real" lives, such mass mediated informa-tion provides the much sought after context that helps people make sense of their otherwise anomic lives. Lives are anomic (or meaningless) because of rapid social change that describes advanced capitalism, where rapidly changing material conditions through technology never allow a lagging culture to "catch up." The fact that meaning and context are provided by the mass media ensures that stereotypes that it perpetuates for ulterior political motives that will become the grounds for all human interaction. Such stereotypes ensure that selective observation, a logical fallacy is set into scripted circulation and stratifies people based upon class, race, gender, religion, and nationality. That the shelter management judged the homeless based upon such mass mediated stereotypes was evident in the general interactional environment in the various shelters that I visited, as well as the rules through which these adults were infantized and discredited for the purpose of resocialization.

Within a structure that determines personal worth through pre-formed personality types, selected and given status based on their expediency in the economic sphere, all other personality types are denigrated. The social control of those deemed disruptive to an existing order necessitates control of identity because identity mediates between structural coercion and social action (whether confirmatory or revolutionary social action). Since identity formation and its verification through social action depends on access to resources (Stets and Cast 2007), this gives those that control those resources enormous power in making people become what they want them to become.

In a societal structure based upon extreme inequality, regardless of the identity one adopts or prefers, it is always under threat. Resource dependency and rapid societal change, two processes that ensure that people relate not to themselves or each other, but to the system were outlined in this paper in terms of the displacement of a "normal" identity of the homeless by a stigmatized identity, through interactional transitions and adaptations. Further, the structural link to such altered interactions was also outlined in that it is the societal structure that not only causes such transitions (the event of homelessness) in the first place, but subsequently offers, through the path of self-blame via the shelter industry, a stigmatized identity as the only verifiable alternative. Identity manipulation in this manner can be broadly seen as the general process of bureaucratized (implicit) social control within advanced capitalism.

We can all relate to the homeless: Not only is our separation from the homeless extremely subtle within a crisis prone economic structure, the homeless are in their identity negotiations, the manifest representation of what latently occurs to us all within advanced capitalism: the displacement of a sovereign identity by a robotized subservient identity through necessity of existence within a controlled and controlling social environment. C. Wright Mills asked a question in the 1950's which we are now in a position to answer:

> …[b]ut we must now raise the question in an ultimate form: Among contemporary men (and women) will there come to prevail, or even flourish, what may be called the Cheerful Robot? (1959:171)

The answer to Mills' question, in our age, is an emphatic "yes!"

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