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CONVERSATIONS WITH HOMELESS WOMEN
A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *
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This research is dedicated to the fifteen women who so graciously donated their time and shared their life histories.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

General Area of Concern: Homelessness and the Meaning of Home

Homelessness has publicly emerged over the last five years as a major social and economic problem. Its very existence forces questions as to the adequacy of the basic societal mechanisms established for fulfilling human needs. Sociologically, the career of homelessness as a social problem has passed through a necessary 'emergence' and 'legitimation' phase. Literally scores of articles have appeared in the popular press, airtime has been devoted to the homelessness on local and national news shows, and recently a television movie was produced. Numerous articles, books, photo essays, and pamphlets have documented the existence of homeless persons and have called for advocacy, understanding, analysis, and intervention. More than 200 references to the homeless over a five year period have appeared in the the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, and The Washington Post.¹ There have been numerous demonstrations, local protests, and litigation pursued on behalf of the homeless. Congressional hearings were held in December 1982. None had been held on homelessness since the Depression. The National Coalition for the Homeless was formed in 1983 with many states and localities following suit. In many areas
these organizations, as well as local and state officials, have been involved in mobilizing and formulating a plan of action in accordance with how homelessness has been defined and legitimated in each area. How that plan has been or will be transformed in its empirical implementation will determine the fate of homelessness as a social problem.\(^2\)

Because homeless persons represent essentially the bottom of the stratification ladder much attention is necessarily directed to their plight in terms of finding shelter and food, let alone employment, income assistance, and health care. However, using the word 'homeless' to describe a very heterogeneous population implies a commonality: the loss of 'home.' It is important then to discuss the sociological significance of home. What does 'home' mean? What does its loss entail?

Home is a powerful human symbol. It evokes numerous feelings, memories, and emotions such as those connected with childhood. It may represent the ultimate form of security. It is equated with stability and belongingness and is described often as a haven, sanctuary, and refuge. Home implies harmony, comfort, and a lack of stress. It is more than just a shelter; it is where needs are met and where the soul and spirit are nourished. It is having control over space, and it is reflective of one's personality. Home is the outer shell of a person and as such is an extension of the self. Linguistically, home is used as a metaphor often in autobiography to describe the body. For homeless persons, their bodies are their homes, albeit traveling or mobile homes.
Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, discusses the poetics of the house as images of intimacy, "the topography of our intimate being." The house can be used as a tool for analysis of the human soul. Home represents intimate space and how we take root, day after day, in a "corner of the world." Thus, home is the first universe, a human's first world. These virtues of shelter, although simple, are deeply rooted in our unconscious. The house is a large cradle offering protection and constituting a body of images that give human beings proofs of illusions of stability. It has the greatest power for the "integration of thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind." Finally, he notes, "it seems as though it [a house] could greet us every day of our lives in order to give us confidence in life."

John Berger, a novelist, poet, and art critic, discusses the twentieth century, despite its wealth and communication systems, as the century of banishment. The original meaning of home, he says, was as the center of the world, the place from which the world could be founded. Ontologically speaking, home represents what is real or what makes sense. Thus, without a home at the center of the real, one is not only shelterless, but also lost in nonbeing, in unreality. As the center of the world or real, home represents a place where a vertical line crosses with a horizontal one. The vertical is the path leading to the gods in the sky and to the dead in the underworld, while the horizontal is the path leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one is nearest to the sky and to the underworld. But from poverty, overcrowding, and homelessness, the two
lines may never cross and thus there is no access to the vertical line. The vertical line has been twisted into the individual biographical circle which leads nowhere but only encloses.\textsuperscript{10} Without the vertical as a fixed point for bearings, the horizontal lines are suppressed "into a plain of pure distance, across which everything is swept."\textsuperscript{11}

Taylor (1980), in his discussion of urban spaces, points to the significance of home as a female symbol, being warm, nurturant, and womb-like in character. 'Mother' is often defined as the meaning of home. Her very being represents home so that the phrase, "I'm going home," said at any age, means, "to my mother's home." Kitchen and interior areas are regarded as female social spaces while exterior yard areas are thought of as male social spaces.\textsuperscript{12} Historically, a major task for women was to keep the hearth fire burning, literally. The hearth, another symbolic meaning of home, relates to the center of the home and family life, and as expressed by Berger and Bachelard, the center of the universe. Today's equivalent to the hearth might be the kitchen, another symbolic place for family interaction.

In America the housing system is dominated by a private property land ownership ideology.\textsuperscript{13} As Sternlieb notes, the private house is the focal point of myth and dream.\textsuperscript{14} The week of April 28 to May 4, 1985 was designated as "Private Property Week" by The National Association of Realtors. Private property is considered a coveted right, is imbued with meanings of citizenship and patriotism, and is protected by the Constitution.
Housing, when viewed as an integral part of a societal activity system, is one of the indexes of the quality of the environment and even civilization. Gray noted in 1946 that "one measure of civilization is the extent to which that nation has obliterated the disparity between strata; the extent to which it has made available to those in the lower strata the opportunities and privileges of the traditional upper strata." Housing bears upon the entire social and economic structure and is a societal matter more than an individual concern.

However, housing does play a major role in individual lives. It can be defined not only as a noun, being a commodity or product, but as a verb. Housing is a process of satisfying human needs. Its primary purpose is to provide adequate residences and places for child rearing, social interaction, food preparation, sleeping, and health care. One should find happiness, rest, and inspiration there. Home is a place where individual autonomy can be maximized and conformity to the formal and complex rules of public demeanor can be minimized. Being ill-housed represents deprivation along the numerous sociological functions of housing, such as:

1) Protection from human and nonhuman elements;
2) Provision for a spatial identity - a sense of place and rootedness;
3) Provision for wholesome self-concept;
4) Provision for relating to others;
5) Provision for social and psychological stimulation;
6) Provision for fulfillment of creative or transcendental needs; and
7) Provision for fulfillment of values.

Thus, housing is not unrelated to how we feel about ourselves, our family and work relationships, personal aspirations, health, security,
privacy, status in the community, and access to employment and services. Its quality and location have serious implications for our economic and social well being. Even relative deprivation can lead to widespread discontent and suffering. The effects of poor housing (dilapidated, unsanitary, overcrowded) have been well documented and were the primary concerns of earlier social reform movements. Such effects include:

1) low self-perception leading to pessimism and passivity;
2) stress to which the individual cannot adapt;
3) poor health;
4) constant state of dissatisfaction;
5) pleasure in company but not in solitude; and
6) difficulty in household management and childrearing.

Contemporary analysis of space meaning and use reveal the importance of privacy as basic to the development and maintenance of personal identity. Privacy protects autonomy and provides emotional release and relaxation from pressure of playing roles. Goffman referred to privacy as time when the individual is 'off-stage' from all the roles an individual is required to play, when according to a dramaturgical analysis, one is 'on-stage' as a worker or parent. Privacy represents the right of the individual to decide what information about himself or herself should be communicated to others and under what conditions. A typology of privacy modes relating to behavioral states can be grouped as solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve.

Privacy, despite its necessity, has been a commodity of luxury and securing it is strongly correlated with social class. Those in the middle and upper classes can buy more, build more, and arrange more privacy than those in the working and lower classes.
Popenoe asserts that social class is the most important single variable in understanding residential differences. Residential satisfaction is much higher among upper classes, and as Rainwater points out, housing goals and preferences, such as concern for shelter per se versus concern for personal expression, vary by class. The lower classes must first worry about both human and nonhuman threats and may have to evaluate housing adequacy in terms of its level of protection. For the middle classes security is assumed, and the goals of self-expression and ideals of suburban living can be pursued. Housing itself - what it looks like, where it is located, in what neighborhood, near whom - largely determines one's social standing. Housing livability, defined as the sum of the life support systems organized in such a way so that people can satisfy their needs and feel good about their environment, is very low in poor neighborhoods. It often results in widespread frustration, especially concerning bedroom and bathroom privacy. As some note, "To look at housing in the broader sense and to understand the importance of relative housing conditions is to come face-to-face with the issue of social class in America."

In summary, because humans are social beings, that is, they interact deeply and pervasively with their environments, both human and nonhuman, housing is an integral part of one's inner and social being or one's self. Housing is a symbolic extension of one's self; a symbol of status, of achievement, of social acceptance; it seems to control, in large measure, the way in which individuals and families perceive themselves and are perceived by others.
is not a single attribute, but a series or bundle of attributes. In one study, thirty-nine measures were constructed to capture the dwelling unit, including lot size, floor area, plumbing and kitchen facilities, bathrooms, heating systems, structure type, neighborhood status and characteristics, and the quality of public and private services. Finally, in a world where much of life and work has become increasingly more remote from the personal control of the individual and more depersonalized, the need is even greater to personalize one's immediate environment. What then does it mean to be homeless?

To be homeless is a grave and serious matter for the individual and society. Rarely are the sociological aspects delineated in such reports. Homelessness has replaced poor and substandard as the end point of the continuum of housing. Homelessness used to be associated with skid road alcoholic males, 'hobos', and 'tramps' who migrated to and from jobs via the freight trains. It was romanticized by writers, such as Jack Kerovac (On the Road) as an alternative, chosen way of life, free from societal obligations and free from needing material possessions.

The definition of homelessness and composition of the homeless has changed dramatically over the last fifteen years. No longer confined geographically to skid rows, nor to skid row alcoholic white middle-aged men, many subgroups of homeless can be discerned, including:

- single-parent households;
- formerly working families;
- single men, increasingly young and minority;
- single women;
- victims of domestic violence;
- psychiatically disturbed and physically impaired individuals;
- ex-offenders;
- youth;
- elderly
and near elderly; and legal and undocumented immigrants, as well as native Americans.\textsuperscript{33}

Homelessness, far from being a chosen lifestyle, is the deprivation of the essential elements of livelihood.\textsuperscript{34} The diversity of the homeless population can be related to the underlying socioeconomic dynamics. Hopper and Hamberg group these dynamics as follows:

1) the economy (interest rates, recessions, and unemployment);
2) a severe housing crisis (shortage of affordable housing, gentrification, displacement, and demolition);
3) lack of community programs for deinstitutionalized mentally and physically ill and restrictive admission policies;
4) erosion of income maintenance programs (budget cuts, intensive reviews of disability coupled with tighter eligibility restrictions);
5) domestic violence and family instability; and
6) the relevant public policy (regressive tax policies, public housing cuts, etc.)\textsuperscript{35}

In other words the roots are structural rather than personal. The combination of historically high levels of unemployment coupled with double digit inflation and depression and recession cycles pushed many closer to homelessness. The massive cuts in federal programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and housing programs - which were essentially eliminated - pushed many into homelessness.\textsuperscript{36} No other function in the federal budget has suffered from the decision to reduce spending as much as housing.\textsuperscript{37} One Congressman has remarked, "We have a more efficient system in the United States to deal with stray pets than we have for homeless human beings."\textsuperscript{38} The 1949 national goal of "a decent home and suitable environment for every American family," seems remote in the midst of a housing crisis, which is not unrelated to broader problems in the United States and world economy.
The importance of societal structures must be underscored because in an individualistic-oriented society, the problem may be defined as individual personal failures. In fact, homeless people's lives have been used as human interest stories, and media attention has often been harsh. The President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, and former Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Margaret Heckler, have cast the problem as only affecting a few societal deviants, who have chosen to be homeless. Because most studies are of individuals, the temptation is to focus on psychological characteristics, rather than on sociological characteristics.

This is clearly seen in the case of homeless women. They are one of the fastest growing groups of the homeless, yet their existence, needs, and concerns are rarely investigated. Their very existence on even skid row has been denied and although their presence has grown, little attention is devoted to them because their numbers are smaller than homeless men. Homeless women are stereotyped as 'bag ladies', eccentric psychological oddities who allegedly refuse offers of assistance.

If not typecast as bag ladies, then they are usually seen as 'whores' who 'deserve what they get'. While for a homeless man the economy can be cited as a causal factor, for the homeless woman personal failure in marriage and parenthood are cited, and she is more or less blamed for her homelessness. A homeless woman is more of an outcast than a homeless man as societal definitions as to the proper place and role for women are violated. This is evidenced by the lack
of services and shelter space allotted to homeless women and often by the restrictions and exclusionary policies of some shelters and agencies.

Home, of course, has a different meaning for women than for men because of societal norms and expectations. Although the majority of women are employed in the labor force, the tasks of homemaking and child care are still assigned to women. The outside world is a male domain, and a homeless woman is more "out-of-place" than her male counterpart. 41

Problem to be Studied

Little is known about homeless women, other than their statistical appearance. The homeless man has been an object of sociological inquiry over the last eighty years, with extensive studies of hobo life and even contemporary portraits of the migratory 'tramp' and the demise of this phenomenon. 42 A commission to study homeless men was initiated in the first decade of the twentieth century. There was no female equivalent to the men's bowery and in the words of Nels Anderson, author of the classic 1923 study, The Hobo, "Tramping is a man's activity." 43 Even the words 'tramp' and 'bum' have a completely different social meaning for women than for men. A female 'tramp' is not homeless but rather sexually promiscuous, traveling not from place to place, but from man to man. 44 Thus, the language, symbolism, and romanticized world of the homeless was not extended to women.
Recent studies of the homeless make only brief mention of the appearance of women. Popular accounts focus on myths and stereotypes, especially regarding the so-called 'bag ladies'. Even what little scholarly work exists tends to be guided by preconceived notions of homeless women. As Caplow notes, homeless women are a sociological mystery.

The problem to be addressed, then, is the contemporary form of homelessness and how it is experienced by women. Who are homeless women? What are the social experiences of homeless women who are single parents; alone without children or spouses; victims of domestic violence; very young or elderly; those first time or many time homeless; those previously psychiatrically hospitalized; those recently homeless; and those almost homeless? We know little sociologically about the current situation of homeless women, let alone their histories and personal observations and opinions. There is a disjunction between our knowledge and analysis of societal structures, such as the economy and public policies, and individual biography and history.

The necessary social structural analysis of causative factors of homelessness has not been connected with a sociological examination of individual biography. Micro-analyses tend to be clinical and psychologically focused on individual deficiencies. The theoretical problem area then is the interface between social structure and social life.
Purpose

The overall purpose of this research is to study patterns of social interaction in order to observe and identify the construction of those social structures which describe and explain the lives of homeless women in American society. More specifically, the objective of the research is to discern the meaning of homelessness for women and to learn about the experience of homelessness from the perspective of homeless women. The research goals include: the active involvement of the research participants themselves in defining the parameters of the study; discernment of the process and variations of becoming homeless; and finally, an in-depth longitudinal exploration of the historical realities of their entire lives, that is, the meaning of social institutions over the course of the life cycle.

The sociological perspective is of utmost importance. That is, the purpose is not to diagnose or classify persons or personalities, but to look at social patterns and social practices. It is, in the tradition of C. Wright Mills, to connect social institutions with individual biography.

Major Research Questions

Two major research questions will guide this research.

1) What is the social life-world of homeless women?
2) What are the relevant categories that describe and provide interpretation of their experiences?
Minor Research Questions

The minor research questions can be stated as follows.

1) How is the homeless experience explained and accounted for?
2) How do homeless women feel about their situation?
3) How are familial and other relationships related to the homeless experience?
4) What are homeless women's experiences of employment and income?
5) What do homeless women see in their futures?
6) What does 'home' mean to homeless women?

Significance of the Problem

The proposed study will begin to fill a void in the sociological study of homelessness. The field is replete with skid row studies which document different types of homeless men, such as the hobo, vagrant, or tramp or the demise of this way of life. Few studies of a sociological nature have been done on the contemporary form of homelessness seen today.

Although the composition of the homeless population is heterogeneous, they are still lumped together in most accounts. In fact, the shelters look very much like the nineteenth-century almshouses where the poor, sick, elderly, and orphaned were housed together. Yet each category poses its own set of problems and needs. It is the task of sociology to describe these empirical variations and interpret their meanings.
Furthermore, the proposed study will unite such sociological subfields as urban studies, social psychology, and gender. The macro-social forces of the economy and public policy will be linked with the micro-social experience in the lives of homeless women. The inner subjective experience will be intersected with the facets of social class and mobility, poverty, social welfare, family, and aging.

Perhaps the significance to gender studies lies in the phrase used by Golden in the title of a recent article, "Finding our Roots in the Homeless Women." Golden emphasizes the tree as an emblem of women's individual and collective history and that homeless women are uprooted and outcast, as a tree cut off at its roots. But there is a link from homeless women to all women, especially as deviants from a male defined culture. All women face the same prospects in a society that does not adequately provide for all people, especially the poor. The homeless woman is subject to a constant real threat of rape, injury, and assault. In order for her to survive, she must become invisible. The more inconspicuous and unobtrusive, the more homeless women blend in and will not be harassed. Thus, relatively little is known about homeless women except for their statistical appearance.

The shopping bag lady is a current stereotype although this category (older women who have been homeless for long periods of time) is not representative of the female homeless population. However, the symbolic shopping bag is something most women carry in our commodity-obsessed society. The only difference is that they have a home with cupboards and closets in which to store their belongings. The shopping bag or purse is a negative female image to symbolize
women's so-called attention to minute details and their collecting and shopping. Furthermore, homeless women often develop disguises by appearance or behavior to be so repellent that no one will want to come near them. This is not unlike women deciding not to dress traditionally so as not to be harassed by men. When a homeless woman responded in an interview that she would like to be left alone, that was interpreted by the researchers as pathological, not as ruggedly independent as the romanticized homeless male. These interpretations themselves are informed by social norms and point to the relevance for gender studies.

The proposed study is significant in the applied fields for social welfare educators as well as for program planners. Facilities and services are meager for homeless women as compared to that for men. Moreover, the women are judged more harshly than men as evidenced by the more restrictive admission policies and more punitive atmosphere in facilities for women. The image of homeless women is even more derelict and eccentric than homeless men because of the denial that homeless women exist. They are defined as a less needy population than homeless men because they are less troublesome or feared than men. The significances of the proposed study in this regard, then, may be in its provision of in-depth data on the social realities that this population faces. That is, its significance lies in the potential to change the status of homeless women from a statistical anonymous category to individual persons with histories. Social scientific research plays an important role in providing a background which informs the climate of policymaking and
implementation. Furthermore, the American Sociological Association in its recently established "Commission on Sociology and Society" has stated that

American society would benefit from greater attention to sociological analyses in the formation of public policy ... sociology as a discipline would benefit if more sociologists related their theoretical and empirical work to pressing social issues.53

Finally, the proposed study will yield theoretical and empirical knowledge as to the sociological study of home and the interaction between humans and their environments. Because of the importance of home in social life, the study of those experiencing the most extreme loss will be a significant contribution.
Notes to Chapter I


4 Ibid., pp. 7, 17.

5 Ibid., p. 6.

6 Ibid., p. 54.


8 Ibid., p. 56.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 65.

11 Ibid.


13 Ibid., p. 178.


15 Lee Taylor, Urbanized Society, p. 171.


20 Quoted in Nathan Glazer, "The Effects of Poor Housing," in Housing Urban America, p. 160.


23 Ibid, p. 165.

24 Ibid.

25 Lee Taylor, Urbanized Society, p. 132.


35 Ibid.

38 Ibid.
46 Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper, Private Lives/Public Spaces, p. 49.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction
Up until 1970 the homeless were considered to be inhabitants of skid rows, mostly middle aged or older white males known for their use of alcohol and their disconnectedness with society. They were called hobos, bums, or derelicts. They included what was left of the migratory workers whom Nels Anderson studied in 1923 and others who were permanently confined to skid rows by lack of job skills and personal misfortunes. They were served by the traditional institutions of missions, cheap hotels, or flophouses and were confined geographically to a certain section of the central city. Over the last fifteen years, the composition and numbers of the homeless have changed radically and no longer are the homeless confined to skid row areas only. The homeless today include large numbers of children, women, young men, minorities, as well as the elderly. The reasons for their homelessness are complex and diverse, personal choice not being one of them. Unemployment, severe shortages of housing, public policies and harsh cutbacks in social services and entitlements, inflation, recession and depression, deinstitutionalization coupled with lack of community aftercare, domestic violence, and the weakening of family ties (more often a consequence) are the causal factors most often cited.
In 1979 litigation was successfully pursued on behalf of the homeless in New York City, making the city responsible, according to state statutes, state social service laws, and city administration code, for providing shelter to all those in need. Stern cites this as the beginning of the emergence of homelessness as a social problem. The District of Columbia, in 1984, is believed to be the first jurisdiction in the country to guarantee voting rights for the homeless. Suits followed in New York and Philadelphia to ensure that those without a permanent address can still register to vote. Since the late 1970's, and continuing to the present, an explosion of news stories have appeared about homeless people, especially during each winter.

A life size statue sculpted of a family huddling over a steam grate entitled "Third World America" was offered to the White House for the annual Christmas display to represent Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. The offer, however, "was rejected, as it was not in keeping with the traditional upbeat holiday exhibits." It will be used, though as a centerpiece for the Year of the Homeless, declared by the United Nations for 1987.

Numerous editorials across the country, especially during Thanksgiving and Christmas, remind the public of the "Needs of Winter's Homeless" and that "Homeless Have Little to Cheer." The attitudes exemplified in the coverage by the major newspapers have ranged from hostility toward the homeless to sympathetic portrayals and searches for underlying societal factors. Diaries of homeless women and men have been published along with ethnographies and
testimonials. Homelessness has also made its way into Trudeau's Doonesbury comic strips. Many media articles still focus on popular images (homeless as alcoholic) or focus too exclusively on the mentally ill, although as more and more 'normal' persons (for example, recently employed workers and their families) become homeless, magazines like Newsweek, Psychology Today, U.S. News and World Report have offered more complex overviews.

Homelessness has been called the century's most visible tragedy and advocates have made passionate, moral pleas on behalf of the homeless. The very essence of this country has been questioned. Daniel Berrigan asks, "Is typical American 'goodness' enough?" while Robert Hayes, who moved from a Wall Street law firm to work on behalf of the homeless, calls homelessness a symbol of a cruel economic system, an unresponsive government, and a festering value system. As he suggests, when unprecedented numbers of people must live in shelters, cardboard boxes, and makeshift arrangements, the American dream has failed. The religious communities, notably the Catholic denomination, have been outspoken on the issue. The National Catholic Reporter, for example, has published numerous articles and editorials about the needs of the homeless and the societal treatment of the homeless. Such titles as "The Homeless are Missing Persons ... Missing From Our Lives, Consciences" and "Society Tested on How Homeless are Treated" are suggestive of the importance placed on traditional religious obligations toward the poor. Homeless persons are referred to as "America's untouchables" or modern day
lepers and many historical religious analogies are made as illustrated in the following passages:

If we believe Christ, it is by how faithfully, how personally we respond to the needs of the least, that we shall be judged by the Father. St. Francis of Assisi had to embrace a leper before he was able to completely follow Christ. Perhaps it is time for us to do the same.¹⁰

Comparing a section of New York City where many deinstitutionalized can be seen to 'purgatory', Hirshfield suggests that "it possesses an hallucinatory quality to be found wherever the warehousing of despair exists."¹¹

Methaphors aside, charitable organizations have spent enormous sums on providing emergency shelter and food. However, in the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' pastoral letter they rejected the Reagan administration's call to the private sector to assume the responsibility.

Both the history of the church's involvement in charitable programs and a realism gained from direct experience in meeting the needs of the poor tell us that private voluntary action is not sufficient. The works of charity cannot and should not have to substitute for humane public policy. Society's responsibility to alleviate poverty must also be carried out through the government acting as the agent of the common good.¹²

Thus homelessness has been the focus of fierce debates on who or what is to be blamed, and how should the problem once defined, be solved, and by whom, where, and in what ways. Homeless people existed long before the media attention, but it is only within the past few years that public understanding has grown. This is encouraging to advocates who strive to create a collective or societal awareness rather than an awareness that is the property of individuals' consciousness.¹³ Yet there has also been what some researchers call
a fierce counterattack on the homeless and moves to dismantle all the entitlement programs.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, Stern cites homelessness as a perfect social problem in a conservative era, in which private charity is called upon to feed and shelter the homeless, rather than a federal response of full employment policies, adequate income transfers, and construction of affordable housing.\textsuperscript{15} In sum, the recent history of homelessness includes extensive documentation of the existence of the problem, litigation on behalf of the homeless, and continuing debate on the related issues. Major reports have been issued by the United States Conference of Mayors, Federal Government Accounting Office, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and advocacy groups such as the Community for Creative Nonviolence based in Washington, D.C. and the National Coalition for the Homeless, and research institutes such as the Community Service Society's Institute for Social Welfare Research based in New York.

**Historical Background: Causes and Dimensions of Homelessness**

The vast majority of literature is focused upon the crisis nature of homelessness, and in fact, the crisis nature of the problem has dominated public awareness to the extent that structural roots and long term causes are rarely discussed in detail. Homelessness, outside skid row inhabitants and migratory workers, was thought to be the result of civil wars, famine, plagues, and other major societal disruptions. The presence of women and children denoted widespread disorder and instability.\textsuperscript{16} However, today's widespread homelessness can be traced to decisive social and economic changes
over the last fifteen years in the economy at large, the housing market, and government programs for the disabled and dependent, the net effect being the marginalization of an increasing segment of the American population. And homelessness is the extreme of this marginalization. Other indicators of this marginalization include the low vacancy rates in many areas, the rising rent-income ratios and evictions, the growing reliance on soup kitchens, and the rising incidence of makeshift accommodations.

Although the causes behind the explosive growth can be described, Hopper and Hamberg suggest that these factors, rising rates of unemployment, especially among young people and minorities, dire shortages of affordable housing, deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients, and intensive reviews of disability benefit recipients coupled with tighter eligibility restrictions, do not reveal the underlying dynamics. The point the authors make is that all of these factors have occurred before in history and did not produce the level of homelessness seen today. They suggest that a threshold was crossed in 1980 with the convergence of forces in the economy, changes in demography, and the relevant public policy. This thesis is supported by comparing these forces and the level of homelessness in two previous periods: 1945 to 1970 and 1970 to 1979.

During the postwar period from 1945 to 1970, there was unparalleled improvement in both real income and housing conditions. The overall housing stock increased by 50 percent and many families were able to undouble and move to less crowded conditions. With federally insured mortgages, by 1960 62 percent owned homes, compared
with 44 percent in 1940. The most pressing problem with housing was substandard conditions. But by 1970 only 7 percent lacked complete plumbing compared to 45 percent in 1940; poor structural conditions were reduced from 18 percent in 1940 to 5 percent in 1970. Rising incomes, largely due to unionized industrial employment, meant a 19 percent average income to rent ratio in 1950, which remained the same for the next two decades, although minorities and the poor paid proportionately more. Government housing policies were oriented toward construction of public housing for low income families, and during the 1960's programs were instituted to create moderate income housing and to provide subsidies. There was a marked reduction in the homelessness created from the depression with the federal relief and work programs and demands of the war effort. The homeless who remained could not fit into government housing programs which excluded the single, nonelderly, and nonfamily households (a policy still in effect today). These were the homeless men who provided subject matter for the numerous skid row studies. Many were disabled or suffered from alcoholism and other ailments, although Hopper and Hamberg document that from one-third to one-half of them had menial jobs. Because of vagrancy laws and statutes against intoxication, houses of detention played a significant role in intermittently housing this population. However, with urban renewal and plans for inner city revitalization, this way of life had almost disappeared.

The period between 1970 and 1979 is entitled "A Gathering Storm" by the authors since the metamorphosis of skid row went unnoticed, but
by the end of the decade was no longer geographically confined and included new and younger inhabitants, women, Blacks and other minorities, and the disturbed. The decade as a whole was characterized by economic stagnation, persistent high unemployment levels, declining real wages, and stagnant household incomes. The rapidly rising market values on homes barred many first time buyers, which then increased the demand for rental units.

In contrast to the prior period, workers in the nonfarm sector experienced a real decline in their wages of 7.4 percent between 1970 and 1980. With inflation, the median household income was the same at the end of the decade as the beginning, only because more households had more than one wage earner to compensate for declining buying power of wages. Yet there was a very significant and growing polarization in the income distribution. The middle class began to shrink while the upper and especially the lower started to expand.

Hopper and Hamberg discuss four reasons for this income shift during the 1970's:

1. Changing occupational composition of the United States labor force;
2. High divorce rate and growth of female headed households;
3. High levels of unemployment; and
4. Erosion of real value of benefits in means-tested income maintenance programs.

All were later intensified by the Reagan administration in the 1980's.

Thus, the differences among one and two-wage earner households, males and females, and Blacks and Whites reveal a growing polarization in the income distribution. The high unemployment of the 1970's displaced many middle class families. As Thirsw points out, most middle income households became lower income if the principal earner
lost a job. And when only 7 percent of the labor force is unemployed, some 15 to 20 percent of all households experience job loss during the year. Labor Department figures show that the American industries that grew the fastest in the 1970's and are projected to grow the most in the rest of the century are generally those in which the average wage is 1980 fell below $12,500. Most of these jobs are in service industries, including restaurants, hotels, and medical care. The only way to have a middle class standard of living would be if several members work in these low-paying jobs.

Black unemployment is not unrelated to the enormous growth in families headed by Black and other minority women. Since 1960, the number of Black female-headed families tripled, and by the early 1980's, one-half of all Black families were headed by women, and 60 percent had incomes below the poverty line. In 1960, the employment rate was 75 percent for Black males, but in the 1980's, it dropped to 54 percent.

During the same time of the highest unemployment levels since the 1930's, there were abrupt reductions in benefit levels and in the number of beneficiaries in many social programs. During the 1970's, the real value of AFDC benefits declined by 29 percent, and prices in the general economy increased two and one-half times faster than general relief levels.

Hopper and Hamberg argue that these factors, growing income polarization and the relative deterioration of the poor, set the stage for intensified housing abandonment and gentrification which brought an even larger number of households to the brink of absolute shelter
poverty. Whereas during the depression owners boarded up vacant units (awaiting the return of prosperity), during the 1970's, landlords and financial institutions, "gave up on the bottom of the market," both buildings and people. The young professionals and managerial class were increasingly locked out of the first time home buyers market and could outbid moderate income tenants in a pinched rental market.

Costs of home ownership increased much more rapidly than prices and ownership grew only slightly from 62.9 percent in 1970 to 65.2 percent in 1979, despite a high rate of residential construction. A major shift occurred in the characteristics of renter households. Whereas in 1970 the median income of renters was 65 percent of that of homeowners, it fell to 55 percent in 1979. Rents increased nearly double the rate of tenant incomes which resulted in a dramatic increase in the proportion of income paid in rent. The income for rent jumped from a median of 20 percent in 1970 to 27 percent in 1980.

For the very poor, the authors report, the situation was disastrous. By 1980 one-half of the 2.7 million renter households with incomes below $3,000 spent more than 72 percent on rent, compared to 34 percent in 1970. According to a recent GAO report, in 1975 2 million low income households spent over 70 percent of their incomes for rent; in 1981 the number was 3.1 million, and in 1983 there were 3.7 million households in this group. The National Low Income Housing Coalition calculated that in 1980, 7 million were paying over 50 percent for housing, 70 percent of whom were renters with median household incomes between $4,000 and $5,000; another 6 million paid
between 33 percent and 50 percent of income for housing, 60 percent of whom were renters with a median household income of $7,400 in 1980.\textsuperscript{32} It is estimated that one-third of the nation is shelter-poor, that is, unable to afford both housing and basic necessities.\textsuperscript{33} This is substantiated by the rise in utility shut-offs and the growing number of people using soup kitchens and food pantries.

Displacement and the disappearance of single room occupancy (SRO) housing are additional housing issues beside the rent-income ratio that contributed significantly to the growing housing crisis. An estimated 2.5 million persons are displaced each year, and 500 thousand low-rent units disappear annually through combined effects of conversion, arson, abandonment, inflation, and demolition.\textsuperscript{34} Until the late 1970's, the majority of the displaced found alternative residences although follow up data on the nature of their new accommodations revealed higher than previous levels of crowding, poor structural conditions, and higher rents.\textsuperscript{35} But by 1980 displaced persons were not able to even find replacement housing.

The conversion of SRO housing into condominiums, offices, or their demolition for parking lots has been widely publicized. This form of housing (residential hotels and rooming and lodging houses), inhabited by the elderly, young singles, recently deinstitutionalized, and unemployed persons, was eliminated in many downtown areas during the first urban renewal and highway construction projects. Later, some of the well publicized public urban renewal projects eliminated much of what remained. For example, the South Market area of San Francisco
lost 4,000 SRO units during the early 1970's for a convention center and offices. Between 1970 and 1982, many cities had lost more than two-thirds of their SRO units. Nationally it is estimated that 50 percent of the total supply of SRO units were lost. New York City lost 87 percent of its total low rent SRO stock due to rent inflation, conversion, or demolition.

The conversion of single and multifamily housing to rooming houses in an earlier period reflected the adaptation of the housing market to meet the needs of single person households. However, during the 1970's the number of single person households increased dramatically while the supply of SRO housing was seriously depleted.

By 1980 record high interest rates and near record low residential construction substantially increased the demand for rental housing. Between 1975 and 1979, the rental vacancy rate dropped nationally from 6 percent to 5 percent and in some areas well below the 5 percent considered necessary to accommodate normal mobility in the system.

The last factor discussed as relevant to the 1970's was deinstitutionalization. Homelessness as an unintended consequence of deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients did not emerge until the late 1970's, although the depopulation of state asylums began in the mid-1950's and accelerated during the 1960's. As many researchers argue, it is not deinstitutionalization per se, but it is the unavailability of community resources needed to make the transition, specifically the network of appropriate housing and support services. Hopper and Hamberg argue that the vast majority of the deinstitutionalized were housed; however, with SRO units disappearing...
and their vulnerability to housing discrimination, finding housing on a fixed (if any) income in a tight market was difficult, if not impossible. The other aspect of deinstitutionalization was the more stringent admitting criteria. This will be discussed later on.

Recent Historical Background

By the end of the 1970's numerous households were close to being homeless and were given the "push over the edge" by: 1) twin recessions between 1979 and 1982; 2) unusually high and protracted unemployment; 3) high real and nominal interest rates; and 4) the Reagan administration's budget cuts and regressive tax policies. The condition of the housing market and the economy escalated the problem. Homelessness during the 1980's has continued to rise despite an economic recovery, which may be suggestive of its deep structural roots and the impact of spending cuts. The National Coalition for the Homeless conducted a study of the impact of the recovery in September 1983. They found homelessness at pre-recovery levels or increasing in nine major cities across the nation. They note that measures of economic recovery do not measure any impact on homelessness. The contributors to the homeless problem: shortages of low-income housing, cuts in entitlements, deinstitutionalization, and unemployment, were not affected by the rate of growth of the GNP (Gross National Product). One economist has also pointed out that "this has been the slowest recovery in the post World War II period."
Unemployment

It would seem that the recovery would affect unemployment. However, unemployment statistics do not include those who have exhausted their unemployment benefits, nor do they include discouraged workers, underemployed individuals, nor people who have never been steadily employed. Homeless individuals are more often in the category of last hired-first fired and do not have the seniority nor skills of others who would be called back to work before them. The steel and automotive industries have eliminated categories of jobs permanently. Other measures of economic recovery, such as new car sales, are irrelevant to the homeless.

It is argued that the peculiar character of unemployment generated by the last recession, coupled with reduction in benefit programs for those who lost jobs, help account for the continued growth of homelessness during the recovery. Three points are made.

First, more of the newly unemployed in the last recession were permanently separated from their jobs than usual. The recessions of 1969-1970, 1973-1975, and 1979-1980 produced 36 percent permanent job loss as a proportion of the total, which meant that almost two-thirds of the unemployed could expect to return to work. However, during the recent recessions the average was 53.1 percent permanent job loss.

The second point is that once out of work, today's unemployed are more likely to stay jobless for extended periods of time. At the low point of the 1973-1975 recession, the duration of unemployment averaged 15 weeks but in June 1983, after the recovery had begun, the average was 22 weeks. Approximately 1.6 million had been unemployed
over one year; this is thirty times higher than the comparable number in the 1969 recession. In July 1984, there were 750,000 more long-term unemployed than in 1980, and the average time out of work was two months longer than in 1980. Black and Hispanic unemployment remained at pre-recovery levels. The Children's Defense Fund reports that of the 15 states that currently (1985) have higher unemployment than the nation's average, 13 had higher unemployment in August 1984 than in August 1980.

The third point related to unemployment and homelessness is the change in unemployment benefits. In 1981 legislation was passed that changed the duration of regular coverage and the way states may receive federal funds for extended benefits. The effect was that no state could qualify for extended benefits, and workers in states with a constant high level of unemployment, like Michigan, were ineligible. In November 1984 only one-fifth of the recently unemployed in Michigan received benefits. A Brookings Institute Study revealed that fewer than 50 percent of the newly jobless in 1982 received unemployment benefits; during the last fiscal year of the 1973-1975 recession more than 78 percent of the unemployed were covered by unemployment benefits. In June 1984 the percentage of unemployed receiving benefits had fallen to 29 percent, the lowest percentage recorded in the history of the unemployment program. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that the number of persons jobless and not receiving any unemployment benefits reached 6 million in both June and July of 1984, which was greater than when the recession hit bottom in late 1982. This gap is cited as one of
the principal reasons that lines at soup kitchens and food pantries are not declining. In fact, two-parent unemployed families are usually not eligible for public assistance. Unemployment, then, remains a critical factor in understanding homelessness. Back in 1923 Nels Anderson had already cited evidence of the correlation between unemployment and the demand for shelter. As was known then, as well as now, unemployment hits those who can least withstand it - the poor, the young, women, and minorities. In the recent GAO report on homelessness, its review of 52 studies which specifically addressed the issue of causal factors revealed that unemployment was the most frequently cited factor. The GAO report also noted that 2 million more people were out of work in January 1985 than before the 1980 recession began. Other factors relevant to the 1980's, cited in the GAO review of studies as well as the impressive and comprehensive documents produced by the United States Conference of Mayors, the Community for Creative Nonviolence, and the Institute for Social Welfare Research, which will be discussed below, include: Cutback in Social Programs, Deinstitutionalization, and the Continuing Housing Crisis.53

Cutback in Social Programs

The increase in poverty, hunger, and homelessness and the reduction or elimination of social programs over the last five years have been well documented by The Urban Institute's Changing Domestic Priorities Project, The Children's Defense Fund, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, as well as numerous commissions and task
forces. In 1984 with the poverty level at 15 percent, more Americans were poor than at any time since 1964. From 1979 to 1983 the rate increased by 35 percent, representing an increase of 9 million people, which is the largest increase since poverty statistics have been recorded in 1960. The rate currently for Blacks is 33.8 percent, and for Black children it is 51.1 percent. Studies by the United States Conference of Mayors have documented the increased demand for food, shelter, and energy assistance and the gap between available resources and demand. Most emergency agencies have to limit how frequently the same needy families can obtain food. Chronic malnutrition among children has been reported by public health officials, physician groups, and citizen groups.

Those homeless individuals and families dependent upon public assistance or disability entitlements have not experienced the economic recovery. These social programs continue to lose funding in the face of extraordinary low benefit levels that do not allow for the purchase of both food and shelter. The Reagan administration efforts to dismantle the social programs that provide assistance to the poor and disabled have been dubbed, "Policies That Kill" and "The Great Cutback" to signify the depth of the impact on low income Americans. Although programs for low income families comprise less than one-tenth of the Federal budget, they bore one-third of all cuts made anywhere in the Federal government. These programs were reduced more than twice as deeply as social programs for the nonpoor. No other part of the Federal budget was cut so sharply. Such programs as: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), in which
purchasing power has declined by more than one-third since 1970; food stamps in which the average benefit is now 47 cents per person per meal; Medicaid; public service employment which has been terminated; job training; energy assistance; legal services, which for five years President Reagan (and as Governor of California) has been trying to eliminate; education; health programs; school lunch and summer food programs; and basic social services, such as day care and services for homebound elderly and disabled persons, have been severely cut back in two ways. The total amount budgeted has been severely reduced, and the criteria for eligibility have been changed to exclude more people and to make the application process more difficult and cumbersome. A case in point is social security disability. This cut was heavily publicized as one-half million disabled persons were told that they were no longer disabled and could now work. By late 1983 the Social Security Administration curtailed this practice, but after one-sixth of the total were already dropped. The Mental Health Law Project found that termination was related to an impaired ability of the recipient to challenge the ruling rather than a legitimate question of the recipient's recovery. The mentally disabled were overrepresented among the terminations by a factor of three. Furthermore, only one-half of those terminated who were able to appeal were reinstated. These cuts were called cruel and brutal in the media and a Federal judge called the Department of Health and Human Services "a heartless and indifferent bureaucratic monster." In sum, cutbacks and restrictions in an already inadequate system of support for low income Americans have directly contributed to a growing
homeless population. Moreover, homelessness should be viewed only as the tip of the iceberg of the hardships imposed on a significant number of Americans. The redistribution of tax burdens reveals a further polarization between the rich and the poor.

Deinstitutionalization and the Lack of Community Services

Between 1955 and 1980, the population of state mental institutions decreased by more than 75 percent, from 559 thousand to 158 thousand.65 The conditions in hospitals and abuses of patients confined in state hospitals fueled an advocacy movement whose concern was patients' civil rights and more humane treatment. The Community Mental Health Act was passed in 1963 after President John Kennedy predicted, "Reliance on the cold mercy of custodial isolation will be supplanted by the open warmth of community concern and capability."66 As much as this movement was supported by advocates, a powerful financial motive was operating to decrease hospital costs.67 The federally supported community mental health centers were to serve this population, however, less than 800 of the originally estimated 2,000 community mental health centers needed to provide community care were established.68 Thus it is not deinstitutionalization per se, but the way in which it has been carried out. Most communities are in dire need of supervised housing arrangements, half-way houses, and other structured living services. Another aspect which compounds the problem is the more restrictive criteria for admittance into state hospitals.
Some persons have blamed deinstitutionalization for the entire crisis of homelessness, which may reveal more about the attitude toward those labeled mentally ill than it does about explaining homelessness. Studies which try to determine the extent of mental illness among the homeless or the extent of homelessness among the mentally ill usually fail to distinguish between the two populations and are plagued with theoretical and methodological difficulty.\(^6^9\) The problems are not only definitional and operational, but how mental health status can be determined if someone has not been sleeping nor eating. The perils of the street do not enhance mental health in anyone. After one has had shelter, rest, and food, a mental health measure might change.

Deinstitutionalization is easy to blame for it places the entire responsibility for the homeless on the mental health system. It also makes homelessness an individual problem and allows all the homeless to be labeled 'crazy.' The media have been drawn to paint portraits of these individuals as metaphors of the homeless. Rarely has it been mentioned that deinstitutionalization does not generally apply to homeless families.

Estimates range that from one-fifth to one-half of the homeless may be former patients or be in need of such services. A 1984 statewide study of homeless persons in Ohio revealed that 29.9 percent had at least one psychiatric admission.\(^7^0\) This study provided a counterpoint to the notion that the majority of homeless are casualties of deinstitutionalization. It states in its concluding section:
We would agree that an accurate assessment of the service needs of homeless people cannot occur until adequate housing and resources are made available to these people. It is very likely that an entirely different picture would emerge and one that is much less dysfunctional, if people were to start first with basic resources.71

As it was mentioned earlier, the bulk of the deinstitutionalization occurred from the mid-1950's to the mid-1960's and a second wave occurred from the late 1960's to the early 1970's. But it was not until the late 1970's that homelessness emerged as a consequence.72

Of course, the sociology of mental illness cannot be ignored, as poor people, Blacks, and women have a much higher likelihood of having that designation, and thus there is certainly a linkage between the homeless and mentally ill populations.73

Housing in the 1980's

Finally, the most directly related factor to homelessness, the crisis in housing, must be reviewed. As discussed earlier, since the early 1970's, severe problems have appeared at an alarming rate. With the increase in mortgage interest rates and the inflation in shelter costs, few of those in the market to buy a home could afford to purchase a house. In 1983 only 30 percent of married couples under 35 with two children could afford to purchase a house, although in previous years 65 percent could. In 1979 the proportion owning homes declined for the first time since the Depression. In addition, homeowner mortgage delinquency rates have been increasing at the highest rates since 1953 when the Mortgage Bankers Association began quarterly surveys.74 As mentioned earlier, an even higher proportion of housing consumers, both renters and owners, are spending
higher proportions of income for shelter. Between 1970 and 1979 the median gross rent rose 101 percent while median renter income only rose 59 percent. As Chester Hartman, a noted housing specialist, summarizes:

The failure of renters' incomes to keep pace with housing costs, the decreasing supply of rental housing because of inadequate construction levels, conversion of apartments to condominiums, and abandonment of rental units in some central city neighborhoods are all factors in this squeeze on renters.

Between 1979 and 1982 annual rental vacancy rates nationally were between 5.0 and 5.4 percent, far below the rate typical of recessions. By the end of 1983 the vacancy rates were 3.7 percent in the Northeast, 4.4 percent in the West and between 1 and 2 percent in New York City, San Francisco, and Boston. The rent component of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 5.4 percent during 1983, while the CPI increased by 2.2 percent for prices generally.

One consequence has been the increase in the number of families doubling-up, a reversal of the postwar trend. Young adults or married couples are more likely to live with parents, and the number of families living with others doubled from a low of 1.3 million in 1978 to 2.6 million in 1983. The number of unrelated individuals living with others went from 23.4 million in 1978 to 28.1 million in 1983. These are very precarious living arrangements and in some cases can be considered borderline homelessness. The New York Housing Authority estimates that 17 thousand families are currently doubling up in public housing; affecting 1 in every 10 households in public housing. The other related consequence is an increase in evictions, one of the most frequent immediate causes of homelessness.
More directly related to the shortage of housing for low income Americans is the rapidly declining federal commitment to providing housing assistance. Before discussing it, the sociology of housing subsidies should be reviewed. Roger Sanjek, in his analysis of the social structure of housing subsidies, points out that there is no residential housing constructed today without a federal subsidy. The correlation is very strong between income and the amount of assistance whereas the larger the income, the more assistance available, in terms of tax rates on capital gains, depreciation deductions, developer subsidies and abatements, and participation in real estate tax shelter syndications. The largest and most well-known assistance program is homeowner income tax deductions for property taxes and mortgage interest payments, which cost the Federal Treasury $30 billion in 1981, four times what was spent that year on all low income housing programs. In 1982 the homeowner subsidy was $39 billion, which was larger than the entire HUD budget for 1982. In 1984 it amounted to $45 billion and is expected to rise astronomically. These federal subsidies are universal entitlements inasmuch as the only criteria for eligibility is home ownership. Thus, those with annual incomes of over $100,000 receive an average of $5,500 a year in federal housing assistance. These facts stand in stark contrast to housing assistance available to low income people. Housing subsidies are not entitlements and only reach a fraction of those in need. The wait for public housing in New York City is estimated at 15 to 18 years; in Washington, D.C. it is 10 years. There are no federal subsidies available to homeless persons.
These data are important, for they provide the societal context in which housing develops. The entire stock of housing is shaped by these forces, and consequently housing investment has shifted from rental apartments to single family homes. Construction of large expensive homes will not serve the needs of single people, the elderly, and low and moderate income families. In 1981 there were one-half million empty new homes that were too expensive to be sold.

Since 1981 federal support for low income housing (public housing, construction, and rehabilitation) has been cut by two-thirds, and those cuts accounted for about one-half of the Reagan administration's domestic budget cuts in its first two years. These cuts represent more than the combined total of cuts levied in education, training, employment programs, social services, and health.

For those 4 million low income households living in public or subsidized housing, their rent were raised to 30 percent of their incomes from the previous level of 25 percent. The median income of these households (mostly elderly and female-headed families) is $6,300 per year. It is important to note that the 30 percent figure is somewhat arbitrary and does not reflect what a family can afford for housing and other nonhousing necessities. For example, using Bureau of Labor Statistics for a minimum family budget, Stone calculated that a Boston family of four in 1980 needed an income of $16,500 before it could afford to pay 25 percent on housing according to standards set by the government.
Perhaps most devastating is the Federal Government's movement out of its historic role in providing housing to poor Americans who are unable to afford housing on the private market. In 1977 there were 57,436 additional households assisted through public housing, but since 1981 HUD has cancelled commitments to the point of a negative number. This includes the special public housing program for Indian reservations. Since 1983 no additional households were assisted through public housing. 89

Significant cutbacks also affected the other assisted housing programs: The Section 8-New Construction/Substantial Rehabilitation Program, and the Section 8-Existing/Moderate Rehabilitation Program. In the first of the aforementioned Section 8 programs, the number of newly assisted households from 1981 to proposals for 1986 fell from 51,635 to -1,000 households; in 1977 the number assisted was 169,396. 90 Finally, in the second Section 8 program, the number of assisted households from 1981 to proposed 1986 fell from 83,520 to 12,050, whereas in 1977 the number of newly assisted was 127,581. 91

Combining all three programs, the total additional households assisted in 1981 was 158,885, however 5,847 is the 1986 projection; in 1977 354,413 were newly assisted. 92 The budget authority appropriated in 1977 was 28 million dollars; however, since 1981 it has decreased from 25 million to 5 million proposed for 1986. During the first few years of the Reagan administration, the subsidies came from appropriations from previous years, but by 1933 "this flow was reduced to a trickle," or the "housing spigot was shut off." 93
Summary

The problem of homelessness touches every societal institution and has its roots in social and economic transformations, namely the depletion of the low income housing stock along with declining incomes. The crisis is predicted to continue, especially in light of the Federal response or the lack of it. Because of the complexity of the problem, the homeless population is extremely heterogeneous and many population groups can be discerned. It is not by coincidence that such groups, especially those with a historic and well-documented housing needs (female headed households, minorities, those below poverty level, disabled, immigrants, and native Americans) are among the homeless. In earlier times the problems of the deinstitutionalized could be contained within the mental health system; the problems of unemployment could be addressed with education and training programs; and public assistance could be addressed through welfare reform. But when even the poor quality housing stock was depleted, these and related problems "quit their assigned places" and found common expression in homelessness. Whereas housing problems meant structural problems or overcrowding, today it has taken the form of no shelter at all.

Homelessness can be viewed as a continuum and it is difficult to define it precisely as many people are living in abandoned buildings, substandard or dangerous situations, or are unable to heat their dwellings and must spend their days elsewhere. Most definitions encompass the following possibilities: those living in a SRO and paying by the day or week; those living in a shelter; or those living
on the street, in alleys, and under bridges. Baxter and Hopper's definition is "those whose primary nighttime residence is either in the publicly or privately operated shelters or in the streets, doorways, etc. and other well hidden sites known only to their users." Other definitions may simply be one without a fixed place of residence, or one without a regular place to live. Other definitions encompass a time and minimal standards dimension, "anyone without an address which assures them of at least the following thirty days' sleeping quarters which meet minimal health and safety standards." Kaufmann defines homelessness as a "condition wherein an individual on a given night has no place to sleep and is forced to be on the street or seek shelter in a temporary facility." 

Estimating the magnitude of homelessness has proven to be a political event and a major legitimation crisis. At one time the problem was simply denied by Reagan and HUD officials. Then a Health and Human Services study estimated that 2 million may have been homeless as of November 1983; however, six months later the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated the population to be between 250,000 and 350,000. The HUD figures were immediately denounced as inaccurate by advocacy groups and by some in the media. Estimating the numbers of homeless people is fraught with conceptual and methodological difficulties and the consensus is that any estimate is an underestimate. The HUD figures were criticized during Congressional testimony given in June 1983 as omitting: the vast numbers of homeless who are given vouchers for motels; all youth; all homeless temporarily in hospitals and jails; those in smaller
shelters; those living on the streets; and finally, those people doubling-up. Furthermore, noted in the testimony given, HUD did not provide a definition of 'metropolitan area' when asking local experts for an estimate. HUD did not use Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas or a layperson's sense of metropolitan area, but rather it used the Rand McNally commercial marketing unit, which is much larger than a metropolitan area is commonly thought to be. For New York City, it includes 80 cities and spans part of three states, including four counties in New York State, one in Connecticut, all of Long Island, and northern New Jersey. So, mathematically if the denominator is inflated, the percentage of homeless declines. These local estimates were then used by HUD to arrive at a national figure. This is a very serious problem with the HUD estimates. Thus, the figure most often cited with more assurance of credibility is 1 percent of the population, or between 2 and 3 million people are homeless in the United States.

Estimates for individual cities across the nation have been widely reported. For the most part, the documentation has been part of the effort to mobilize resources on behalf of the homeless. However, some localities have reacted to the problem by condoning violence against the homeless, or by making it illegal to look through trash bins or sleep in public parks and by terminating what little services were available, such as missions and soup kitchens. In other cities, the location of shelters has been the primary issue. Advocates must constantly publicize the plight of homeless people as attitudes toward the poor have historically been
mixed with pity and contempt. They must vociferously denounce the notion that homeless people somehow choose this life and must emphasize that the homeless are respectable people and are not 'crazies'. Whether the calls for food and shelter overshadow the necessary analysis of what has happened to this country's mechanisms for people to meet basic needs remain to be seen.

**Current Literature Relevant to Homeless Women**

Housing for women per se has only recently gained attention. Typically, gender has not been considered an important factor in the literature on housing. After all, the American dream house of a single detached family dwelling embodies the nuclear suburban family, not the single female parent nor the elderly widow. However, when gender is added to housing analyses, women form the largest subgroup of the poorly sheltered population with single parents and elderly women the most vulnerable to being cost-burdened. Of the 23 million American households with a housing problem, females (as single person households or heads of families) total 10 million, or 40 percent of the total. However, female householders represent 27 percent of all American households.

This figure of 27 percent represents a growth from 15 percent in 1950 to 18 percent in 1960, 21 percent in 1970, and finally up to 27 percent in 1980. Women are increasingly heads of households, from 9 percent of all households in 1950 to 15 percent in 1980, and the numbers of nonfamily female households have grown from 3 million
in 1950 to 12.8 million in 1980.\footnote{111} Approximately one-half of this group are elderly women.

Female householders (single or heading families) earned a median income of $8,931 in 1980 while the national median was $19,074; and for married couples it was $25,106.\footnote{112} Furthermore, in 1980, 72 percent of female householders earned less than $15,000 compared to only 24 percent of married couples, and 40 percent for the total.\footnote{113}

Thus only 6 percent of all female householders earned enough to purchase a new home at the median price of $93,000, while 40 percent of married couples could undertake this responsibility. Women, then, are more likely to be renters and in 1981 were 40 percent of the total, an historic high.\footnote{114} Single parents and elderly renters are twice as likely, more than any other American household, to have a housing problem with physical structure, overcrowding, or affordability, and are three times more likely to be specifically cost-burdened.\footnote{115} Even for the 48 percent who own homes (compared with 65 percent of the total American households), women are still more likely to be cost-burdened and living in inadequate dwellings. While only 8 percent of homeowners were cost-burdened, the rate for females was 17 percent, twice the national average. And while only 6 percent of all homeowners live in physically inadequate housing, 32 percent of females do, which is five times the national rate.\footnote{116} In Ohio the rates of home ownership in 1980 were 68 percent but only 38 percent for female-headed families; in 1984 the rate decreased to 28 percent while the percentage for the total stayed the same.\footnote{117}
Homelessness among women, then, can be viewed on a continuum from being poorly housed and extremely vulnerable economically. To reiterate, that is, one in two female householders earns less than 50 percent of the national median, and female heads of families have more than a 50 percent chance of having a housing problem. Housing discrimination persists, especially toward women with children. Few women have accumulated capital and established credit and thus are faced with living in insecure arrangements; their housing is vulnerable to sale, rent increases, and conversions.\textsuperscript{118}

The socioeconomic position of women limits their choices, and societal norms regarding child rearing place single parents under great strain. Also important to note, as Weitzman has recently demonstrated, in the first year after a divorce, a woman's standard of living decreases by 73 percent while her husband's increases by 42 percent.\textsuperscript{119} Often when property is divided, the family home is sold, forcing the mother and children to leave a whole system of social networks. Weitzman's research also points out that the median child support payment ordered by the courts covers less than one-half of the actual cost of raising children. Furthermore, she notes, "in 53 percent of the cases, women do not receive court-ordered payments, with men earning incomes of $30,000 to $50,000 a year no more likely to pay than those earning $10,000 per year."\textsuperscript{120}

In the State of Ohio, a Senate task force on female single parents summarized the hardship on this group by noting that the American dream has become a nightmare.\textsuperscript{121} While only 4.5 percent of Ohioan two-parent families lived in poverty in 1980, 30 percent of families
headed by a woman lived in poverty. In 1984 the statistics were 3.6 percent and 32.4 percent respectively. Furthermore, in 1980, 13 percent of children in Ohio lived in poverty while 49 percent of children living in a family headed by a woman lived in poverty; in 1984 these figures were 19.2 percent and 57 percent, respectively. The poverty rate for female-headed families in Ohio is five times the rate than for other families. The number of female-headed families grew by 60 percent from 1970 to 1980 and increased by 67,000 in four years. In 1984, over 50 percent of them had incomes of less than $10,000. For Black families the situation is even more bleak. Black female heads of families in Ohio, who were in the labor force, had annual median incomes of $4,564 in 1980 compared with $6,047 for their White counterparts. In 1980, 59.7 percent of all Black women heads of families were below the poverty level compared with 39.7 percent of White female-headed families. In its statewide survey of single parent households, the Ohio Senate Task Force found that 20 percent responded that they had been homeless at one time.

Combining these statistics with those given earlier on the extent of budget cuts, it comes as no surprise that the lack of adequate income is the most serious problem noted among homeless women. As Stoner notes,

Images [of homeless women] are changing as we witness increasing numbers of homeless single women and homeless women with children ... and awareness that they are by-products of "feminization of poverty" often the result of family breakdowns through divorce, desertion, and abuse that have led to mortgage foreclosures or evictions for nonpayment of rent.
Slavinsky and Cousins point out that few analyses exist on the causes of female homelessness, but offer some explanations as to why their numbers have increased. First, changes in the economy and public policies may have a greater impact on women; second, women's salaries are lower and have not kept pace with men's, especially as the cost of living increased. Furthermore, the authors state:

Many divorced or widowed older women are unable to compete in the current job market and regardless of whether or not they have been employed outside the home, older women are the largest population group drawing minimum social security benefits in this country. In urban areas, unfortunately, those who must live on minimum social security benefits are frequently forced to choose between food and shelter; the minimum benefit simply does not stretch far enough to cover both. Because the economic position of so many women is dependent on others, when abandoned, abused, or disowned, they have nothing on which to fall back.

The statistical appearance of homeless women is the most widely circulated statement about them. As with all the homeless, enumeration is plagued with difficulty, but for women the problem is compounded by the fact that they are less likely to be in places where the homeless are counted. Thus most researchers preface any numbers with warnings of underestimation. In the HUD 1984 Survey of Shelters, one-third were women and family members. A recent Associated Press story cited a Massachusetts Department of Human Services report that 75 percent of the state's homeless are families headed predominately by women. A HUD report estimated that 16 percent of the homeless are women. Slavinsky and Cousins place the estimate at 50 percent. The Manhattan Bowery Corporation estimates
that from 6,000 to 6,500 women are periodically homeless in New York. In 1984 Crystal calculated a 28 percent increase in the number of women in New York City shelters from 1983, compared to an 18 percent increase for men. He estimates that women comprise 12 percent of the New York City shelter population. However, many of these estimates do not include women with children. The Children's Defense Fund has documented the epidemic growth of homeless families in major United States cities. In New York City, the number of families has tripled in two years, and the prognosis is an estimate of 110,000 families as potentially homeless. As noted elsewhere, the number of emergency requests for food and shelter has grown astronomically and one finds consistency among the numerous reports, newspaper accounts, and local studies that the numbers of homeless women are growing. In December 1983 even the popular women's magazine, Glamour, reported that the number of homeless women and children is expected to hit record levels and urged readers to volunteer and to write national agencies for help.

Locally, in Columbus, Ohio, 1983 estimates of the number of homeless women during a year include 1,000 women with children and approximately 962 single adults, based on shelter and emergency housing counts. The total population estimate is 9,000 persons—7,400 single adults (13 percent female or 962 women) and 1,600 women and children constituting 1,000 different families. Again, these figure are acknowledged underestimates, exclusive of welfare department housing requests and homeless persons served by informal church programs. Thus, women represent 22 percent of the total
estimated homeless population in Columbus, Ohio, during the course of a year's time.

Research on homeless women, other than the mere mention of their statistical appearance as significant of serious inquiry, is sparse. Because of the negative stereotype of the 'bag lady', much of the literature is devoted to dispelling myths and to providing rich detailed portraits of the plight of homeless women and the discrimination, stigma, and danger they face. Although informative, much of this material is in the form of testimonials, photographic essays, and diaries.

Although excluded from the romanticized world of the homeless man, the 'bag lady' as an eccentric oddity has gained popularity to the point of being exploited for commercial gain. Recently a company began printing shirts with a picture of an elderly homeless woman whose picture had been published earlier in a photography book. Bloomingdales Department Store has also featured a 'bag lady' look of layered, oversized clothes, and recently Tiffany's featured an image of a homeless woman next to an expensive jewelry item. Needless to say, homeless women were neither consulted nor compensated.

The Manhattan Bowery Corporation's 1979 report on homeless women has been cited in numerous reports as one of the most substantive documentations of homeless women to date. It points out the limited value of the label of 'shopping bag lady' and reveals less well known connotations, such as swollen, ulcerated legs, frostbitten toes, and women's extreme, constant vulnerability to crime, street
hazards, and the elements. The report focuses, however, not on all homeless women, but those in late middle age or older.

Public concerns regarding homeless women are often in reference to their own safety and welfare, rather than them being a threat to the public order, although their presence itself is often perceived as unsightly and threatening. In fact, Stoner discusses their image as more eccentric and derelict because of the long denial that homeless women exist. Baxter and Hopper document how public attitudes reveal fears of contamination. Others have suggested that at the root of public concern are societal attitudes on what constitutes a suitable lifestyle for women. Since homeless men are more readily accepted, homeless women seem more "out of place." Thus, they can survive as long as they or their very presence does not annoy nor offend anyone. Homeless women must seek safe places where they can remain inconspicuous and anonymous. These may include doorways, telephone booths, hotel lobbies, movie theaters, hospitals, alleys, basements, vacant buildings, empty lots, church entrances, restrooms, park benches, and so forth.

As mentioned above, however, the danger homeless women face is a major concern. They are prone to 'jack-rollers' who prey on the homeless and are especially active when entitlement checks are received. Women are also targets for rapists and others who commit random acts of violence. They are robbed, mugged, and beaten by men who look at them as whores. As one homeless woman noted, "The pimps wait around because they think the first thing a woman will do when she is destitute is become a hooker." The public is
generally unaware that the danger to homeless women, in the form of brutalization and sexual assault, is worse in the summer than it is in January. 149 Ironically, as Baxter and Hopper note, this may be even more of a problem for women who try to maintain their personal appearance. Even if a man, homeless or otherwise, befriends a woman, she is still extremely vulnerable, as in the case documented by Baxter and Hopper. One woman, who had been sleeping in a cardboard box alongside several other men, was threatened by a man who usually was friendly, but at the urging of another man, threatened to kill her. 150

Homeless women can be victimized in other ways, such as by the lack of services available to them. Most shelters and related services began by first serving men, and still today, homeless women face discrimination when seeking shelter, food, and employment, such as spot labor jobs. Stoner hypothesizes that again, because of women's invisibility and being less feared and threatening than men, services to homeless women have been limited. Equating them with derelict eccentrics who allegedly choose their lifestyle has made them the worst social undesirables of all marginal people and has contributed to a belief that they are "less needy." 151

The municipal shelters in New York City are unable to meet the growing demand of the homeless female population. 152 From 1971 to 1977 the number of applications for admission rose from 872 to 3,355. 153 The Women's Shelter in New York is one of the few public shelters for women in the country; however, it is most often cited for its restrictive admission requirements (three-fourths of its
applicants have been refused admission since 1975), bleak and militaristic atmosphere, and lack of services in comparison to what is provided for homeless men. For example, some of the rules include submitting to a psychiatric and gynecological exam as well as an extensive intake interview, which is not required of the men. Life in a shelter is not unlike other institutions, such as jails and mental hospitals, where strict rules regarding personal belongings, daily schedules, and seating and bed assignments are enforced. "A Homeless Woman's Story," published as the cover article in the July 1985 issue of New York, provides rich and detailed personal observations by one of the shelter residents. Baxter and Hopper recommend that "the overly restrictive admission regulations, specifically the requirement of psychiatric clearance, the denial of shelter to physically disabled, intoxicated or drug addicted women, the mandatory shower and gynecological examinations, and the complicated intake procedures, should be modified in accord with the needs and fears of homeless women." The most frequently cited reason for rejections from shelter services, after "no vacancy," is "failure to comply," that is, failure to comply with any of the aforementioned regulations and other rules. Other reasons for rejections can include having children or being pregnant. For the women who are able to pass all the entrance requirements and who are willing to comply, the shelter offers an invaluable service. Most of these rules almost completely eliminate elderly women ('shopping bag ladies') who would have difficulty with following all of the regulations, especially immediately relinquishing possessions which,
to them, represent their whole lives. This finding is substantiated in the Manhattan Bowery Report; women who would be labeled 'shopping bag ladies' do not use the shelter.\footnote{159}

Finally, another disparity between the women's and men's shelters is what services are available and to whom. Not only are the male residents of the shelters given services, such as meals, medical treatment, clothing, counseling, and referrals, but any homeless man can avail himself to such services whether staying at the shelter or not. In contrast, services to women are only offered to the residents who have checked in, showered, checked their possessions, and so forth.\footnote{160} New York is not an anomaly in the treatment of homeless women, but is illustrative of the attitudes, assumptions, and treatment of homeless women.

During the 1960's and early 1970's much of the literature on homelessness focused on disaffiliation as an explanatory factor.\footnote{161} However, this perspective was developed on male skid row populations with a high prevalence of alcoholism, and recent studies question its applicability to homeless women.\footnote{162} In Bahr and Garrett's 1969 study, they focused only on middle aged and elderly women and found not surprisingly that shelter residents were least affiliated, compared with more stable and affluent women.\footnote{163} This perspective seems to fit more with the literature on aging, but more problematic is its emphasis on personal failure rather than socioeconomic forces. Affiliation, measured by whether one lives alone, whether one is employed, and whether one belongs to voluntary associations, does not take into account the profound effect of poverty. Certainly,
elderly homeless women may be an extreme example of the effects of social and economic forces which work on middle-aged and elderly single women in general. However, elderly women do not represent the homeless female population, and 'bag ladies', per se, represent only a fraction. Disaffiliation does not explain the social forces which have produced the contemporary form of homelessness witnessed today. Disaffiliation seems more like a consequence rather than a cause of homelessness.

The findings from the more recent literature on homeless women reveal many significant differences between men and women. Baumohl and Miller in their 1974 study found that the homeless women were younger, less educated, and more likely to obtain income from legitimate sources than their male counterparts. Their report though also documents women's frustrated desires for conventional monogamous relationships and intense conflicts following coercive sexual encounters.

These findings are confirmed by other inquiries, except for education. Bahr and Garrett found that the shelter sample of women were more educated than the men. Their findings were that the women were poorer, younger, more educated, more frequently Black, married, more apt to have children, informal liaisons, and, finally, more frequently from a broken home in the family of origin.

The findings from a 1982 study conducted in Columbia, South Carolina, were that the most serious problems of homeless women are lack of money, nowhere to live, unemployment, separation from family,
and illness. A greater sense of affiliation was noted in this study compared to others.

Demographic analysis of 1,000 first time applicants for the Women's Shelter in New York in 1979 closely paralleled the men's shelter and revealed that: 50 percent of the women were under age 40, and 16 percent were over age 60; 40 percent were White and 44 percent were Black; and over 25 percent cited illegal lockouts or evictions.

However, a more recent study of shelter women and men reveals some significant differences. Crystal analyzed the intake instrument for one year between 1982 and 1983 at the public shelters in New York for both men (n=6,253) and women (n=1,798). He also conducted an interview with 213 women in the shelters in 1982. The findings include: 60 percent of the women were single compared to 71 percent of the men, and 8 percent of the women were married, compared to 4.5 percent of the men. Women had higher incidences of separation (13 percent versus 11 percent for men), and widowhood (6 percent versus 3 percent for men), and approximately the same rate of divorce (11 and 10 percent for women and men, respectively). Women were more likely to have grown up in an institutional or foster care setting (20 percent of the women and 13 percent of the men had not lived with neither parent during childhood). Bahr and Garrett also noted the salience of the broken home in the women's family of origin. Crystal also noted among the women a higher incidence of psychiatric treatment or diagnosis, but a much lower incidence of being in jail or prison. This obviously relates to the social roles assigned to males and females.
Over one-half of the women in Crystal's sample had at least one child with substantial ongoing involvement. This differs substantially from the findings on homeless men. He concludes that many women do not fit into the disaffiliation perspective, which assumes a lack of involvement in relationships or parental roles, as well as other aspects of social living, such as the internalization of societal norms and values. This finding is confirmed by the numerous portraits of homeless women that, in fact, they share the same values of American life and suffer greatly because they are unable, due to their homelessness, to take part in such institutions. In sum, the literature on disaffiliation, as well as the research on skid row males, does not bear relevance to the contemporary social world inhabited by homeless women.

What are the realities when one looks beyond the myths? Descriptions of shelter residents include women of all ages, colors, ethnic backgrounds, and even social classes. Some hold professional degrees whereas others were previously factory workers, secretaries, domestic workers, and nurse's aids. Many have been abused as children or by their own children, husbands, boyfriends, and now by strangers on the street. Finally, many are victims of deinstitutionalization in combination with inadequate community care, urban renewal, and gentrification.

Strasser studied a group of homeless women during a six-week period in which she observed their perceptions of health and way of life. She noted their great resourcefulness regarding personal hygiene and their strenuous daily routines. Their days began at
4:30 am and included waiting in lines throughout the day for meals, walking from train station to bus station and other places where they could sit and rest, such as churches, park benches, libraries, and department store lounge areas. Other options were riding the subway all night or finding an abandoned building or car. Sleeping was not on the daily agenda as it would call attention to their status, and they might be asked to leave.

Strasser also noted that all the women she observed had at least one health problem. Other reports support this finding, especially their susceptibility to malnutrition, poor circulation, hypothermia, pneumonia, frostbite, parasitic worms, and respiratory illness. Baxter and Hopper reported that it is commonplace to see men and women with urgent medical problems, ulcerated legs, lacerated heads, and grime-filled wounds on the street. Strasser, however, noted that most make attempts to treat their illnesses. Many homeless women have had contact with the health system, as both Strasser and Slavinsky and Cousins noted, as homeless women are often seen with slings, bandages, crutches, and prescription medications. However, homeless women may find it difficult to follow a physician's orders or to take medication without any water or without having a watch to know what time it is.

Finally, Strasser noted the fear, hatred, and distrust of health providers, social workers, and sometimes police and security guards. In general, homeless women felt that not only are these personnel unhelpful, but they directly contribute to making their situations worse. They responded favorably to some saleswomen and waitresses, who listened to them and gave them things and friendly
advice. Strasser concluded that the following observations about homeless women require special consideration.

These include: perceptions of health providers, the strenuous round of life, the 40 to 55 year age range of most of the women, nutritional aberrations, the severity and number of health problems, conditions, present health practices and ethnic beliefs, a low rate of alcoholism ... a fear of men ... efforts toward and pride concerning personal hygiene, a fear of dependence, and a desire for autonomy.

Homeless women have been the subject of two recent photography books on 'shopping bag ladies' that are sensitive portrayals and serve to dispell myths. Both document such causal factors as unemployment, unavailability of affordable housing, deinstitutionalization, a sudden crisis (fire, crime, illness, eviction, death), inaccessibility of public assistance (negotiating bureaucracy, providing extensive documentation, keeping appointments), domestic violence, and lack of income. Their journalistic accounts vividly portray the problems with social services and call for an understanding of what it means to be a woman who has lost her home. Shulman notes, "As one begins to understand the extremely tenuous circumstances in which these people live, the less mysterious become their bags, less strange their behavior, and less invisible their lives."

These accounts also point out other differences between homeless women and men. Women have more to fear than men and must become as inconspicuous as possible. Thus, they can resort to behavior derived from female roles, like "shopping, sorting, selecting, and collecting to gain access to urban facilities." Furthermore, situations may drastically differ; for example, female homelessness can be anything
from temporary to extreme and prolonged indefinitely, or can occur regularly, dependent on periodic crises.

Finally, both books offer testimony to not only the victimization of homeless women, but how that is internalized by the women themselves. Homeless women suffer a profound disillusionment and trauma. As Rousseau notes, the values of mainstream American life are not forgotten.\(^\text{186}\)

... they feel drastically out of place, demoralized by the inability to establish homes, find work, and belong. The cruel realities of their own lives conflicted with their desires to fulfill the stereotype of wife, mother, and daughter ... To have no place in the world made them question their right to be.\(^\text{187}\)

Once a woman is homeless, who she is and the talents she possesses are ignored. She is more or less blamed for her situation and subject to being labeled or categorized so she can be processed by a service system. She becomes a case and is identified by a number. And usually, that is all that is known about her, as with Rebecca Smith, who died in a box, after being visited by numerous professionals in New York City.\(^\text{188}\) She then received national attention in the media. The following are illustrative statements made by homeless women.

Because I have the body of a woman, there is nothing I can do but be insulted.

I have the right to live with integrity; to be treated like a decent human being. I am so insulted, so degraded, so humiliated.\(^\text{189}\)

Thus, without shelter, homeless women are destined to stay invisible and suffer in silence. As one of the authors note, "Take one woman, put her inside for a few weeks, give her adequate food,
medical and psychiatric attention and you have a different person." Again, what these contemporary portraits reveal is that homeless women come from every walk of life and defy categorization, except that their resources and the available housing do not match.

Much of the aforementioned studies are exclusive of homeless women with children. Here is an area in which mental illness and the relevant mental health policies have played little part. The Children's Defense Fund cites economic problems, such as unemployment, the high cost of basic necessities, poverty, cutbacks in federal social services, such as AFDC and SSI, and the lack of decent, affordable housing as the major causes of family homelessness. The Federal cutbacks in housing have exacerbated the housing crisis. The Children's Defense Fund identifies a typical homeless family as composed of a single female head of household with more than one child. It cites an increase in the number of battered women and children seeking shelter, as well as a recent increase in two-parent families seeking shelter. An important concern is the lack of services needed for families. A special report on homeless families (n=61) was conducted in 13 cities across the State of Massachusetts in 1983 and documented the direct impact of federal budget cuts since 1981. The most important factors contributing to family homelessness were insurmountable shelter debt and extreme poverty. The unfortunate consequence was the destruction of family life. What is important to note about this study is the difficulty in generalizing from homeless individuals to homeless families and the impact federal policies had on the financial stability of these families. As
documented extensively in the report, the average monthly shelter
costs prior to homelessness far exceeded their incomes.\textsuperscript{194} The
authors focus on the necessary state legislative changes needed to
prevent homelessness, rather than on the less-than-effective reactive
policies.

Another study of homeless families conducted in Columbus, Ohio,
revealed that domestic violence, unemployment, and eviction were the
primary causal reasons given by the family head.\textsuperscript{195} Over one-half
of the sample were receiving public assistance; 20 percent listed
employment as their source of income; and 14 percent had no income
whatsoever. Much of this report was service-oriented and like many
others, reveals the inadequate funding of essential services.

The literature on homeless women reveals documentary evidence of
the plight of homeless women. Few studies go beyond this and more is
found in the popular media than in sociological journals. Beyond
their vulnerability and the rampant discrimination, little is known
about their lives.

\textbf{Theory Relevant to Research Questions}

The literature on homelessness is descriptive of the social
structural conditions that have rendered people homeless. Although
some ethnographies have been completed, they are oriented to how
homeless people live and struggle to cope. Important as these factors
are, the literature rarely goes beyond the homeless situation itself,
nor does it explore the meaning of the experience. Both of these
aspects are central to this research. That is, this research seeks
not to be crisis-centered, but life-centered, and seeks to explore the meanings of social life as experienced and socially constructed. The theoretical problem is the interface between social structure and social life.

The resolution of the theoretical problem lies in the use of symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, and existential sociology. All can be broadly conceived as dialetical ecological approaches, that is, the study of human beings and their human environments and the interplay between the two. In studying human needs in housing, Nattrass and Morrison recommend the use of a humanistic perspective within an ecological framework. The focal relationship is between humans and their housing environments. Of course, as discussed in Chapter One, a home is not simply a roof over one's head, but the center of a web of human relationships. Thus, at the outset, the general paradigm directing inquiry is relational. That is, life histories will provide the context for study of the relational intersubjective world, not the context for clinical psychologizing.

The three sociological perspectives of existentialism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism share many of the same tenants, and developments in each have influenced one another. What follows is a brief description of each theory. This section will then conclude with a synthesis applied to the research questions.

Existential sociology attempts to study human beings in the everyday world in which they live and to examine as many as possible of the complex facets of the human experience, especially feelings and
emotions. The major figures include Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Soren Kierkegaard, Fredrich Nietzsche, and Wilhelm Dilthey. Existential sociology borrows the notion of Verstehen, of understanding human beings by empathizing with them. That is, one must immerse oneself in everyday reality - feel it, touch it, hear it and see it - in order to understand it. Existential sociology recognizes the complexity of human interaction and seeks as its subject the total person, not just a scientific or rationalized human being. All facets are considered, from rational elements to emotional ones, from bodily bases to mental states.

The self is "existential" because it is an incarnate self, filled with rational thoughts, sudden emotions, deeply felt anxieties, biological urges, and cultural elements. The self is "in society" because it is a self-embodied-in-the-world; therefore it is studied in its natural settings, in its interacting stance, and in its experimental confrontation with society.

The existentialist critique of society sees the instability and remoteness of social institutions and thus the coercive power experienced by people. Much of social interaction may be what is termed "inauthentic," which prevents people from experiencing the responsibilities, intimacy, ecstasy, as well as pain of subject-subject communication. When people talk to hear themselves and to have others hear them, it is not to share discourse, and is a form of inauthentic or it-it communication. The self and others are objectified, and manipulation covertly or overtly becomes a key property of human interaction. Another aspect of existential sociology quite relevant to this research is the problematic nature of meaning and of existence itself.
Man's existence is fundamentally problematic, both for man as actor and for anyone who would understand his existence. Man is varied, changeable, uncertain, conflictful, and partially free to choose what he will do to exist in a world that is varied, changeable, uncertain, and conflictful. The concern is with meanings in concrete situations, not to supply a context, but because the situation itself is personal. In sum, existential sociology offers important theoretical guidance in consideration of the totality of the person, including feeling and emotion, authentic and inauthentic relations, the problematic nature of existence, and the importance of Verstehen from Dilthey and Weber. Contemporary examples of existentialist sociology can be found in Tiryakian (1962, 1965, 1968), Douglas and Johnson (1977), Fontana (1980), Kotarba (1979), and Manning (1973).

Symbolic interactionism, in viewing the human being as maker, doer, actor, and self-director, emphasizes the processual and reflective nature of self and society. George Herbert Mead is considered to be the founding theorist, who was influenced by the writings of Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, William James, and W.I. Thomas. Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's, further developed Mead's thought and extended his own development of a methodology. Three basic premises represent the core of the perspective.

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them.

2. The meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has.

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered.
Most relevant to the research is the importance of meanings and the self, that is always in the process of becoming. Having a self means that humans can view themselves from the outside by placing themselves in the position of others and acting toward themselves from that position. The self emerges through social interaction and, conversely, only those who possess a self can engage in social interaction. The interpretative process is the link whereby individuals create, sustain, and modify their realities. Role-taking in reference to the self and others is important for the definition of situations, which determine symbolic meaning and consequent action. In sum, the symbolic interactionist perspective offers a dynamic emphasis on the social nature of humanity and human activity. It insists on direct acquaintance with the social world of human activity and highlights the uniqueness of the human enterprise and the construction of a meaningfully interpreted, reciprocal, and ongoing project.\textsuperscript{204}

The third theoretical perspective, phenomenology, can be said to encompass both existentialist sociology (existential phenomenology) and symbolic interactionism and serves as a general frame of reference. In fact, any theoretical move that acknowledges human beings as subjects, rather than as objects, is a move toward a phenomenological perspective.\textsuperscript{205} Shearing suggests that Blumer's symbolic interactionist premises are a good start for a phenomenological sociology.\textsuperscript{206} Edmund Husserl is known as the most important philosopher in its development, and Alfred Schutz is noted for developing its application to the social world. More recent
contributors to phenomenological sociology are Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, George Psathas, and Maurice Natanson. Two central themes are those of consciousness and the social world. Phenomenology has as its central task the radical description and analysis of human consciousness, which is grounded in the social world. Phenomenology places the accent on how human beings confront and are confronted by phenomena which manifest themselves to consciousness.

Schutz was specifically interested in how the social world is experienced by a member of society. The world of 'daily life' is an intersubjective world which, already existing before one's birth, is handed down to one's experience and interpretation. Schutz defined 'the natural attitude' as a set of untested assumptions upon which person relies to interpret the world or a general implied stance taken toward the world. Thus, the 'natural attitude' involves the taken-for-granted assumptions used to create and sustain social life. Furthermore, members of society acquire what Schutz termed a stock of knowledge, or recipes used for interpreting and acting in the everyday world; it is basically a system of constructs that enables one to typify situations, selves, and the world in general. However, one should note that those typifications are not static rules, but rather are changes with each biographical situation. That is, as one's biographical situation changes from moment to moment, so is the stock of knowledge elaborated and reassembled. Furthermore, the social world can be thought of as made up of multiple realities, some of which are apprehended routinely and others that present the individual with problems of one kind of another. Each social reality
has its own special and separate style of existence. Following Schutz's work, Berger and Luckmann describe 'finite provinces of meaning' as social realities within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience.\textsuperscript{210} As the world of working in daily life is described by Schutz as the archetype of one's experience of reality, the world of the homeless can be characterized as a 'finite province of meaning'. Berger and Luckmann explain that a radical change takes place in the tension of consciousness within a 'finite province'.\textsuperscript{211} Each province of meaning has a particular style and is characterized not only by a tension of consciousness, but by a specific time perspective, by a specific form of experiencing oneself, and by a specific form of sociality.\textsuperscript{212} This notion of multiple realities is most relevant to this research endeavor.

In summary, a phenomenological framework will provide the guidance for inquiry and analysis. This perspective will allow for study of the social life-worlds of homeless women and the typifications developed and used to sustain that reality. Combining both symbolic interactionism and existential sociology, the task of the research will be to look at biographical situations and the meanings of social institutions, such as family and work and the evolving and changing definitions of the self-in-society.
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4 "Needs of Winter's Homeless," The Hallandale Digest, November 28, 1985; Associated Press, "Homeless Have Little to Cheer; Miami Herald, November 28, 1985, p. 6B.


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45 Ibid.
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51 Ibid.


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130 Ibid.
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138 Ibid.
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169 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
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173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
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183 Joan Roth, Shopping Bag Ladies, 1982, p. 3.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
188 Mary Ellen Hombs and Mitch Snyder, Homelessness In America, 1983, p. 56.
192 Ibid., p. 131.

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198 Ibid., p. 9.

199 Ibid., p. 11.

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CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

At the conclusion of Chapter Two, the theoretical perspectives guiding this research were delineated. The focus of this chapter is the translation of theory into methodological practice. That is, what methodological principles are assumed by the theories of symbolic interactionism and phenomenological and existential sociology?

Of utmost importance is what Murphy and Pilotta (1983) refer to as "responsible methodology." It means that one is aware of the assumptions that one makes about the world that is to be investigated. The entire research process must be empirically grounded and oriented to the reality experienced by homeless women. As Murphy and Pilotta comment:

... the social world is not thought to be an object which can be readily comprehended by just any casual observer, but instead represents "reality" assumptions which must be captured by an investigator who will take the time to penetrate those presuppositions in order to grasp the meaning they have for the persons who live them. In this sense, the world has meaning which must be captured if data are going to have any real validity.

The methodology must encompass an approach that is personal, direct, and naturalistic. It must try to capture the process of human interpretation and must respect the integrity of personal meaning systems. Emphasis should be given to the representation of the
world-view of the research participants by understanding it from their perspective. Clearly, this is a case for taking the role of others, which is a methodological principle of symbolic interactionism. Furthermore, attention should be given to the definitions and meanings that are lodged in social relationships and the variable nature of these definitions across situations and through time. Finally, the research must incorporate a method that will view homeless women in the context of their entire lives, and not just their homelessness nor individual personalities.

Overall Methodological Approach

In order to be responsive to these theoretically informed methodological principles, a life history approach is proposed. Denzin suggests that life histories approximate an important fit between theory and data and this approach is the method par excellence of symbolic interactionism. A life history presents the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as this person, group, or organization interprets those experiences. As Robert Angell noted in The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology (1945), personal documents reveal the participants' views of their experiences. These are materials in which people reveal in their own words their views of their entire lives or a part of them or some other aspect about themselves. The aim is to obtain detailed evidence as to how social situations are defined and what meaning these definitions have for the participants. Clifford Shaw, in the Jack-Roller (1930) noted this as
one of its values, especially because life histories are recorded in first person language. He quotes Burgess, "In the life history is revealed, as in no other way, the inner life of the person, his moral struggles, his successes and failures in securing control of his destiny in a world too often at variance with his hopes and ideals." This seems to be just as relevant to the sociological study of the homeless in 1985.

Life histories were extensively used in sociological research during the 1920's and 1930's, and life history studies, such as The Polish Peasant by Thomas and Znaniecki, The Jack-Roller and other studies of delinquents by Clifford Shaw, and Sutherland's Professional Thief, are classics. The method was abandoned during the 1940's with the new focus on survey methods, scaling techniques, and 'objectivity', rather than on conceptualization, theory, and 'subjective' experiences. Angell's 1945 review of the life history method revealed its usefulness in developing hypotheses and generating and verifying theory. His analysis of 22 studies carried out between 1920 and 1940 revealed that life history data were equally as valid as questionnaire data. Its virtual abandonment revealed new methodological priorities in sociology, especially because of the time and labor involved with doing life histories.

Yet the life history method has remained a viable one, and today it is enjoying renewed popularity. During the 1978 World Congress of Sociology, three sessions were devoted to the life history approach, bringing together scholars from fifteen different countries. It is used quite extensively in Canada and in Europe, especially in
Poland, where each year public competitions are organized for the collection of hundreds of life histories, with Florian Znaniecki organizing the first in 1921. As Bertaux notes, his disciple, Jozef Chalasinski, "transformed Znaniecki's initiative into a national and perennial cultural phenomenon by showing in his highly successful books how the formation and transformations of whole social classes (peasants, workers) could be described and understood by analyzing sets of autobiographies." 

Life histories are recognized for their value in yielding direct access to the level of social relations and social processes. Thompson suggests that the method offers information rooted in real social experiences and is capable of generating wholly fresh sociological insights. It is based on a combination of exploration and questioning within the context of a dialogue and thus the information given is not determined by the researcher, but by the informant's view of his or her own life.

In sum, the life history approach (sometimes referred to as the biographical method) is very much tied to epistemologies implied by symbolic interactionism, existentialism, and phenomenology, specifically by allowing direct access to social life as experienced from within, and in its historical dimension. For Dilthey, the autobiography assumed a central role in Verstehen, and the phenomenological theory of the foundations of social action argues that the autobiography is one of the essential dimensions of the articulation of the stream of consciousness.
The theoretical-methodological paradigm thus stated is to bear directly upon the major research questions regarding the social life-world of homeless women and the delineation of the relevant empirically grounded categories which describe their experiences.

Research Design

The major research design can be conceptualized as a longitudinal panel survey design. That is, life histories were collected with a sample of individuals, documenting changes in their homeless status for approximately six months.

Two additional designs were implemented to supplement the main design. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with participants in the service delivery sector (shelter providers, case workers, policy leaders, advocates) to gain access to research settings and to understand how homelessness is understood by persons who are in direct contact with homeless persons or are concerned with their plight. The Key Informant Interviews were conducted before the life histories began. The second design, which was implemented concurrently while collecting life histories, was participant observation in a shelter for homeless women. This allowed for triangulation of methods to secure a greater understanding of homelessness.

Location

This study was conducted in Columbus, Ohio, a metropolitan area of some 565 thousand persons, the state capitol, and as boasted by market researchers, "a typical American city." In 1984, 9,000 persons were
conservatively estimated to be homeless in Columbus: 7,400 of the 9,000 mentioned were adults and 1,600 were female family heads and their children.

Much of the research activity took place in the central city area. The life history interviews took place in parks and other areas where privacy was secured.

**Sampling Design**

Purposive sampling was used to locate fifteen homeless women representative of different sociological experiences. Theoretical criteria guided the formulation of the following sampling matrix composed of different sociodemographic characteristics, immediate antecedents of homelessness, and other criteria for comparison purposes: [1] Age (18 to over 65); [2] Marital Status (single, married, separated, divorced); [3] Family Structure (with or without children); [4] Race (Black, White); [5] Length of Homelessness (first time, many times, prolonged); [6] Prior Institutional Living Situations (hospitals, jails); [7] Presence of Domestic Violence; and [8] Formerly and Almost Homeless (within 30 day period). These categories were not meant to be used as quotas but as sensitizing devices to insure a full range of representation. This is known as theoretical saturation.

The study population was built by engaging the key informants to refer potential interviewees or through direct contact via participant observation. The sampling network was carefully monitored, and details as to referral source are reported in Chapter Four.
The key informant sample included a geographic representation of Columbus neighborhoods as well as a representation of the social welfare community. The key informants included shelter personnel (case workers and executive directors), neighborhood service coordinators in the various settlement agencies, church workers, mental health workers, advocates, and persons in leadership roles in planning and referral organizations. Inasmuch as these interviews could constitute an independent inquiry, it should be emphasized that the key informant interviews were used as a means of moving closer to the study population. A total of twenty-six key informant interviews were gathered.

Data Collection Schedule

An interview guide was utilized to serve as prompters to initiate the life history material, that is, to guide the participant as she ordered her thoughts. The guide included seven topical areas: [1] Current Housing Situation; [2] Prior Living Arrangements (timetable from birth); [3] Family and Friends; [4] Jobs and Income (work history); [5] Values; [6] The Future; and [7] The Meaning of Home. The areas were not meant to be mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. They were designated to reveal the effects of external events upon the internal experience of the individual.19

The purpose is to establish the process whereby the personal circumstances recounted in the account were interpreted by the respondent, so as to produce the actions related in the account. Here particular attention is paid to the temporal sequences of events, the social contexts in which they occurred, their interpretation by the individual, and how all this led her to believe and behave as she did. An underlying assumption of this strategy is that an analysis of the
individual personal circumstances is necessary to reconstruct the reality of a social scene as it existed for her at some point in time. 20

The interview guide was consistent with Young's guidelines for life histories and covered essentially the life cycle. 21 What was of utmost importance was for the interviewee to express how she felt and how she interpreted situations. The objective was for her to take control of the interview situation and talk freely. 22 It was important to have her structure her accounts and to introduce material she considered relevant.

The Interview Guide and prompting questions can be found in Appendix B.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of life history materials were constantly held in check by triangulation (in-depth interviewing and participant observation) and by the longitudinal nature, as well as the in-depthness of the observations. Burgess felt that "the best guaranty of the reliability of a document is the degree of spontaneity, freedom, and release which a person enjoys in writing or in telling his own story." 23 Thus, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee was critical. One of the goals sought in this research was authentic communication, a concept taken from existential sociology, that is, that the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer was based on reciprocal interaction. 24 Ferrarotti argues that as knowledge becomes a mutually shared
knowledge, it becomes more profound and objective as it becomes integrally and intimately subjective.25

Denzin has written extensively on the validity and reliability of life history materials, and Kidder has provided an analysis of how participant observation satisfies criteria of internal, external, construct, and statistical conclusion validity.26

Pre-Testing

While preparing the interview guide, the researcher conducted pretests with a homeless woman, referred by one of the informants. This provided information on the nature and timing needed for the sessions as well as the utility of the referral network.

Definitions of Important Terms

The most important term to be defined is homelessness. As reviewed in Chapter Two, there are many definitions, depending on what purposes the definition is sought. The definition used for this study encompassed a broad range of situations.

A homeless woman was defined as a female person, eighteen years of age or older, who:

1) had no fixed place of residence; or
2) was living in a shelter (so designated for homeless persons); or
3) was living in tents, alleys, doorways, or other hidden sites; or
4) was 'doubling-up' in such precarious arrangements that threatened mental or physical immediate well-being.
Life histories were to denote accounts of a person's life as delivered by the person herself. The account may or may not be supplemented by other data. Furthermore, a life history need not cover the entire life span, but must include the person's "own story" and a sequence of past experiences and situations.

Gathering Life Histories

The data was collected through a series of in-depth, topically focused, unstructured, tape-recorded interviews. A total of eighty interview sessions were held with the fifteen participants. This produced 112 hours of taped interaction. The research documented each woman's status for at least a six-month period. The location of the interviews was mutually decided and took place during daylight hours in public parks, quiet restaurants, or while driving in the car.

Great care was taken in relation to entering into relationships and maintaining them, as well as ending relationships. The Letter of Introduction carefully outlined the research expectations and stated that a small honorarium or gift would be given to each participant in appreciation of her time. This subject was handled very delicately and in accordance with each unique situation. Meals and transportation were provided during the course of the interviews as a means of establishing and reinforcing the relationship. Furthermore, time was spent with each participant outside the interview sessions.

Approximately 413 hours were spent in the field, which included key informant interviews, participant observation, and life history interview sessions.
Procedures of Analysis

The tape recordings were transcribed into written format and served, along with the relevant observations as the data for this study. The goal of analysis can be stated as follows:

The analysis of life histories does not primarily aim at individual particularities, but seeks to unravel what general (or generalizable) elements they contain. By representing individual life histories, the biographical method is meant to give access to the reality of life of social aggregates (strata, classes, cultures, etc.).

In general, the analysis sought to develop concepts, especially as relevant to the theoretical perspectives, to suggest hypotheses, and to secure greater understanding of the social processes and meaning of being a homeless woman. Blumer discusses two analytic phases: exploration, followed by inspection. This is consistent with Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative analysis, described below. The collection of data and the delineation of categories and patterns occurred simultaneously. Glaser and Strauss refer to this as "the Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis." As they suggest:

If the data are collected by theoretical sampling at the same time that they are analyzed, then integration of the theory is more likely to emerge by itself. By joint collection and analysis, the sociologist is tapping to the fullest extent the in vivo patterns of integration in the data itself; questions guide the collection of data to fill in gaps and to extend the theory - and this is an integrative strategy.

The four stages of this procedure of analysis included:

1. Comparing incidents applicable to each category;
2. Integrating categories and their properties;
3. Delimiting the theory; and
4. Writing the theory.
This method of analysis was used for a number of reasons, the most important of which was for the purpose of delineating a developmental type theory and suggesting categories, properties, and hypotheses. That is, this method was especially suited to study processes, sequences, and changes. The units of analysis were not necessarily the individual women but rather meanings, participation, relationships, processes, and settings.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were carefully and honestly informed of the voluntary nature of the research and all expectations. The Letter of Introduction (see Appendix A) was mutually discussed before the study began. Participants were assured that their consent did not place them under any obligation to reveal particular information. This research respected the rights of the participants and the study was carried out with concern for their dignity and welfare.

Confidentiality was of utmost importance in this research. Verbal consent was obtained to assure each respondent full anonymity. An important part of the justification for verbal consent was that in many cases, the researcher did not know the respondent's real name or surname. In addition, many women, because of their situations or particular orientation, might have felt reluctant to reveal personal information if asked to formally reveal their full names in writing. Each participant was identified only by a code, and all names, as well as agency identifiers, were changed.
As stated in The Ohio State University *Digest of Human Subject Program Guidelines* (effective May, 1984), survey and interview procedures are exempt from review. On March 14, 1985, the Chairperson of the Social and Behavioral Science Human Subject Review Committee granted an exemption from review for this study.

**Limitations**

Although the factor of time was judged as feasible for the amount of data that would be garnered, more time for reflection and analysis would be ideal. However, that is the major purpose of the research questions, to guide and focus the study. The purpose was not to analyze all data in all possible ways, but to bear upon the research problem.

Another limitation lies where triangulation with other data sources was not possible. That is, for some participants, their life histories only consisted of their accounts. Again though, this did not invalidate any life history. Internal consistency served as an important validity check. Furthermore, this distinction is currently under debate. Observational data augmented all life histories, and again the primary focus was how that person defined her life experiences.

Finally, the processual and perhaps tentative nature of the data should be emphasized. Thomas and Znaniecki's concluding remarks are very pertinent to this study of homeless women, who are subject to either the media's or the public's wrath or pity, but rarely to their understanding.
Our work does not pretend to give any definite and universally valid sociological truths, nor to constitute a permanent model of sociological research; it merely claims to be a monograph, as nearly complete as possible under the circumstances, of a limited social group at a certain period of its evolution, which may suggest studies of other groups, more detailed and more perfect methodologically, thus helping the investigation of modern living societies [homeless people] to rise above its present stage of journalistic impressionism ... 32 (emphasis added)
Notes to Chapter III


2 Ibid., p. i.


4 Ibid., p. 220.


10 Ibid.


12 Ibid., p. 3.

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16 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 65.


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25 Ibid.


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CHAPTER IV
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY POPULATION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the relevant sociodemographic characteristics of the fifteen women in the study population. The characteristics of age, race, education, occupation, family structure, income, as well as the relevant data regarding their homelessness will be reported. Sampling sources will be discussed in order to provide documentation of how the study population was built. Finally, brief case histories will be presented.

Age

A forty-six year range is represented, with the youngest participant at 19 years of age and the eldest at 65 years. The mean age is calculated at 37 years, and the median at 35 years. Six women (40%) were between the ages of 18 and 29; three (20%) were in their thirties; three (20%) were in the forties; one (6.7%) was in the mid-fifties; and two were (13.3%) in their sixties. The sample standard deviation is 14.9 years, reflecting the wide range.

Race

Five women or 33 percent of the sample are Black women and ten or 66 percent are Caucasian women, including three of Appalachian descent.
**Education**

Eight participants (53.3%) have completed a high school education; three (20%) have not. Three women (30%) have completed some college, and one (6.7%) has a baccalaureate degree and has completed some graduate work.

**Occupation**

At the inception of the study, nine women (60%) were not in the labor market as they were rearing children, were disabled, or were retired. Five (33%) were unemployed and seeking employment in factories, food services, housekeeping, dishwashing, and other employment openings they could fit into. One is currently a teacher. Other occupations previously held by those retired or disabled included secretary, practical nurse, nurse aid, cook, dishwasher, and various military service positions.

**Family Structure**

Only one participant was married and living with her husband and children, while three (20%) were separated and six (40%) were divorced. Five (33%) had never been married. Seven women (47%) had children with them and four had adult children or, in the case of one person, a child not in her custody. Thus, approximately half of the study group had children with them while homeless.
Income

At the initiation of the study, only one person was receiving income from employment. Six were receiving public assistance (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), two were receiving SSI (Supplemental Security Income for elderly, mentally or physically disabled), and six had no funds from any source.

At the end of the study period, three had found low wage employment, one started receiving SSI, and one began receiving a small pension from her previous employer. Thus, their income sources as of January, 1986 were as follows: four from employment (one professional, two domestic labor, one menial labor); six from public assistance; three from SSI, one from a private pension; and one was not receiving any income.

It is important to note that these statuses regarding income sources are very precarious, as many other changes took place from the beginning of the study to what is reported above. For example, one woman was laid off from employment three times and periodically received public assistance for her family between the study initiation and termination, when she had obtained a temporary job. Between jobs are gaps of no income (for at least one month) until public assistance will be reinstated. Then employment may be found again.

Furthermore, many who are receiving income may be paying debts or paying 'obligations,' as in the case of one SSI recipient who gives 63 percent of her monthly income to her mother for care of her son or as 'rent,' whenever she wants to sleep there.
Finally, because income amounts are not reported, it must be emphasized that all, with the exception of one person, remained, despite any employment, well below the poverty level. Public assistance in Ohio is less than 50 percent of what the State itself determines to be the minimum necessary for survival. Even for those employed (many times only seasonally), the minimum wage has not been adjusted for a 20 percent inflation increase since 1981.

Homeless Status

Like income sources, homelessness is dynamic. One may move to other living arrangements out of desperation, only to become homeless again in a few weeks. Or one may move to another shelter. Although employment seems like the path out of homelessness, the wages may not be enough to secure housing. Or one may be moving out of homelessness only during periods of employment. These are some of the situations encountered in the data. Other situations include cycles of psychiatric hospitalization followed by shelter stays, or stays with friends or family until the next hospitalization.

Table 1 provides a summary of the homeless status of the participants during the study period, roughly from mid-July, 1985 to mid-January, 1986.
Table 1. Housing Disposition During Study Period
July, 1985 to January, 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation at Study Initiation</th>
<th>Changes</th>
<th>Changes</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Homeless</td>
<td>Housed</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Homeless</td>
<td>Housed</td>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Homeless (Different Locations)</td>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Almost Homeless</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 reveals, during the study period nine women (60%) changed their status. Five moved into apartments or homes (as renters), as roommates (including with a family member), or as boarders, while four moved into housing where they would be assuming all responsibilities.

The move out of homelessness was for the majority, one or two steps, but for one family it involved periods of stays in motels, in the car, and as boarders in an exhortionate situation before securing housing. Another woman had to move from one shelter to another to avoid a life threatening situation before moving into housing.

Table 2 reveals the housing situations prior to the current one when the study began.
Table 2. Prior Living Arrangements
Before Current Location At Study Initiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior Arrangement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Shelters(^1)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Spouse (^2)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Family (of origin)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Relatives/Friends</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Abode</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) including periods of no shelter at all (e.g., living under bridges)
\(^2\) including common law spouses

Approximately one-third of the study group were already in a definite homeless predicament before the study began. Another 20 percent were next in line, living in difficult situations with relatives and friends. The remaining 46 percent were newly homeless when the study began.

Length of Homelessness

Table 3 provides data on the length of the time the women were homeless as of mid-January, 1986. The range is from two months to five years. The average is just under one year (11.14 months), while the median is five months. The outlier scores are three and five years, representing two of the five women who are still homeless.
Table 3. Approximate Length of Time Homeless
January, 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Months</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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**TOTAL** 14

* Still homeless at end of study period.

Note: In some cases, months are rounded to nearest half-month. One case not applicable.

**Sampling Sources**

Four of the participants (27%) were referred to the researcher by four persons in the key informant network. Two informants represented agencies which provide direct services to homeless persons, and two represented neighborhood agencies in two different low-income areas of the city, where staff members were aware of homeless women and others in housing distress. Three participants (20%) were asked to participate by the researcher after relationships had been established through volunteer work at a shelter for homeless women and children. The remaining eight participants (53%) were selected through the six months of participant observation at another shelter for adult homeless women (without children).
The guiding principle in selection of participants was social criteria, to insure a wide variety of participants in terms of age, education, family structure, and other experiences. The critical factor was the relationships established during the volunteer time at the one shelter on two occasions, and the volunteer time (as participant observation) at the other shelter over a six month period. More details will be discussed as each case is presented below.

**Brief Case Histories**

The following descriptions are to provide introductions to the types of situations represented in the study, especially their processual nature. Significant events or ideas as expressed by the women will be noted. Names, of course, are fictional.

Celia is a 25 year old Black woman, the mother of four young children, who became homeless upon separation from her husband. He had recently moved to Columbus from another state because of a job transfer (white collar employment). She was previously enrolled in college, and felt as though she gave up everything to join her husband. They were having marital problems and, being new in Columbus, she had no support system established here.

The point of homelessness occurred when she decided to leave her husband. She sought emergency housing for herself and for the four children (including a newborn), and from there she moved to a shelter for homeless families. Shelter life was very new and difficult, especially the rules and regimentation. The other women at the shelter expressed surprise upon learning that she was married and that the children were all from that marriage. Thus she felt distanced from many of them.

Celia had never been on public assistance and wished to go back to college and become independent. In the meantime, however, she was encouraged to apply for assistance to secure an income. After approximately two months, she secured rental housing with a friend. At the end of the research period the disposition of her marriage remained unresolved.
Erma has been homeless for at least three years, and has stayed in many different types of shelters. When a shelter wasn't available, she slept under bridges, in alleyways, and other hidden places. She is a 49 year old Caucasian woman who has been divorced for some time, and has two grown children who live elsewhere. Her work history includes military service and a variety of experiences in food services, housekeeping, and what she describes as "business and professional" jobs.

Exactly what the circumstances are surrounding her homelessness, she chooses not to reveal, except that it is not unrelated to her divorce and some experiences which occurred many years ago on the military base where she lived with her husband, who was also in the military. She receives no income from any source. During the course of the study she found minimum wage employment, which enabled her to move into an apartment. However, when she terminated her employment, she couldn't afford the rent and had to move back into a shelter.

Ida is a 35 year old Black woman who is divorced and the mother of three children. Her home was in a small town, in a state bordering Ohio, where she worked in a factory and had accumulated many possessions, was able to enroll her children in parochial schools, and in her words was "middle class."

When she was laid off and had exhausted the available unemployment compensation, she decided to move to a large city to seek employment. In addition, problems with her 16 year old son and the juvenile corrections system were mounting to the point that her lawyer advised her to leave the area. Her son stayed with her mother, and the two other children and Ida left for Columbus, Ohio. Ida's 20 year old male cousin accompanied them, and the four of them arrived in Ohio during the winter.

They stayed in a motel for the first four months and, at one point, Ida was working two jobs, one in food service and one in a local factory, to stay afloat. Later, during this time, she was sharing the room with a boarder to help defray expenses. She felt empathy for this fellow homeless person, a male transvestite, who was supporting himself as a female prostitute. This arrangement did not work out, as expenses were not shared equally, and Ida began to worry about the welfare of her children. The motel manager began to impose restrictions as to the use of the telephone; thus Ida, her cousin, and the children sought shelter elsewhere.

When she was laid off and had exhausted her savings, she could no longer afford motels. She could not make use of the adult shelter as no children were permitted, and she could not enter the family shelter as children over 12 were not permitted. So many a night the car doubled as a shelter. This proved to be very difficult, as she had to avoid being noticed by the police who could potentially contact the local Childrens' Services Bureau about her not providing adequate
shelter for the children. This would have been devastating, as it was her family that kept her going.

In the meantime, she finally applied for public assistance, after walking out of the welfare office three times before out of humiliation. Out of desperation, she contacted a woman who she met at an emergency shelter where she once stayed, who had offered her home to Ida. This turned out to be a dangerous situation of extortion, because the woman was demanding 69 percent of Ida's expected monthly income on public assistance (leaving Ida with $90.00 per month for a family of three), and unlimited use of Ida's car. Ida was only given one room to be used for four people. During the day she and her family had to stay away from the home. This woman also had others living with her under similar arrangements. Following this, the car had to double as a home.

Ida turned to a church group for assistance, and was vouchered into motels. It took well over two months for public assistance to begin. Without the church group assistance, her family would have been on the street. Indeed, Ida was an astute observer of "street people" and many befriended her and were generous to her children. After seven months of homelessness, and with the assistance of the church group, she moved into a one bedroom apartment. She was recalled back to work, only to be laid off again, this time indefinitely. She has been able to keep the apartment because of the church assistance.

She is again waiting for public assistance to resume, and has secured only temporary employment. The apartment is obviously overcrowded, but even more problematic are electrical problems and other structural code violations reflecting landlord neglect. She lost all of her and her family's possessions (furniture, appliances, clothes) because she couldn't pay for the storage fees while homeless in Ohio.

Susan is a forty year old Caucasian woman, who became homeless upon leaving an abusive relationship that she was involved in for 17 years. It was a difficult situation to leave after so many years, but her home had literally become a "prison." She survived many life-threatening situations. With the support of her sister, friend, and lawyer she planned an elaborate escape, and was homeless for almost three months before finding affordable housing where she felt safe. It was a more difficult process than she thought it would be, and living at a shelter was a completely new experience for her, sometimes described as a "zoo."

She had grown up on a farm and still is very devoted to her parents, who are struggling, especially after her father suffered a stroke. She is an artist and teacher and has completed post-baccalaureate coursework. She was fortunate to have resources to hire a lawyer, rent storage space for her belongings, and have a job that she could take 'vacation time' from.
Wendy, who is a 26 year old Caucasian woman, still grieves for her sister who committed suicide a year ago. Wendy's most recent life has been a cycle alternating between psychiatric wards, homeless shelters, friends, and her family. She has attempted suicide many times, and she says that she suffers from depression, insomnia, and nervousness. Life is an incredibly painful experience for her. She has not been able to get the help that she so desperately seeks and, after her medical insurance allowance is used, each private hospital recommends the state psychiatric hospital as an alternative. She has been through shock treatments and is prescribed many different psychotrophic medications. She has been in the state hospital and does not ever wish to return.

She has a nine year old child, who is in her mother's custody, which is why she attempts to stay with her family. The household includes her mother, stepfather, half-sister and her child, Wendy's son, and niece and nephew (children of her deceased sister), who reside in a three bedroom home. It is a very unsupportive living arrangement for her, but she has no where else to live and is uncertain of her ability to take care of herself. She helps support the household monthly with $200.00 out of her $315.00 disability assistance, and would not be permitted to stay there if she didn't contribute. She may only stay there one week out of the month, but nevertheless, must relinquish the money in order to have access to her son.

Next month she may try to search for other living arrangements with 100 percent of her assistance, instead of 37 percent. Her life has been one of rejection by family and by the social system. As she often says, "My life is fucked up."

Naomi, a 38 year old Appalachian woman, was homeless for two-and-one-half months before moving in to live with her sister. Her and her husband moved to Columbus from a small town on the Ohio River, and were staying with another couple. Naomi has a nervous condition and was involved in a support group which met daily.

Her living situation became intolerable when her husband and his friends would not let her eat (especially critical as she has diabetes), and were threatening to confine her in a room. She separated from her husband (who later became homeless himself), and moved into a shelter and continued to attend support group meetings. She was in the process of filing for disability assistance (SSI) and was living on her monthly food stamp allocation. During this time her sister was in the process of securing a two bedroom apartment. Naomi is now separated from her husband, receiving SSI, and living with her sister.

Betty celebrated her fifty-fifth birthday at a shelter where she had been living, when her funds ran out and she left her apartment. She is still homeless, but since has relocated twice to other shelters. She views her homelessness as voluntarily imposed. She
reared her three small children after her divorce, and had a fifteen year career as a secretary in a major corporation. After she was laid off, she worked in numerous other offices using her clerical skills. She later sold her home due to a family crisis and moved to an apartment.

She views her downward mobility as beginning at that point and being a "ten year slide downward." Basically, she explained, she is tired of secretarial jobs and working in offices. She would like to make a career change and work on a part-time basis, but there seems to be little opportunity for a new and completely different career for a woman of her age. She enrolled in the local job training program and completed a math course at a technical college as required by the program, but afterwards there were no jobs available that were suited to her needs. She was able to begin receiving a pension but it was very small and, after paying rent at the shelter, she only has about $60.00 per month for cigarettes, food, and other necessities.

She lives in two worlds, she says, one when visiting her adult children, and the other as a homeless woman. Her last employer has invited her to come back to work, and she would, only because of the hardship of living in poverty, but it is not something that compels her, that is, "being the low man on the totem pole and having no power over any situation." She feels that she has "dropped out of society" (and feels shame, as she says that idleness is only acceptable through wealth and not poverty), and questions the very meaning of life.

Betty discussed many experiences and shared thoughts relevant to the sociological areas of work, alienation, aging, and the family, especially what's been termed the empty-nest experience of women after rearing children.

Andrea celebrated her twentieth birthday during the course of the study. She was living with her father and sister in an affluent suburb and has a background unlike many homeless women. She was in the process of repeating her senior year in high school, but was unable to work out an arrangement where she could attend school for a half-day and work for the other half, as she had done the previous year. She has made some very important observations about social class and doesn't aspire to be like many of her classmates.

When her father remarried, she felt a change in their relationship and experienced a strained relationship with her stepmother. She became homeless when her parents called the police to remove her from her home. She was taken to a shelter and could only visit her home, and had to telephone first. She was without any income until recently when she secured a minimum wage job which, to her dismay, does not include any employee benefits.

During the course of her homelessness she became involved with a man twenty years her senior. She had to move to another shelter when he became violent and threatened to kill her. After six months of
homelessness, she and a new friend from one of the shelters moved into housing together. The house they live in is infested with mice and cockroaches, and they are negotiating with their landlord to fix many of the other structural problems with the house.

She continues to keep in contact with her father, and feels that their relationship has improved somewhat.

Denise is a 32 year old Black divorcee raising one child. She has some college training and has served in the Air Force as a communications specialist. Her story was the subject of a feature article in the local newspaper, and she was also interviewed by a national news affiliate for a program on children in poverty. She came to Columbus and was living with her uncle prior to becoming homeless. After approximately seven months, she moved from a shelter as she secured employment partially as a result of the newspaper story.

A full life history was not obtained as she decided not to be a participant after two interview sessions which covered three topics.

Debbie, age 19, Caucasian, lived previously in institutional or foster home settings and, after 18 years of age, was not social structurally related anymore with the County Children's Services staff. She had interacted with those persons while in the custody of the Child Welfare Agency for approximately eight years of her life.

As an adult, she lived briefly on her own in an apartment while supporting herself waitressing in an ice cream parlor, but later moved in with a friend. She was briefly married (for one week) and then divorced. Before living at a shelter, she was staying in a motel with a boyfriend. At the initiation of the research she had recently learned of her pregnancy and was living at a shelter, as mentioned above. After a period of approximately six weeks she moved in with some companions and within a month, rented a room in a house where the owner was also a companion and seemed genuinely concerned with her welfare, according to her and others' accounts.

She regularly attends meetings of an alcoholism support group. This seems to be an important part of her life, although she never discussed it in any detail. Some of her acquaintances are from this group. She was concerned about being a good parent and providing a home for her child, because she felt as though she had never had one herself. She gave birth to the child at the end of the study period and was residing in her companion's home, where she was renting a room, as mentioned above.

After the second interview session, Debbie's interest in participating declined. She cancelled future sessions as she had doctor's appointments regarding her pregnancy, and also had been having a difficult time living at the shelter. However, the researcher continued to interact with her and documented her experiences.
Sheila, a 29 year old Black woman, who grew up in the deep south, separated from her husband, because of his "clowning" (drinking), among other reasons. She and her four children (age 2 to 14) moved north into her sister and brother-in-law's home.

A total of twelve people, between the two families, were living in a three bedroom home. Her homelessness stemmed around the precarious nature of this arrangement. She lived in fear of her brother-in-law, especially as relations soured between her and her sister. Her brother-in-law controlled who used the kitchen and when, even though she provided for the entire household with her public assistance. She did not feel safe in the house and from daybreak to sundown, sat outside on the front porch.

She had difficulty in securing housing without a credit history and it took her three months to find a landlord who would rent to her. She moved to a three bedroom apartment in a neighborhood she describes as "bad" (drug dealing, domestic violence) and keeps to herself. It took a few months to secure a refrigerator and stove.

Loretta is a 65 year old Caucasian woman who was homeless for three months before finding housing, and is now homeless again. She was previously evicted from her housing and then was raped in the next place where she lived, and was afraid to go back. Living in the shelter was especially difficult, as she was the eldest and resented being called 'grandma' and felt isolated and left out.

She often mentioned her three previous marriages and a child she bore almost forty years ago, who she never knew. She said she lost custody when she had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. She reflects on her childhood as being difficult because she was bedridden with illnesses and she has mentioned growing up in a violent home with little affection.

During her adult years she was a licensed practical nurse and at one time lived in Washington, D.C. and described her life as glamorous. She lives now from her SSI (Supplemental Security Income), and prior to turning 65 she had no health insurance. At one point (before receiving SSI) her rent was $100.00 and her public assistance grant was $101.00.

After three months of shelter living, she moved into a newly built public housing apartment building where at first she was overcome with joy. "Miracles do happen!", she exclaimed. But three months later she moved back into the shelter. She was very happy to be back among familiar faces. To an outsider this may not seem desirable, but apparently she felt more at home in a shelter (with people, structure, supervision, yet independence), than in an apartment where she knew no one. Her limited funds may limit her from moving into a retirement type of community, where she wouldn't be isolated, and would have caring staff to relate with.
Only a partial life history was obtained, as she wanted to postpone the rest of the interviews. She later remarked that she does not like to talk about these things as she would become too worked up. However, the researcher spent the same amount of time interacting with her.

Lianna is a 20 year old Black single parent of two small children. She has lived in poverty all her life. For much of her life she lived in foster homes, group homes, and other institutional settings since she was separated from her alcoholic mother by the County Children Services Bureau. She said that her past (all the places she's lived, some sixteen different settings), used to bother her, but it doesn't anymore.

She had been living with relatives, and when that became impossible, she stayed in one of the inner city hotels with a voucher she received from a church group. Her two year old asked her if they could 'go home' and she had to say, "We don't have a home." She then stayed in a shelter for two months and at the end of the study period was planning to share housing with a friend. She would like to be able to finish high school and "work in an office."

Roberta has been homeless for at least five years. At age 60, she found it difficult to secure the employment which she was desperately seeking throughout the study period. She was seeking employment mainly in food service, housekeeping, or light factory work and managed to find employment, but only temporarily, because of the problem of transportation (she must depend solely on public transportation), and the speed of work demanded by many employers. She actively sought work daily and traveled by bus and foot to all the employment offices in the city and to all the potential jobs she was referred to for interviews.

This schedule was strenuous and she experienced problems with fatigue (including difficulty in sleeping in a shelter), swollen and sore feet, and broken blood vessels due to her sensitive skin. She was well aware of her physical needs, especially proper nutrition, which she felt was related to her skin problems.

She said that her homelessness was only incidental to her real problem, which she would only discuss in fragments or by describing related incidents. She cried when discussing the research objectives, as she said after repressing so deeply, for so long, she didn't think she would be able to relay her life history. She said she really didn't know if it was possible for her to be honest, as she had related to people mostly through forms and applications. She felt weak and often expressed the desire to talk once she felt stronger and "the mist clears my brain."

She lived in a shelter and left after an altercation and moved to a church sponsored shelter where she also was given employment cleaning the shelter. She has a very unique history, being a Jewish
woman, and has lived outside the United States for portions of her life.

Jessie is a 43 year old woman who grew up in the hills of Kentucky and West Virginia, and dreams of having a home there. She has been poor all her life and, after finishing junior high school, had to quit and help raise the other children in the family. She never knew her father, who was killed in the coal mines, and was raised by her grandmother. Her husband is an unemployed carpenter, who was injured at one of his last jobs.

Jessie and her husband have a very strong relationship. One of the primary reasons for moving to Ohio was the public assistance provision for intact two-parent families, whereas in Kentucky they would have to live separately to qualify. Jessie has worked as a maid, housekeeper, and babysitter to help support the family while her husband works at odd jobs. Their eldest son (of four children) joined the National Guard to help the family and now has his own family to support. The family has moved several times and has lived in a poor neighborhood in Columbus for about a year.

At the inception of the study they were behind in their rent, were still making payments on the rental deposit, and were waiting to receive public assistance. Because the threat of homelessness loomed large, and because representation of the processual nature of becoming homeless was important to the study, Jessie was included as a study participant (e.g., almost homeless). She feels as though she has never had a home, and is struggling to maintain the housing that she has. Her housing would easily be classified as substandard and overcrowded. "It's a firetrap," Jessie says, "but where would we go if the place is shut down?"

Things took a turn for the worst when Jessie suffered three heart attacks shortly before the study began. She was unsure of how long she would have to live, and she and her family were confronted with this possibility. She has severe heart disease and throughout the study was in and out of a hospital and in the process of applying for disability assistance. By the end of the study period, she had secured the disability assistance and was seeing a new doctor and on new medications. She has had intensive experiences with doctors, the welfare system, and has many thoughts on today's poverty in America.
CHAPTER V
ON BECOMING AND BEING HOMELESS.

Introduction

This chapter will explore the social life-world of homeless women by focusing on the research questions of how the study participants explained the nature of their homelessness, that is, how the experience was accounted for. Their feelings about their situations will be examined as well as the topics that were seen as problematic. The relevant data regarding family and work structures will be integrated throughout the chapter.

Comparative Overview of Homeless Situations

The particular situation of each study participant has already been described in Chapter Four. The situational contingencies can be summarized as follows. Foremost was the dominance of inadequate income which played a significant role in their homelessness. Homelessness is an extreme form of destitution. Other problems notwithstanding, the absence of monetary subsistence prohibited the women from securing immediate housing and services. The study population was representative of the bottom strata of society. Only one woman held a professional degree. The remainder were either from lower middle class, working class, or lower class families. However,
the problem of inadequate income meshed with family and work structures. The way problems were integrally related was especially significant in explaining female homelessness.

A broad array of life situations were represented. While for one woman inadequate income represented the primary and dominant factor in keeping her, her husband, and the family constantly on the edge of homelessness, for five participants domestic violence or marital separation were the major precipitating events. Two of the younger women, one from a middle class family and one from a lower class family, were rejected by their families in a most literal and deliberate fashion. Another situation, common to two other young women, was an 'aging-out' from the guardianship of the county. That is, after turning eighteen and legally becoming adults, they went from a life of institutional and foster home care to beginning their adult lives homeless. The social and psychological aspects involved in the aging process, along with work alienation, were predominant for two of the near-elderly and elderly women. A family crisis coupled with long-term unemployment produced homelessness for one mother and her children. And for the two women in the study representative of prolonged homelessness, deep social wounds and fears of persecution plagued them.

Regardless of these life situations, whether homelessness was almost incidental to the web of relationships broken long ago, or if homelessness was very recent, and perhaps even temporary, certain commonalities appeared in their accounts and descriptions of
Explaining Homelessness

Accounting for homelessness was explained by a progression of events. This progression was described in two different formats. One type of progression was from living a life in which one felt financially and socially secure, personally happy, and involved in a social world that could be described as normal, to a series of events, such as changes in the meaning of relationships, loss of employment, a family crisis, or usually a combination of such events, that resulted in homelessness. The other type of progression in the extreme is reflected by one woman's statement, "My whole life has been a tragedy." That is, homelessness represented yet another crisis in a series, or another more dramatic form of marginalization. There were a number of variations on this theme which shall be discussed later. But in general, the accounts were in one of these two formats.

In accounts representing the first scenario the women presented their former lives in great detail, particularly with regard to how 'good things were'. Their self-presentation often seemed dramatic, that is, former lives seemed to be presented in a somewhat exaggerated and idealized fashion in comparison to their homeless situations.

For example, Celia explained how "she gave up everything," to be with her husband, including a clerical job at a major movie studio, although she had only worked there three days. And Andrea often referred to her family prior to her father's remarriage:
The kind of home I like is being with your family and you're all working together. This is what I had before he got married. We [her sister and father] all wanted a nice house. We all worked together and we saved together. We cleaned together. We did all kinds of things together. We were all happy there. We all got along.

Ida elaborated extensively on her life before becoming homeless. She had accumulated material possessions which held a great deal of meaning to her. Out of necessity, however, she pawned her wedding ring and CB radio, and sold her television. The rest of her possessions were put in storage. She was not able to retrieve any of them.

And believe it or not, I had quite a bit of stuff. I was married most of my life and my husband always had a good job. So we acquired quite a few things. Like I have handblown crystal. I have lead crystal. I got dinette sets. I have things you've seen in hotels, huge plaques, large gold mirrors with the gold leaves, and the clocks with the chains. I've got it. I bought it from hotels when they were redecorating and employees had first choice before they had public openings ... I've got wicker chairs and all this, wicker tables. And a big old owl lamp to go with my wicker. When I moved into my apartment, it wasn't going to be a sleaze bag. It was going to be superb, and that's what I did. That was my goal.

For these women, homelessness was a totally new experience and shocking in comparison to the lives they led before. In many reports such persons are referred to as the new poor, as their poverty originated from the historically high levels of unemployment and permanent job loss. There is a clear identifiable pattern of downward mobility for these women.

For other women whose poverty has been chronic and life-long their accounts of homelessness reflect other periods of homelessness or being near homeless. For example, Jessie explained that she has never had a home:
I never had a home except for when I was, say from eleven years old down to four, which that was my grandmother and grandfather's home. I was raised by them since my dad got killed in the coal mine when I was four. And that was my only home I had. After that, I went to live with my mother as she got remarried and the only reason I went to stay with them then was because she had extra kids coming along, and I was the oldest and I had to help raise them. I always wanted to leave home then, cause it was never happy. My mother never really wanted me after my father died, so my grandmother and grandfather was my real mother and father. When times got rough with my stepfather, I would go back to my grandmother's. That was my only sanctuary away from all the troubles and stuff like that. My life has never been really pleasant.

Lianna related some twenty-six places she's lived during her twenty years. Only one early foster placement ever felt "like home," she said. Wendy's cycles of psychiatric hospitalization began ten years ago when she was sixteen. Such examples reflect a further marginalization of their already low social status.

Two analytic concepts emerged from these data. One, that homelessness was conceived as a series of events or a slide. Both Ida and especially Betty used this term to characterize the process of becoming homeless. Regardless of the depth of the slide, whether it was a steep downfall or further marginalization, conceptually a slide was meant to indicate a continuous flow of events which compound each future event, and culminated in homelessness, representing a symbolic avalanche. In addition a slide may imply a powerlessness to actively negotiate the process. For example, an individual has little if any control over a company layoff; a person labeled mentally ill has little credibility; a nineteen year old woman barred from her home has little recourse. Thus, a slide not only implies a series of events, but also a powerlessness to affect the process.
An interesting variant on the slide theme was found in the accounts of Erma and Roberta. Both had been homeless over a prolonged period of time (three and five years, respectively). Although they were from completely different backgrounds and ten years apart in age (fifty and sixty, respectively), they expressed similar explanatory accounts of their homelessness. Both felt that their homelessness in a certain way was incidental to their real problem, on which they never elaborated. Being homeless was in part related to their being persecuted and discriminated against. Both were very evasive about who or what is or was persecuting them, yet it was clear that some wrongdoing had occurred and they were suffering as a result.

The second analytic concept could be entitled a critical juncture. Rather than a slide, homelessness represented a crisis point or critical juncture in their lives. This was exemplified most clearly in the cases where marital separation and domestic violence were the immediate precipitating causal factors in becoming homeless. In contrast to being powerless to negotiate the process, they deliberately made a decision to change their situations, with homelessness being an undesirable result, or temporary state until resources could be gathered to begin anew. The accounts of Naomi, Celia, Sheila, and especially Susan, all revealed this structure.

Susan, who had to plan an escape with the utmost care is illustrative. She was leaving a violent relationship and the only way out was for her to leave her own apartment, which she was sharing with her abuser, and to get a legal protection order.

I actually started preparing to leave about eight months before I did it ... I just started planning what it would
take to get out. I saved my money. I hoarded my vacation time and sick time and personal time at work. I had movers out to look at my apartment and tell me how much it would cost to walk in one morning, if everything was just out like normal, pack it up and leave and take it and put it in storage.

My lawyer sat down and told me the extreme measures I was going to have to do. I kept telling myself, no, no, there has to be an easy way out. There has to be an easier way out. Here I'd lived in this apartment all these years. I was paying the rent. But I was going to have to leave if I wanted out of this situation. And I remember that day when she got done telling me that I was going to have to get a protection order, I was going to have to move out, I was going to have to disappear for a while, at least until the final protection hearing. I can remember leaving her office that day, and I couldn't even feel my feet touch the ground. It was almost like I had ceased to be a person...

We [she and her sister] set a date. I got a storage space. I called the movers. I told them what time to be there and that I needed to move quickly. And that week, I tried to act like everything was normal, but that was the hardest week of my life. And that morning when my boyfriend left, I got up and started packing my clothes. My sister and friend came over and we started packing. At 8:30 am the movers came and by 12:30 pm, I was out of my apartment. And then I called the shelter and said I was ready to come if they had a place for me. And the lady said, "You've made your decision to go? You don't want to go back?" I said, "No, there's no going back now."

In sum the accounts were structured around themes of a slide or critical juncture. Both types of accounts revealed a social downfall, from being a part of society to being outside of it. This was the most prevalent feeling of being homeless which shall be discussed below.

Experiencing Homelessness

Even for those who have experienced homelessness for long periods, and for those who have lived meagerly most of their lives, homelessness was still a new world, a world that was continually experienced anew. As mentioned previously, for those whose social
downfall was steep, they were thrust into inhabiting a new social world, quite different from the one they came from. Why was it a new world?

Homelessness represented a different social reality than the dominant one, where people live in residences, hold jobs, and raise families. Homeless people are deviants from this taken-for-granted world of normal life. The vast majority in society have a place to rest, to sleep, to eat, to store belongings, to think, to create, and to be away from others. Because homeless persons may have to carry belongings with them, may have to dress in clothes that serve functional purposes rather than expressive purposes, and must use public places, such as parks, streets, libraries, bus stops, waiting rooms, restaurants, stores, or churches to rest or meet human needs, they are deviant from societal norms.

No matter how well homelessness is camouflaged, homeless persons feel deviant, for they adhere to the same dominant values and norms. They are cognizant then of two social worlds, the normal one, and the homeless one. This feeling of abnormality shall be explored in further detail at a later point. It is indicative though of a new social reality, marked by new meanings, a different time orientation, and a different sense of self.

What is the social life-world then of homelessness? By the accounts of the fifteen study participants, it is constantly occupied by concerns regarding shelter, food, employment, income, health, and hygiene. Shelter life, that is, utilizing a shelter so designated for homeless persons was the predominant topic of conversation.
Homelessness is a world of various institutions, such as shelters, soup kitchens, and churches and the people who utilize them and organize them.

**Shelter and Street Life**

Living in a shelter is synonymous with what is meant by a new social reality. Shelter life means rules, regulations, curfews, work assignments, and exposure to an immense variety of people with whom one must learn to adapt. One cannot help but make comparisons to other institutions such as jails, mental hospitals and the almshouse of the eighteenth century, as there are so many similarities. Street life refers to a new neighborhood especially in regard to where the shelter was located, or in regard to what geographic areas one became familiar with as a result of being homeless.

Andrea never knew shelters existed until she was brought to one by the police the night she was banished from her home.

When I first walked in there, everybody told me that my eyes were bugging out of my head. I did not know anything of what it was like. I didn't knew what to expect. I never heard of the shelter before. I never heard of a food stamp. That's why they were all making fun of me.

Susan was expecting a quiet refuge from the violence she fled.

It isn't what I expected. I expected a nice quiet place where a woman who had been battered can get herself back together again and gather up courage to go out into the world. But what I found was a circus. It was a zoo. Cause there's alot of children. Women from all walks of life, all kinds of circumstances. It took alot of adjusting to get used to it ... The first three weeks were just hell. They were just hell ... But I'm real happy the place was there for me. It's just that I didn't quite understand that it would be a zoo ... It's like a world unto itself.
Betty had stayed at another shelter and was disappointed when they decided to no longer accept women. She had made comparative analyses and felt that she would not "last long at this shelter."

... I'm not going to last at this shelter. I lasted fine at the other, two-and-a-half months ... Here, in two weeks, I'm ready to blow my stack and say, "This is a terrible place to be." I don't want to be here.

Erma's comparative analysis yielded a positive rating for the one she was currently staying in.

I think this location ranks above most of the others I have seen over the past ten years. I am appreciative of the fact that the laundry facilities are free and available for use. I'm also appreciative of the fact that it does not have a religious regime to follow ... I have found this shelter to be less intrusive than most.

However Roberta spoke increasingly of the hostility she felt in the atmosphere.

I hate to be in the shelter. The whole atmosphere is ... I don't like it cause sometimes there are deliberate quarrels and unpleasantness ... Anyway, it's not a very conducive atmosphere.

Since Ida was not staying at a shelter she spent many days 'on the streets' as she referred to it. She came to know other homeless individuals and families and continued to form new opinions about 'street people' as well as adjustment to her own homelessness.

I've learned so much on the street, I mean, it's things you don't think about, things you don't even consider encountering in your life, until it happens. And when it happens, it's a whole other world. And I'm trying to figure out, well, like I said, you have to be accepted. If you aren't accepted, you may as well be sitting in an agency, because you're going to be treated the same way.

[How do you get accepted?]

I guess it's just in different manners. But you have to sort of weed yourself in. You know, let them know that you are for real. You're not a policeman or you're not someone
that's going to criticize and you're criticized alot, and they pick up on that quick. And they can pretty well pick up vibes if you're sincere or if you're not ... They sense it. But if you just let them know that you're genuine, and hey, I'm out here just like you are. I'm not here to take anything from you or anything, you can pretty well blend in. And when they see you around the different places, like the soup kitchens, they begin to know you and you sort of just move in. You just gradually work your way in.

Loss of Freedom and Dignity

One prevalent experience was the loss of freedom, because of shelter rules and the pervasiveness of their impoverishment. In a shelter one must constantly be on guard not to get into an argument, and be watchful that possessions are not stolen. Privacy is non-existent, and often the noise and language heard in a shelter offend sensibilities. One may have to wait in line to use the bathroom and shower, assuming that they are in working order, and one may not find them up to personal standards of cleanliness. Usually each shelter resident must complete a 'chore' as a condition to stay at the shelter. The types of chores and the distribution of chores were often topics of discussion.

Lianna:
It's hard with the constant chores cause they, like, slap you on the basement, and that's a real big basement, and you have to sweep and mop it.

[The whole basement?]

The whole basement, and you know, they just try to work you to death. They tell you, "This is for your own benefit, for when you get out on your own, to learn."

Susan:
There's chores to do, and like I said, it is a chore. It's like miles of hallway. It's cleaning up a bathroom after 30 or 40 people have used it. It's doing dinner dishes after all those kids and people. So they are chores, they are real chores.
Many shelters (especially those housing women) also use a demerit system to punish those who disobey rules, such as the nightly curfew or the daily chores.

Lianna:
Demerits are bad points against you. [For example,] I had until 11:00 to get the basement done and this certain staff came up to me and asked me, "Are you going to do the basement?" I said, "Yes, I am." And then the same staff came back and said, "Are you going to do the basement?" And I repeated, "Yes, I am." And she said, "You got two demerits." And it was just 10:30, and I could have got it done in 30 minutes.

... They ride my back, they expect too much from me. I don't mind cleaning, but they was trying to take it to the extreme. They had me on the bathrooms ... I had cleaned the one bathroom, and I used my own cleaning stuff, and I had the bathroom that smelled like pee, and I got the odor out of the bathroom. I cleaned that bathroom and then they put me right back on another bathroom ... They weren't rotating me, they was sticking me back on the bathrooms.

Susan:
It's hard to live your life if you have outside things going and arrange your life around the chores ... One time I got back late and I'm running trying to get back before curfew, and I'm thinking, I'm forty years old and I'm running to be in by curfew.

The loss of freedom was also exemplified by comparisons made to how they used to live, or what they would do if living in their own place.

Celia:
At home, you can do whatever you want. If you decide you want to clean your room up next, you clean your room up next. You want to do it tomorrow, you do it tomorrow. But up here, your chores have to be done before 11:00 am.

Sheila:
In my own house, I would clean up, I would cook, I just would enjoy myself knowing that I would have my freedom in my own house. In someone else's house you can't do the things that you want to do. I would just enjoy myself. I would be doing everything - cooking, cleaning, sewing, just everything ... When I get my house, I will fix it up, I will clean it up. I can lay down without feeling like I'm doing something
wrong. Here I can't lay down like in the daytime. And when I get my own house, I can lay down when I want to. I don't have to worry about looking and seeing if anybody is watching me. And when I'm talking on the phone, I won't have to worry about nobody peeping around the corner trying to listen.

Andrea:

I like my own privacy. I like to be able to just sit and think. But if you sit and think in the shelter, they'll ask you, "What's wrong? What's the matter?" "Nothing. I'm thinking." "What about?" I'm like, please! I like to just sit in a room by myself and just sit there and just look out the window. I like to do that kind of stuff. Just lay there for a while. Just peaceful. No noise. Listen. There's nothing. That's what I'm waiting for, my own little privacy space because these people are driving me up the wall.

I mean, I need my own bathroom again. I need to have my own shampoo. I mean, mine only. I don't need to put tape on it that says, "Andrea." I mean, I want my stuff to not have tape on it saying my name on it. I want to know that it's just mine, nobody's going to take it. I want to have my own little things. Not saying, "Can I have a bar of soap, please?" And they hand you the little Ivory. But it just gets ridiculous. I just want to have my own things and have my own privacy, and not have to walk around to different bathrooms finding one because I've got to go. I mean, my eyes were crossed this morning. I'm walking back and forth. "Dammit, can I have the bathroom? You've been in there too long. Get out." They ought to have meters on those things, I swear. They ought to make them pay to go in there. I mean, shoot, they're in there for hours.

I'd love to have my own privacy again. Like when I lived at home, I'd stay in my bedroom all the time. It was like I had my own little apartment. I had my bathroom right in there, and my bed and my TV and my stereo. I stayed in there all the time when I was home. Unless I was cleaning the house or mowing the lawn or eating dinner or stuff like that. I'd try to stay in there and read or do something, and just sit there. Even just sit there on the edge of the bed, no TV on, no radio on. I'd just sit there, and I liked it.

Another common experience was a loss of dignity from being homeless. This is really an all encompassing concept. Here the emphasis was on the human environment and the extent to which a person's unique qualities could be expressed, or where choice could be exercised in all areas of social life, especially in basic areas like
eating and sleeping. It is precisely in these areas where homeless persons have little control.

Celia:
I hate it there. It's not home at all. It's a long way from being home. I hate the fact that I'm here twenty-four hours a day. You know, you do your chores. They tell you when to get up, when to eat, when you have lunch, when you have dinner. It feels like a prison, to me it is, anyway. It's just very boring. They decide when it's time for your kids to go to bed. They even schedule your meals for you.

Being homeless is an embarrassing experience and some acutely felt the stigma. During the interview sessions Betty did not want to eat in a neighborhood where she used to live as she did not want anyone she knew to see her.

Ida also mentioned the possibility that her 'secret' would follow her and eventually she would meet someone who knew her when she was 'on the street'. She expressed the difficulties in maintaining pride while seeking public assistance, or while communicating with her uncle, or while at work.

[The first time requesting emergency assistance:]
I walked out. Cause there was just so many people waiting. I felt like, hey, I don't have to put up with this. So I'm thinking. I don't have to deal with this. You do. Bull! That's when the pride was still there and I felt like, hey, I'm somebody and I don't have to take a bunch of crap. Well, that changed.

[Receiving food:]
You either eat that or you eat nothing. They give you a doggie meal. They may go home and eat a steak and potato. And they've done their good duty for the day. I mean, you could give people a little ... Let them keep their pride. Pride doesn't cost anything. Nothing. And they strip you of it. That I have found out on the street. They try to strip you of everything you've got. Material things and your body, your mind.

[You mean the so-called people that help you?]
That's right. They strip you. Because they've put you in such a bind, either you're going to hold onto your pride and say the hell with it and stay in the car like I do sometimes or, a lot of people don't have a car choice, and you're going to go in and let them strip you, which I've done. You don't have very many choices. Now if it was just me, I'd stay in the shelters because I could get in the shelters. But with my kids, I can't get in the shelters. And I'm not gonna send my kids off somewhere and I stay some place else. It's bad enough Paul's over there and we're not together. A house that's divided will fall. No, he's not my son, but he's my family. He is my blood relative, and there is no way that I can keep going through being separated like this.

[Requesting help from an uncle:]

This is really hard for me to ask this man. He has sent me money since I've been here. And it's hard. It comes to the point that you are ashamed. Well, some people aren't, but for me, I'm sorry. I can't turn lose that part of my pride to ask anymore ... I didn't tell him about me being in the streets because I'm too ashamed. I am. Right now, I realize I have no control over it, but I am ashamed cause he just thinks that I'm doing superfine. Oh God, if he only knew.

[At a factory working:]

It's super hot. So all I can do is keep on walking back and forth to the water fountain. And people ask me stuff like, "Well, hey, we never see you eat." I tell them when it's this hot, I'm not hungry. Cause you're too ashamed to say, "I'm broke. I'm busted. I have no money." And then, every once in a while, somebody will come over there and buy you a Pepsi or something, and then you feel like, hey, they bought me one, I sure would like to be able to repay, you know, buy them a Coke or something. You can't do that. You just can't do it.

Social Welfare Experiences

As mentioned previously a major part of the homeless experience is entering the world of social agencies, soup kitchens, shelters, and other institutions that serve those unable to purchase their needs. All of the study participants had opinions and analyses of those institutions.
Ida desperately sought help from numerous agencies. Many would only provide assistance for one night, or at most, one week's lodging. Thus she termed her experience with these agencies as 'riding the carousel', because after that one week she and her family would be homeless again. She could not utilize the services of one shelter because she had children. Yet because one child was over the twelve-year-old age limit, she could not gain entrance to a family shelter for women with children. The services available to her were only emergency, short-term assistance, which left her chronically in need. Excerpts of her opinions and analysis follow.

I've gone through all of those agencies once, and they're not going to allow me to do this until maybe a year or so ... There's no agencies left ... I have had to go to so many agencies and seeing that there are so few, it makes you a repeater. To me, the reason they aren't helping me is I've been labeled. You know, it's like, "Hey, you're trying to abuse us," but they really don't know. I am seriously in trouble. I am not playing a game ...

This social service agency helped me once when I first got in trouble. They helped me that once, so in other words, we've done our share. We're not gonna let you forget it. We're not helping you anymore. One time is the limit.

[Do you think they realize that you've got no place to go?]

I think they just don't care, just like everybody else. Because when the agency worker talks to you, she sits there and she says, "Well, all the agencies know what you've said, and I really don't know what else to tell you." And then when you go back to use that agency, they tell you they're out of funds ...

And if you go down the list of these shelters and count them, you'll see there's more on here for men than there are for women. That's wrong. That's discrimination. Because there are women in the street too. They have to live too. Paul has a place to stay. We don't. That's unfair. No, it's not the people, it's not the men. It's the system. Whoever set it up, it's their fault. It's discrimination against kids with these shelters.

You can go to this agency or that agency. Once. And it better be a long time in between there before they return.
Or you can go to the church group. And it all depends on who's in there and what church, and it's unfair.

After you hit a few agencies and get turned down, you become numb. That is what they do to you. It's like everything's wearing you down mentally until you don't have that gusto fight anymore. And they've worn you down to the degree of, well, like a lot of other people on the street. You feel, I don't care. You give up. You come to the point that, hey, yeah, when you first start out, hey, I'm going to make it. I'm going to survive. Hey, I've got the power. And then you come to the point where you've been browbeaten so until you're just, you're tired. Like when I tell you I'm tired, it's not that I'm physically tired. I'm mentally tired. You come to the point where you can't think anymore ...

When you leave most places, I won't say all, but most places you leave, you feel like you've just gotten up off of your knees. They've totally brought you down until you're nonexistent. You're not a person. You're just something there begging, and I don't like that feeling ...

... Have you ever been down to the sandwich line? You should stand in line and go ... the way they toss it to you in a sack. You're a doggie. It's your doggie bag for the day. You're not even looked at. It's thrown in your sack. This is the doggie bag for the day. Dogs take it. And a lot of that stuff isn't even good. It's backdated three or four days ...

The subject of social welfare came up very often in conversation because homeless individuals had to rely on social services, soup kitchens, sandwich lines, and very often the kindness of strangers. Many viewed the shelter service as a charity or gift and were angry at others who did not behave properly. Others did not particularly enjoy being on display when potential donors would want to look at the shelter. Most were always aware that they were at the mercy of others.

Betty:

You are a poor person, dependent upon these people who have more, and this tape can't pick up that snoot nose. You are the disadvantaged person whose living at the moment is incumbent upon their good will. And they're looking you over ... I don't like it. I don't like being on display from a disadvantaged place. I'm not at their level financially or any other way at the moment. And so I don't like that sort of thing. It makes you feel like a lesser person. A lesser person.
You are made well aware that if somebody does give, you're going to have. If they don't you're not going to have it. You are at their mercy that way. Your stomach is at someone else's mercy, as well as everything about you. You are at the mercy of someone else.

Andrea:
In some ways, you can't ask for too much. I mean, we're getting this for free and everything, and you can't ask for much.

Roberta preferred personal charity rather than social programs per se, and relayed her numerous experiences with kind strangers. One experience involved her attempt to walk a distance of almost forty miles.

Apparently, while I was walking, people eating on Sunday morning in restaurants, for one reason or another, somebody had noticed me. This couple had sat near the window as I passed. Later they drove past me and noticed that I was walking, and they had seen that I had walked a tremendous distance for at least an hour or two. ... They stopped the car and came towards me. ... I told them a little bit, that I was trying to reestablish myself ... I assured them that I knew what I was doing, but that I have no choice because I have no money for the Greyhound. I would have taken the Greyhound bus, but I wanted to save. [the six dollars she had]

They drove me all the way and told me it would have taken four or five days for me to walk it. So I was so grateful for such people ... It was inspiring that you still have people who are not so fearful of their fellow man as to refuse their own natures of extending a little helping hand.

Ongoing Concerns
Throughout the sessions, no matter what the interview topic was, study participants relentlessly discussed their ongoing concerns. Because these concerns revolved around basic human needs, it was very understandable why the participants were preoccupied with them. Being homeless had put them in a world of perpetual concern with securing
food and shelter, obtaining work and income, and maintaining health and hygiene.

Food

Erma, being homeless for years, remarked that as long as you have food, you can survive. That would certainly be the minimum necessary for survival. Those who had funds were able to purchase food, although they were limited usually by a lack of transportation, and lack of space to store food at a shelter facility. One common complaint heard from shelter residents is that others will disregard someone's name on a food item and will consume it from a common refrigerator that sometimes is provided for shelter residents. Some of the women were staying at a shelter without cooking facilities and were severely limited in that way. Even for those with funds, with the cost of food at restaurants, they soon were forced to rely on soup kitchens or an occasional meal brought into the shelter by a church organization.

Utilizing soup kitchens, sandwich lines, and other sources meant that one must keep track of where and when these foodstuffs were available. Again, it might involve bus fare or long walks, and always long lines, to obtain sustenance. One's day must be restructured in order to secure sustenance. Nutritional considerations had to be put aside. Although some organizations tried to eliminate the stigma involved, fulfilling this human need was continually debasing.

Part of the loss of freedom mentioned earlier was represented by the loss of choice over what one consumed. Even someone like Sheila,
who had funds, found that she had no control over the food she bought for her family because they were living with her sister and brother-in-law.

I'm getting Welfare for my four children. I get $360. Okay, and like when I get my check, I go to the grocery store and I get $120, $125 worth of groceries, and they don't spend theirs at all. I spend mine. Okay like, by the tenth [of the month] the groceries are gone and they still have their food stamps. They get about $350 worth of food stamps. Like when my sister gets ready to go to the store, she asks me, "Do I want to go?" I say "yeah" thinking all the time that she is going to spend her stamps. Then I get to the grocery store and I have to spend some more. And the $360 I should have to run from one month to the other, but I don't have nothing, no money at all.

He cooks at 4:00 in the afternoon but he won't let the children eat until 8:00 in the evening ... And then sometimes they don't even eat breakfast ... I don't even eat. But it's my own food.

Other excerpts regarding their concern with obtaining food are reported below.

[You are served one hot meal per week, right?]

Andrea:
Sometimes we get two. I'm not really sure. I'm never really sure about that stuff. Cause sometimes I don't eat because they'll have something that I don't like, and I don't like to be picky, but I am not going to sit there and force myself to eat something that is going to make me sick. I can go hungry for a long time and let the other people have it. They need it more. I've gone for days without eating. I just wish they had more healthier food for them to eat.

Roberta:
There are a lot of things that ordinarily I wouldn't eat, but there are times that you eat whatever you can get, as long as it's not spoiled or dangerous. And then, as I say, what I don't eat I just put in the refrigerator in the common drawer and whoever wants to can eat it. There are always people who are hungry in these shelters because unless somebody brings meals ... Sometimes they bring peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Maybe they're leftovers, I don't know where they get them. I don't know if they bring them or ... Like yesterday, somebody brought a bag full of tomatoes and there was a another bag full of cucumbers. Well, that was a real something for people.
But this is not the kind of food that I would eat, if I had an income or anything like that. And eating the kind of foods that I know is good for me and from past experience that I enjoy. And I feel better too. But this is also good because anything that keeps you from being really hungry ... A lack of food can be devastating. And I've gotten to the point where even a few days is no good for me, because I've done it too often. You ruin your digestive track because when you don't eat for a long time, you're bound to go to the extreme afterwards, and that is bad.

For a short period Ida was staying with a stranger who offered the shelter of her home in return for Ida's assistance check and unlimited use of her car. Ida did not want to eat because she could not trust this person's motives.

When I go in there, I'm going to be prepared to go to bed. I'm going to condition myself. I don't want to eat. Maybe if I psyche myself out ... When she says, "Dinner is ready," I don't want to eat, because this way, hey, you're not going to be able to rub it in my face later - "You ate my food." I don't want to. I don't want it. And until I can get my own food, I don't want it. And that's just the way if feel ... People will use that over your head.

I've got a jar of peanut butter in the trunk and I've got a box of dry milk and I've got a gallon jug of water. I've got cups and stuff in the car, so I can always mix up some dry milk. So you've got a peanut butter sandwich and you've got a glass of milk.

Street people give the kids, if they have fresh fruit or something. Now you don't realize how much a luxury that is. Once you're on the street ... A lot of things you take for granted at home, like fresh fruit, orange juice, stuff that you normally have in the refrigerator. It's a luxury. You don't have money to buy it. And when somebody gives you an apple, that's heaven. Good, crunchy, juicy apple. It's heaven. I mean, you don't get this. Or orange juice or milk or anything like this, besides that powdered milk I keep in the trunk. A soft drink is a luxury. If you don't have the cash, you can't buy no soft drinks. I mean just things that everybody around takes for granted.

Lianna specifically commented on going out to eat during the interview sessions.

[How did you feel about our time together?]
It was fun. I liked it. When you came to get us or get me, I liked it cause it gave me a chance to get away and eat some decent food.

[What was your favorite part of all the interviews?]

The funnest part was going out and eating some decent food.

Shelter and Employment

Shelter is the most recognizable need to outsiders and an obvious concern for homeless women. Although the majority of the study participants were sheltered in some way, the concern was still ongoing. First of all, they could never feel completely secure as to how long they could stay. One could be 'banned' from a shelter for numerous reasons, including being late, forgetting to complete a chore, or having an altercation with another shelter resident. One had to be continually on guard while residing at a shelter. Sleep was difficult to obtain. And of course the concern for shelter was reflected in the constant search for a more secure environment and the hope to move into a more adequate form of housing. This was extremely difficult to accomplish while searching for employment and the women found themselves in a constant Catch-22 syndrome.

Without an address and telephone number, even filling out a job application was fraught with difficulty. Shelter addresses could be used with the hope that the employer would not recognize it as a shelter for homeless persons. Finding work and securing shelter were then very much intertwined.

Roberta traveled to employment agencies, filled out job applications, and talked to potential employers on a daily basis. She
blamed her age (60 years) and slowness as reasons for not securing employment. She provided endless details during the interview sessions about her searches, how sometimes she had to convince a reluctant employer that she wanted employment. Securing work, "any job that'll have me," was a constant preoccupation.

Ida experienced a cycle of layoffs from the factory where she was employed, before receiving an indefinite layoff notice. Some of the other women with children were either receiving public assistance or going through the application process. Others refused to apply for any form of public assistance and were without any income for long periods of time.

The talk one heard in a shelter was very often related to who got a job, or what jobs were available. When a shelter resident announced that she secured a job, a round of applause and warm embraces followed.

Health and Hygiene

Most of the study participants had health problems and were under the care of a physician, usually at a health clinic. Some of the health conditions mentioned were as follows. Two of the women recently had hysterectomies; two had heart disease; one had a mastectomy; and three had 'nerve problems' and were using prescription medication. Most were constantly fatigued because of their strenuous schedules and lack of sleep. Colds and infections were frequent.

More problematic to the women though, were their children's health problems, asthma being the most common. All put their children's needs above their own and made every attempt to obtain medical
attention when needed. Often the hospital emergency room had to be relied upon. However without insurance or income, getting adequate care was always a problem or nearly impossible.

Even for those who had Medicaid (public assistance) coverage, medical services were always less than satisfactory. For example, Wendy could only receive ten days of psychiatric care under her Medicaid coverage. On the tenth day, she was discharged regardless of her condition and her needs. No follow-up or aftercare services were provided. One time she was discharged two days early because of an upcoming holiday and her physician's desire not to see her on a Saturday. She was painfully aware that her poverty kept her from receiving the help she felt she needed.

Finally, in regards to health, concern with daily hygiene was very prominent. All the women were concerned with keeping clean and looking the best possible. Perhaps because of the stereotype of homeless people being unkept, there was a preoccupation with body odor. Many women would purchase perfume, creams, lotions, deodorant, and other hygienic items when they had the money. When they did not have the money they showed great resourcefulness in improvising substitutes. Donations to the shelter were always welcomed in the form of shampoo, creams, lotions, and deodorant. This also served as reinforcement of traditional sex-role behaviors and concerns.

Feelings

A very important aspect of the homeless experience is the myriad of new feelings about one's self and one's new situation. Feelings
about the self reflect the core of what it means to be homeless, and to live in that world. The feelings that will be discussed include sentiments that the women disclosed in relation to their situation, to how they felt about it, and how they interpreted homelessness within the context of their own personal histories.

Not Feeling Like a Human Being

As mentioned earlier, being homeless removed the women from the mainstream of social life. Being normal is equated with having a home, having family and close friends, being a homemaker, working at a job, and doing the things that the majority of society does.

This was expressed directly by Ida as she exclaimed one day, "I got a job; I'm beginning to feel like a normal human being." Betty enjoyed going out to eat after the interview sessions as she said, "It makes me feel normal again." Thus being homeless was equated with abnormality or social deviance.

Denise described the worst aspect of homelessness as follows.

Living a life as a cripple, not living a life that is normal, you know? And it's very hard to live life as a socially handicapped, you know? And you know, be considered basically sort of, you know, a cripple, you know? It's very very hard. All my reactions are exaggerated in other people's eyes. The way they deal with them are not at all in proportion to the way they should deal with a person on a day to day basis. It's almost like my world has become a totally different world from anyone else's. The way any else's normally is, you know? Now if the whole world is turning this way, we are really in trouble.

This is all a new world to me. I've never lived like this before. The past, I'd say five years, maybe since 1978, have really just like ... I mean it's been a whole new experience for me. I've never gone through anything like this before you know, it's almost like a plot against yourself, you know what I mean? And it's a bunch of junk. And I've never lived like this ...
I managed to get deodorant, thank you, God. Those kind of things cause fights among people when you're living in close quarters like that, you know. Basically, I guess I'm feeling a little bit better. I'm feeling like at least I'm a person again. I can keep myself clean and well groomed and my kid, you know. We're still a long way from, you know what I mean, being able to do the kind of things you really want to do.

Loretta summarized her hope for the future as follows:

... to be in my own apartment and begin to live again like a normal human being. And cooking and baking, which I love, grocery shopping, and getting some nice things for me to wear, a nice new winter coat.

As mentioned earlier, normality was associated with working. Ida and Andrea expressed this very forthrightly.

Andrea:
As soon as I get a job I know everything is going to be better because I'm going to feel good. But when I'm sitting around doing nothing, like, I'm nothing ... [emphasis added]

Ida:
I got a job and I'm feeling normal again. I said, "My God, I can go to work." You feel useless, you feel like, why am I existing? This is all I'm doing is existing. You don't have a job, you just walk the street all day, and you try to figure out, what for? Why?

Homeless people have been traditionally viewed as outcasts and these homeless women used to be a part of the world that viewed homeless people that way. Thus, they too look upon themselves as outcasts, and are viewed by others that way.

Andrea expressed frustration at her repeated attempts to reunite with her family, especially her father. What was especially disconcerting was his refusal to acknowledge her existence. Rather than telling the neighbors where his daughter was, he told them that she had secured an apartment and moved away. During the interview
sessions Andrea chronicled her father's treatment towards her when she was staying at a shelter.

She called him after two weeks had passed to see about getting her clothes.

I called him up and I was all mad and crying, and as soon as he answered the phone, my tears just ... I was just upset and everything. And I said, "Dad, this is Andrea."

And he goes, "Hi! How are you doing?"

And I was like, what! The last time I see you, you're having the cops take me out of your house. I don't believe this. And he's being real nice.

"How you doing? Where are you staying?"

And, I'm like, "I'm staying in a shelter." And I give him the phone number, I give him the name of it, and I know he didn't lose it. He just doesn't call. And he knows where I am, and it doesn't faze him at all. I want to call him again. I want to call him and talk to him, like go over and see him, or have him come see me. But I know that's beneath him. No. He probably wouldn't want to come around here. [emphasis added]

Another incident she related was when she was invited to eat dinner with her family while she was homeless.

The most I went without eating was for three days. Then I finally went back to my house, and I said, "Dad, do you have a sandwich or anything I could have?"

And he said, "Why?"

"I haven't eaten in three days."

He looked at my face and I was real pale and everything, and he said, "Why don't you come back at 5:00 and you can eat dinner with us."

I said, "Come back at 5:00? What am I going to do?" I was like, I can't believe this. I mean, the way he treated me. I didn't know he knew I was sitting along side of the house. I was just sitting by the side of the house, and there are no windows over there. I was just sitting there in the grass, just resting, hungry. And he comes over and tells me to come back around 5:00. He said he didn't want me
hanging around the house. I said, "I don't believe this. This was my house." It just felt too weird. I felt embarrassed or something, and I shouldn't have been embarrassed. I don't know what it was. It felt really weird. I did feel kind of embarrassed because of my dad. I mean, he's making me look like a total fool. "Come back at 5:00! Go somewhere!" It was like 10:00 in the morning when this was going on. I rode around on my bike. And when I came back, he actually let me in the house.

But the last time I was there when I went to pick up my clothes, I was only allowed in the garage, and he stood inside the door and talked to me through the door, and I was like, this feels so weird. I feel like I'm not even part of the family anymore or nothing. And I've actually said that once, and he said, "Well, you're not." [emphasis added]

[So you came back at 5:00?]

We ate dinner together and we talked and stuff, and it was like normal. It was like I'd been living there, and I was like, I can't believe this place. These people are treating me so weird, I'm going to go nuts.

[And then what happened after dinner?]

They said, "Well, have a nice day." And I rode away on my bike. I sat around and talked to them for about an hour, and then they said, "Well, we're going out now. You're going to have to leave." Okay. I just couldn't believe this.

Toward the end of the interview sessions, her opinion toward her father changed, as summarized below. It seemed especially difficult to cope with the outcast status being inflicted by one's family.

Well, I thought my dad was a little bit nicer than I think he is. He's totally different. They act like they don't even know me. It's like I'm an old friend that calls once in a while, a very distant friend. That's what I feel like now. They don't say, "Hi, how are you?" They just say, "What do you want?" and all this stuff. And then when I go down there, they're like, "Oh, how are you?" And I tell them, "Oh, I'm staying in a shelter." And my dad just says, "Oh, a shelter?" And he just writes down the name of the shelter, and the number, and I'm like, "You don't care." That just takes the cake right there. He doesn't care where I am, and I just don't know what to think.

The feeling of abnormality and being an outcast was expressed repeatedly and exemplified in Ida's not wanting to drive her car as
people would see "all the junk stacked in it" and know that she has no place to live. She said, "I am literally embarrassed! If I could just dump this stuff somewhere, we could ride around and look normal."

Once Ida secured housing, she was concerned that no one should learn of her 'secret'. She was very guarded with co-workers and new friends and felt uncomfortable should someone ask about her prior living arrangements.

Betty was outraged one day when television cameras, bright lights, and reporters appeared at the shelter. She was not given advance notice and could only hide her face from view, hoping not to be seen on television sets spanning the metropolitan area. Outcast status was conferred upon her by her adult children who would not come to the shelter to visit her. The day her son picked up her belongings at the shelter, he did not want to meet her newly acquired friends.

In many ways, homeless persons became unwelcome foreigners in their own communities. They were painfully aware of their status and felt it inwardly themselves.

Distancing Self from Others

One strategy employed to deal with this situation was to distance one's self from others in the same situation - other homeless persons. In fact every study participant clearly distinguished herself from others. Often, the heterogeneity of the homeless population was stressed or more often, there was a strong tendency to disassociate one's self from those considered mentally ill, which was usually noted by medications taken. Excerpts below are illustrative.
Celia:
They make you feel like everybody homeless came from a poor background. And that's not true. I've never been poor. I finished my school. I went beyond school.

Debbie:
I can talk to the staff and communicate with the staff about my problem. But a lot of people that live there, they don't have enough brains to really sit down and count to ten.

Lianna [regarding the other residents' supervision of their children]:
The mother is just too lazy to get up and see what their child is doing. I keep mine at my side at all times. I make sure of that.

Andrea [describing shelter life]:
It's like a soap opera. I mean, people coming in just talking about the same thing every day. They don't try to get themselves out of there ... They're looking for a man to get married to, and I'm like, I don't believe this.

Roberta [regarding keeping the shelter clean]:
Wherever you go, there are all kinds of people. There are people who have a deliberate attitude of ... they enjoy dirt. They are deliberately filthy ... Especially in these places, I'm emphasizing, they should have a little chlorine. It has to be gone over. People like me. I have very thin skin. No matter how healthy I am, not matter how much I repair, in a very short while I'm right back where I start if they start this dirt business again. That's all you need is one or two days neglect, and you use the same showers that the others do, and you're right back.

Ida came to the realization that she was not different from other homeless persons and elucidated in a most striking manner.
In an early meeting she discussed her past life and how she used to make judgments about homeless people.

I used to down people, you know, "Get a job, you crudbum." Now, I'm over here on this side of the line and I can see that everybody on this side of the line - you didn't step over here because you wanted to be here. You were pushed over here, where I am. And that's why I say, if the Lord blesses me and I get back on my feet, there's no way I would ever put a person down again.
A few weeks later she began to define herself as a street person, as illustrated in the following dialogue.

In your earlier tapes, you're going to discover something that I thought. I tried to separate myself from the street people. I always say 'they.' It's not they. It's we, or us. And I guess in the back of my mind, I'm always trying to separate myself. I am not a street person. But, I am a street person.

[What would be the definition of a street person?]

Street life. You're always in the street. The street is your home. You're either sleeping in it, eating in it. Like I said, if you go near that church that gives the bags of food, people are eating. See where they eat. They eat in the street.

[Are you still a street person, even though you're staying at someone's house?]

I feel that way. I feel more at home in the street than I do there. That's why I'm gone all day.

[You have privacy, it seems like. You don't have no one telling you what to do nor expecting things out of you.]

Um-hmm. So, I'm a street person. But, I had been trying to separate myself. I was still fighting the fact that I'm a street person. But, I'm a street person.

[What did you think about street people before you became one?]

Little dirty creatures. You're a nobody, and that's what you are. Because you find out when you're in the street, no one pays any attention to you. You walk down the street, you're just a little creep, a little raggedy creep walking down the street. Someone that no one wants to associate with or be seen with.

People that you may see in an agency somewhere, and you say "Hi," later in the evening when they're with their friends, they don't want to acknowledge you. Yeah, that's what you are. Because then they've got to give an explanation of how they know you. So that's what you are. You are nothing.

And I really feel like I told you before, I really feel like if our government knew how and could do it, street people wouldn't be walking around here with the normal working people.
[If what?]

They'd stick you off on some isolated place somewhere where you couldn't be seen. Camps or something, like they did the Jews. You'd be hidden.

[Is that what shelters sort of do, in the sense of keeping people off the streets so people don't have to see them?]

Um-hmm. You're not seen.

[You said most of the people don't use the shelters because they can only house a certain number.]

Um-hmm. And then you don't know, there's so many reasons why they won't accept you. Most of them, they ask you a lot of questions. They want your social security number. Or at the shelter I was at, they ask why you're here. They asked me for my social security card. They want your number. They want the children's numbers if they have them. They ask you things like, "Do you have sisters and brothers? Are your parents living? Where are they?"

[What were you thinking when they were asking you all this?]

I've just been encaged! I've just been locked up and you're gonna have all my private background. I'm trying to figure out, are you planning on killing me or are you planning on me dying in the street? Which one? So you can contact somebody and tell them to come pick up the body? I'm trying to figure out, what's the purpose? There's nothing there to steal, unless you figure you can walk out with a bed. So, I don't know what their reasoning is to even have ... Cause usually, your social security is your life. If they've got your social security number, they've got everything. And I'm trying to figure out, what's the purpose? What's the reason? All I need is housing. So what do you need my social security number for? Unless they're planning on coming back in later years when you're employed, garnishee your check or something.

[Were you scared to give it?]

No, I wasn't afraid to give it. I mean, what the heck? No. But I just couldn't figure out why. I figure, at that time, I was outdoors then, and that was my first of coming out. And you're desperate, and whatever they want, you give it. I've learned a little better now, being on the street.
Self Blame and Punishment

Inasmuch as homelessness is a result of the confluence of certain social and economic factors, on an individual level it is often thought to be one's own fault. Although structural factors were recognized as well as personal factors that were beyond their own control, some of the study participants expressed sentiments of self blame for their homelessness. A combination of self blame and punishment were expressed by some as indicated below.

Betty felt that she deserved to be homeless because her children, now grown, were not as she had hoped they would be. She felt that, the kind of people you rear up in this world is the most important job you can have, because if all that would come our fairly decent, we wouldn't need all the social workers and we wouldn't need all these types of careers, because you were doing a good job of that in your home.

She empathized deeply with her eldest son.

I'm living his life. He's had it tough, I'm having it tough. I've almost followed his path right down the road, and I can't make myself quit doing it. It's almost as though I'm saying, "I will punish me for what I have done to you." It's crazy, but it's a part of this. Maybe not the major part of it, don't get me wrong. It may not be the major part [of being homeless].

But there's this thing that says to me, "We are survivalists." We want to survive. Basically, we want to survive. But there's the part of me that will only let me go so far and says, "You don't deserve more." There is that that haunts me all the time. That I don't deserve it since I've been such a flop. It's there. It is there, and I know it. You can talk to a psychiatrist about that forever. You could talk to a psychologist about that forever. They can't do anymore than say, "There it is, and you got to get rid of that." I can't get rid of that. It does continually come back and haunt me. I feel undeserving as much as I want a good life, as much as I'm tired, and I'd like to have it nice and everything. There's always the piece of me that says that you don't really deserve it. Look at how badly you did. Look how this all turned out. So, in a sense, I think, well, shelter's my speed.
[Do you think it's all your fault?]

Some of it is. I'm sure some of it is. I just can't draw the line as to how much.

[That's such a heavy burden.]

It is. It's a terrible burden. That's why I said don't ever have kids. If it all turns out well, you've got it made. If it doesn't, the burdens on you are severe. It's hard to live with. It really is hard to live with.

At a later session, she also came to realize that she did not value herself as a person. Despite the fact that she always received excellent work evaluations and many former employers asked her to return after she had quit, she still felt mediocre.

One former employer who was leaving the organization wrote in his goodbye letter to Betty that any organization she ever worked for could consider themselves lucky.

And I thought, Oh, that's neat. Not true, but oh, that's neat. I'll keep that.

[But people continually ask you to come back. Don't you think that means they like you?]

They must. I don't value myself. By the way, I realize that something came out of our meeting yesterday, and that is I have never had or valued myself high enough. But yet I've always been able to work over and above that. And part of what's wrong with me now is I'm not working over and above that.

In a sense, I don't place any value on me. I was happy while there was a goal cause I was working for my children. But when I'm left to do for myself, I don't have a high value on myself. Not on my appearance, not on my skills. I'm always looking at the guy who has more of all of those things than I have, instead of valuing myself as a person. I really guess I don't. I really don't. And I realize that, after you and I talked yesterday. It came out in my own mind.

I thought, you know, it's me that I don't care about, and that affects everything. There's some lack of value that I put on myself which, now, is making me, I think, act very erratic and non-something. I don't want to ...

Well, I didn't want to face failure. I want responsibility, but I want assurance that it's all going to
go great. But that's part of having value too. I consider if I fail, I am of no value. That was kind of interesting to me. And it was crazy, but I got that out of yesterday's talk, and I realize that as long as it was done for somebody else, fine. But if it's for me, I'm not valuable enough or I've made too many mistakes, therefore I'm not worthy of anything or I'm not as good looking or I'm not as skilled, or I'm not as something. You're going to find an excuse to devalue yourself, instead of trying to mesh the two together.

When Ida compared her strict religious upbringing with the state of her life now, she began to wonder if she was being punished because she had not been to church lately.

And I'm beginning to wonder if this is what's happening to me because I have not stepped foot inside of a church since I've been homeless.

[What do you mean?]

What am I saying? I'm saying that I'm paying the cost to be the boss. I'm being whipped here. That's what I'm saying. I'm being whipped because I am not...
I have this little daily prayer book and this is the closest I've come to staying within the faith since I've been here...
And the kids need to be in church, and I know this. We've totally strayed, and I know it.
The Lord never lets you go. But He can teach you a lesson. And I've also been taught that He can bring you to your knees, and I think I've been brought to mine.

Interestingly enough, Sheila resisted the temptation to self-blame as she clearly saw that her brother-in-law was purposely trying to make her feel that way. After a few weeks of living together, her sister and brother-in-law stopped talking to her. Yet she was clearly assisting the household financially.

I feel like I did something wrong and I know I haven't... I have overpaid my stay, I will tell that to anybody.
Disappointment With Life

Another theme often reiterated was disappointment with life. This was keenly felt by women who had fulfilled the roles of mother and provider for their children. Now their lives had come to homelessness. They had followed all the rules, so to speak, and this was their reward.

"Life is stinko at the core," Betty shared after an interview session. She reflected on her disappointment in life after working so hard and raising a family as a single parent. Three major themes were discerned that were generalizable to the other women and are generalizable to institutional analysis of work and family life. The themes related to the unfairness of life and were expressed in Betty's feelings about her experience with her cancer, financial losses, and her work and parenting roles.

Ten years prior to becoming homeless Betty had a mastectomy. This happened soon after being laid off from her job of fourteen years. Those were two critical events during her "slide" into homelessness.

When they removed the breast, I was a little bit upset that that had happened, but I was more upset that I had cancer. I thought, well, damn. Life should be getting better, and now I've got cancer. And I was put on oral chemotherapy for two years ... And I had to keep going back and have tests run and my blood checked and all this crapola during those two years. While you're having all that done, cancer stays in your head, you can't forget. And there was an anger in me, that, hell, I'd already worked hard, and now, damn. When things should get better, I have to deal with this ...

During this time period she also sold her home. Owning a home as a single parent was a significant personal accomplishment. She had an excellent credit rating. During a family crisis she decided to sell!
it and incurred heavy losses. This event is another she described in her slide downward.

[Did you take a loss on it?]

Well, yes. Because I was doing it so fast, and I had just put in a new furnace. And so I took a beating on it. I only cleared like $1,000 or something. It was terrible, and I've never got over that.

I also sold all my ... I had a lady friend who sold off my belongings, and I had a practically brand new washing machine. I had an excellent dryer. I had a big refrigerator. And I got nothing out of that stuff. Just nothing. And I've never got over that. In addition to that, I gave her one-half of everything that the stuff sold for, plus any expenses she incurred.

So the whole thing was a fiasco for me. It really cost me my shirt. I watched fourteen years of work just go down the tubes because it was crisis time for me, and there wasn't anyone to ...

She compared the years of working, saving money, paying bills, and managing the household with her life over the last year.

I've gone down the tubes, ruined my credit since I'm out living alone. And for fourteen years and three kids and myself, it was right there on top. It's crazy, isn't it? It is.

And as mentioned earlier, she blamed herself for her children's problems and felt disappointed that her best efforts were just not good enough.

The children, there was something that I didn't give despite the fact that I followed all the societal rules. There was something that I didn't put in that home, or the boys would have been happier, grown up happier without all the problems ...

I look back now and say I should have done more. I also look back and say I didn't have the energy to do more. I could only do what I did ...

And what were we reading then? That almost all the kids who got in trouble supposedly had parents on welfare. One parent families on welfare. Supposedly that's where all the troubles and ills of the young people were coming from. Well, my kids gave just as many problems to this world, caused me problems and everybody else problems, and they had a working parent ...
It was work and home, work and home, work and home, and that was my life for so many years. It was no wonder I came up with nothing later. Just nothing. What else was there? I didn't have the job and I didn't have the family.

For Ida, a family crisis was a more direct factor in becoming homeless. She took such pride in rearing her family, and the thought that one of her children could have the power to make her homeless was too much to bear.

She explained the situation with her teenage son at the third interview session. Unemployment was the major factor in her being homeless now. But the reason why she actually left her home was because of a very complex and painful problem connected with her son, who was on probation. She cannot return to her hometown until he is eighteen, which is two years away.

[Could you tell me what happened with your son and how that's affecting your life and your family's?]

It's got us on the run. I cannot go home, not until he's eighteen, and so that's still two years. When he turns eighteen, I could probably go home ...

Well, my daughter could tell you about him. Beating up my place, putting holes in the wall where we've had to literally fight, where my daughter has had to fight with him in order to help me because he is pretty strong. And about the only way we could hold him off was to do something ...

So, what I'm saying is that he was to the point of no control. Parents really have no, you really don't have any protection. I called the night that we really got into it, and he beat up - he literally took my stereo and beat it with a hammer. There was no repair. Tubes and stuff laying on the floor.

And I called the sheriff. The sheriff told me that he was underage, that they could not come out and pick him up for fighting with me ... All I had was an incorrigible child. He told me if I wanted something done, I would have to drive into town and bring him in ...

We got him there ... He got in so much trouble there that I told them to let him come back home. That's mother, deep down inside, there's a pain. You hurt. But by then, he had already been charged with a felony [for assaulting another boy].
The difficulty multiplied. Ida had taken her son to some sort of institution, perhaps a youth home, where he assaulted another youth. She paid a $1,000 fine and her son was back home again.

So he comes home, he's home about two or three weeks. He starts all over again ... So this is the reason I went to my lawyer who told me they weren't after my son, they were after me because I refused to go to the mental health association ...

... And I told them, I have nothing to talk about and talking is not going to settle the problem. By then I was already laid off, so all I was getting was unemployment. My son stayed with his daddy for a while before he [her ex-husband] went to prison. He was used to his dad giving him $50 at a time. Well, I couldn't afford that. I've got three kids. All I'm getting is like $100 some a week unemployment. That's it. So, he would go off because he couldn't have things, like all leather tennis shoes that cost $50. So, he would steal from me. He would steal my money ...

All this running around. You're confused, you know? Your mind, your body, you're hurting because you can't cope with this kid. And he's treating me like this, like I'm dirt.

The next series of events culminated in Ida being summoned to court. Her mother, without informing Ida, agreed to have her grandson move in with her. Ida's lawyer, unsuccessful at changing the court date and unable to accompany her, advised Ida:

I tell you what, Ida. The best thing to do is don't fight it. Let your mother have him. Don't fight it and get the hell out of this state, temporarily ... They're not after your son, they're after you now.

Ida was fearful of losing all three of her children because of the one. The law was clearly working against her. Her son could make decisions like quitting school, yet she was still responsible for him.

I can understand certain laws being set up for abused and neglected kids. My kids weren't neglected. They had a beautiful and nice home. Lovely home. They weren't outside. We had plenty to eat. And you're going to take something and turn it on me like this?

... He knew how to use the law to his advantage. One day when we got to arguing and fighting, he told me to hit him so he could get me for child abuse. That's unfair that
people can take laws and use them against you. I felt like I could not deal with this. And the law has the upper hand. They've got you. There's nothing you can do. I feel like this child is taking and using it against me, and tearing up what I've worked for.

... I was working two jobs at the time in order to accumulate stuff over the years. And he can, in a matter of seconds, take it and destroy it, and I can't say anything.

In both Betty's and Ida's histories there was pain, suffering, and disappointment associated with family life. Both were hard working single parents who devoted themselves to their children. Because of the centrality of family life in their system of values, the disappointment was deep and profound.

Another type of disappointment experienced was with occupational roles and rewards. Betty expressed this throughout the sessions, that the rewards were so little in comparison to the investment, energy, and constant hassle involved with working.

Susan realized that her income had not kept pace with the cost of living only after she began looking for another apartment. Despite earning a college degree and teaching for eighteen years, she found that her housing choices were extremely limited.

I went out and I started looking for apartments, and I had been paying $215, and that must be the lowest rent in the city. Because I went out and starting looking and I looked at apartments that were really no better than what I had before, and they were asking $300.

I realized that my pay was not keeping up with what was an average standard of living, and it was hard to accept. I think one of the hardest things for me to accept was the fact that I will be scraping ... I keep thinking I'm not figuring something right. I figure in my car payment and I figure in my apartment, and I mean it's astounding how little is going to be left at the end of the month. So, I've really come up against that ... I don't know anybody rich. None of my friends are rich. I don't really even have any friends that are yuppies, as a matter of fact.

When you think of women and homelessness, you always think of women that were on welfare with three and four kids
without a home. People don't consider somebody who's been out working and having to settle for less than they want or being without a home and having a job. Because at the shelter I probably was in the best position of anybody, with a job and money coming in, and I still was having a rough time.

[Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?]

Yes, the feeling of bitterness I have about my compromised dreams. You know, compromising what I really wanted. Especially after working so long. I guess I bought into the American Dream. I had to settle for less or something.

The bitterness stems from the fact that I went to college for four years. I worked for eighteen years. And I couldn't find an apartment that I liked that I could afford.

I can't even afford a home. I can't even afford a house trailer. And as far as I know, unless my financial situation gets better, I'll never have a home. Unless maybe I get married, but by myself, I won't do it. Even if I could afford one, I might not be able to maintain it.

Disappointment, whether with one's occupation or family life, easily led one to question the purpose of life which is discussed below.

Questioning Life's Meaning

Being homeless one realized that security was only an illusion. Without having a stable existence, one questioned the very purpose of human existence. Ida was led to reflect on such questions, especially as much of the day was spent observing social life in a crowded downtown area.

Ida felt as though she had no control over her life, and, moreover, she felt that having control is never really possible.

A change of mind in this has made me accept reality. Reality in itself. Look at all these people in these cars. They're worried about getting to work, not being late. They've got an appointment. That's why we have heart attacks and strokes. From worrying about something we have no
control over. We have no control over the next day. None. You have no security of tomorrow. And I used to be in the same rat race of always worrying about tomorrow.

It comes down to one thing. You have to have money. That's it. That's the name of the game. And if you have no money, you have nothing. And my money, I can't even, you can't even say I can live on a budget. I have nothing. I have nothing to put on a budget. All I can do is survive from one day to the next. That's why I said that's what brought me to this conclusion of living day by day. Live for today. You worry about tomorrow when tomorrow gets here. I mean, really, I have no control. And that's why I said everybody is in a hustle, worried about, well, I got to put this over her for my retirement. I've got to put this back for my vacation. Hey, we may not live until retirement. And I mean I'm just now realizing this since I've been on the street. You may not be here to draw a social security check. You may not be here at vacation time to go to the Bahamas or wherever it is you want to go. So, what is the purpose? All you can do is live for today, because the Lord might take us away tonight while you sleep.

And I was into that same little old race, always worrying about tomorrow, planning for Christmas, got to put this away for Christmas, got to buy this for Christmas. And what is it? I got wrinkles for nothing. I mean I have no control over the future. We can psyche ourselves out. I used to believe that, yeah, you've got control over your future. We can psyche ourselves out. No one has control over their future. No one. I don't care how much money you've got or how high up you are, your boss could walk in and tell you tomorrow that you're fired. Then where's your future? So, you have no control.

And I did not realize this until street life. Now that I'm on the street, I can see. I didn't have, even what happened to me, the reason I'm here, I had no control. I couldn't stop it. I went and got a lawyer. He couldn't stop it. The only suggestion he had was to leave. So, I had no control in my life right there at all. We can't control our lives. I mean, we can control basic things, yes, but as far as planning for the future or planning for tomorrow or six weeks later, you can't do it, because you don't know what's ahead.

I've got that raggedy car. Until they catch up with me, all these tickets. And then they will impound it. Will I have any control over that? No! Either I accumulate the money to pay the tickets off, or they impound the car.

For Betty, being tired and worn out from years of parenting and working, there was nothing left. A few months after the interview sessions were over, she discussed these thoughts. She said that our
society is missing something. Even those who live in material comfort have nothing more than that. The more money, the more comfort one has. But we are all missing something. She did not identify what the missing ingredient was. But clearly, working and raising a family were not the essence of life. "I think life should be more than just sacrifice and hard work. There truly should be a peace, comfort, and a happiness and not alot of hurt, physical or mental in this world."

The disappointment with societal institutions such as family and work structures stemmed from unanticipated alienation, pain, and suffering. These women were not deviants but rather law-abiding citizens, who worked hard and were shocked that they were experiencing homelessness. They learned that there were no guarantees for a good life, no matter how hard one worked or how good a parent one was. Their disappointment easily turned inward to self-blame. And at the same time, these feelings led them to consider the larger philosophical problem of the purpose of life.

Comparisons to Others

An ongoing feeling-strategy employed continually was comparing one's self with other homeless women and deciding that one's situation could be worse. An example could always be found to reinforce this feeling. Such examples of people worse off included a physically or mentally disabled woman, a severely abused woman, or one with many children. Homeless women who fit such descriptions were referred to with regularity. One could also compare other shelters. This provided assurance that the situation could indeed be worse. This was
usually a comforting sentiment and at the same time a frightening one, "that just when you thought your situation was the pits, you could find someone who had it worse." Some illustrative excerpts follow.

Ida:
All you have to do is look around you and you can always find somebody that's in a worse position than you are, one way or another. There's a lot of people that don't even have a car. They have no shelter. When it's raining they have no shelter, no where to hide. At least we can all pile in the car and be out of the rain. So you can always find somebody somewhere else worse than you are.

Betty:
A lady said to me, "You think this is bad? This the best I've lived in for years and years." So maybe there's even worse ... I've heard the men talk that way, living under bridges, and being cold at night. But this is a woman saying this. There is a worse way to live.

Andrea:
I thought that this place was bad. But it was the first one I've seen. I should have known better than to judge it since there was more ...
This experience has taught me a lot of things that I didn't know. I thought I had it bad when I was living at home.

These comparisons were very much related to the distancing-self-from-others mentioned earlier. That is, comparing one's self to others allowed one to distance one's self, and retain self worth. It also reinforced an individualistic response that one should be thankful for her position rather than angry at societal injustice.

Resentment
Related to many of the sentiments described above (feeling abnormal, disappointed, like an outcast) was the feeling of resentment toward others who they perceived to be in a similar position, but
received preferential treatment. For example, if the women were refugees from southeast Asia, they would be eligible for resettlement assistance offered by many social agencies. This was especially frustrating to both Ida and Lianna, who are Black women. They too were foreigners, yet there were no programs for homeless Black Americans. There seemed to be a societal understanding of the difficulty in coming to a strange place for other people, but not for Americans who find homelessness a strange place as well.

Lianna:

... The people coming over here from wherever and getting housing and jobs, and here we are, American citizens, and still can't get a house and a job ... I've seen a lot of them. They get apartments faster, jobs quicker, and here we are, still scuffling and fighting to get a house or a job.

Ida joked about changing the color of her skin to fit the eligibility requirements for a resettlement program. One day she sat in a social agency that had assisted her for one week and looked over their brochures that described the resettlement services offered to refugees from certain countries. She asked, "How can they offer these services with all of us homeless?"

Summary

This chapter has attempted to reveal the processual nature of becoming homeless as well as the processual nature of the homeless life. Homelessness represents a loss of support for meeting all human needs. Moreover, it represents a degradation of humanness. Borrowing Proshanky's term, it represents a crisis in human dignity. He defines human dignity as the quality of being esteemed or worthy, and suggests that any environment that subverts, interferes with, or
prevents the use of all the human qualities that distinguish humans beings from lower organisms threaten human dignity.²

Homelessness can also be conceived as what Spivak terms setting deprivation. Setting deprivation occurs when an environment restricts the range of human behavior necessary to function as individuals and family groups.³ Because homeless persons have lost all personal and private space, the pervasiveness of the deprivation indeed runs deep.

Homeless women are captives and yearn for their independence. They want independence from husbands or families and from social welfare institutions. Most importantly they want independence from homelessness, the label, the stigma, and the precarious existence.
NOTES TO CHAPTER V


2 Ibid., p. 23.

CHAPTER VI
SYNTHESIS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussions during the last two interview sessions with each participant were devoted to how the study participants saw their future and what the concept of home meant to them. These sessions allowed for the opportunity to synthesize and reflect upon the many topics discussed throughout the research sessions. This chapter will be devoted to a synthesis of these discussions, followed by major conclusions which emerged from the study.

Family Structures

For women like Celia, Sheila, and Naomi, marital separation was the primary factor in becoming homeless. Their economic position was dependent on their marital relationship and upon separation, they had few resources. Wendy and Andrea, both in their twenties, had depended on the families which they grew up in for emotional and social support, and were beginning their adult lives homeless when that support ceased. Lianna and Debbie, also in their twenties, never had families, but lost the guardianship of the county, although at times they viewed that loss as their liberation. A family crisis with their own children was one event in Betty’s ten year slide, and the major event in Ida becoming homeless. Erma's story begins with her divorce.
fifteen years ago and as for family relationships now, she says, "Homeless people do not have family, only relatives." Yet for Jessie, who lives on the edge of homelessness, her relationship with her husband and her children is the backbone of her existence.

What these data reveal is the importance of family relationships in the lives of these women. It's importance was evidenced by the investment of time and energy in building relationships (with husbands and children or parents and siblings) and the pain and anguish felt by the loss or disruption, or perceived failure in sustaining relationships. It was too painful for Roberta and Erma to even speak of their children, who are now adults. Those who were currently rearing children were determined to make life better for them. But a portrait of family life does not provide a complete sociological accounting. One must review the meaning and structure of work opportunities available for these women.

**Employment and Income**

When work histories and the means of subsistence were reviewed, a clearer picture emerged which revealed economic and consequently social insecurity. A structural vulnerability that no amount of individual motivation, ambition, and hard work could overcome.

A majority of the women were employed in service-related occupations or as unskilled laborers, jobs which are characterized by low wages and frequent periods of involuntary unemployment. The other avenue was secretarial work, again, low-paying and vulnerable to technological displacement.
Yet Betty had successfully raised her three children and was employed with a major corporation that provided her with good health benefits. She did this alone without any assistance from her ex-husband nor from any other relative. She even owned a home, "before any of the women's lib stuff," she said. Yet there was always job insecurity, she said. She was laid off after fourteen years of service. Despite the fact that she successfully managed a home and reared three children while working, while retired she cannot subsist on her pension of just over one-hundred dollars per month. She has seven years to wait until she is eligible for social security benefits. Her children are grown and she is no longer interested in secretarial work after a career of some thirty-seven years of clerical jobs. She is desirous of part-time work in a new field, but has yet to find an opportunity or a wage on which she could support herself.

Even someone like Susan, a teacher for nineteen years, had difficulty in securing affordable housing after she left her abuser. She now knows how easily women can become homeless.

Ida desperately sought industrial employment for the wages and union benefits. She was hired at a factory and laid off four days later. When recalled she was never given forty hours. After another layoff that was permanent, she had to settle for a job of house-sitting.

Without a high school degree and no other training, job opportunities for young women like Andrea, Lianna, and Wendy are extremely limited. And those with very young children are also
extremely limited. They must subsist on public assistance which provides less than one-half of what is considered the poverty level.

The constant search for employment coupled with the endless details, such as applications, references, and interviews, followed by rejections or layoffs, was at best discouraging and at worst demoralizing. Having no home and no job made them feel less than human. Roberta remembered a time when one did not have to complete long and detailed applications for such meager jobs. She said homelessness would not be so bad if employers would not discriminate on that basis. Employers were reluctant to hire her because she relied on public transportation. Despite her assurances that she would be on time, they would rather hire someone with a car.

One thirty-one year old shelter resident arose daily at 4:30 am in order to walk the long distance to a labor pool agency, where one is hired by the day to do 'spot labor' for nearby companies. One day she was simply told she was too short, yet she had completed many jobs successfully.

Examples abound of discrimination and the difficulty for women to find and maintain adequate employment. Ida was hired to do maintenance work at a large university through a firm holding a contract with the university. But she had difficulty in cashing her paycheck as the bank told her the company had insufficient funds to cover her check. There were no guarantees of anything it seemed.
The Future

Sentiments about the future ranged from Wendy's dark pessimism, "I'll be dead," to Susan's hopeful feelings about starting a new life. The types of futures discussed could be categorized along a dimension beginning with those who felt they have no future, followed by those who felt uncertain about the future, including those who felt that it was impossible to even think about the future, and finally those who felt hopeful about their futures.

Wendy was the only one who discussed the future as non-existent. If she had her life to live over, she said she would be dead by now and predicted that within five years she will be dead or a 'bag lady'. "I just hate it, I don't need a life like this." Wendy's caseworker at the shelter, after having contact with Wendy's doctor, said "They've given up on her; they're just waiting for one of her suicide attempts to be successful." During her cycles of psychiatric hospitalization, not one person addressed her homelessness and neither has her psychologist and physician who she visits regularly. Interestingly, the psychiatric nurse explained that one aspect of her "borderline personality disorder" diagnosis was, "difficulty in feeling good."

Betty felt very uncertain about her future. She did not know if this was the beginning of the rest of her life, that is, if homelessness was going to be permanent, or if this was just a phase she was going through. For women like Roberta and Erma, the future was irrelevant. All thoughts must be focused on each day as it comes. The concept of the future had no ontological meaning.
The remainder of the study participants felt hopeful about their futures. Lianna had dreams of obtaining her General Equivalency Diploma and perhaps, "working in an office." Celia wants to finish college and Susan would like to get a Master's degree. Despite the apparent obstacles and the lowered socioeconomic status, they felt optimistic once they obtained housing.

The Meaning of Home

As discussed in Chapter One, home is a primal human need. This was reinforced by all the study participants, that home is a part of the core of a person where physical and social needs merged. Home is a part of one's self, and relationships assume an important role in the meaning of home. Over and over the women reiterated that home is where people care about and love one another. Home is where one is safe, both mentally and physically, and where one meets needs, subsistence and developmental, material and spiritual. Moreover, home is a place one has the utmost freedom to live and experience. The women dreamed of having a place that they could own, a place on the earth and in society.

Emergent Theoretical Patterns

Homelessness affronts human dignity both individually and collectively. The study participants counter this dehumanization by distancing themselves from other homeless women in an attempt to retain self-worth, which in American culture is extricably tied to individualism. Homeless women are outsiders, as to be accepted in
society, one has to show independence. Ironically then, in order to be an acceptable community member, one must first show that the community is not needed. Of course independence still implies dependence but that dependence is mitigated and redefined with the concept of money. As long as one can purchase needs with money earned or inherited, one is independent.

Their individualism rarely enabled the women to see themselves affected by collective processes. They saw themselves as not getting anywhere despite their efforts and felt a sense of inadequacy. Sennett and Cobb refer to this as the burdens of social class. Yet a few women began to ask why they got all the blame for their children's problems and why social policies do not encompass women's needs nor their experiences.

The women, men, and children who inhabit the street or, if eligible, make use of shelters, food pantries, or soup kitchens, are not necessarily a community of people but rather a collection of individuals seeking assistance and re-entrance into society. Although people may come to know one another, relationships are very tenuous and one is usually advised to keep to one's self and be careful about revealing personal information and asking questions of others. Ida often discussed an invisible wall that she built around herself to protect her and enable her to continue living each day. The longer one is homeless, the thicker the wall. Some that have experienced prolonged homelessness may only speak in sentence fragments or by what Ida termed, "talking in riddles." Only certain thoughts are revealed
and the observer must fill in the gaps or try to put the pieces together in a meaningful way.

Survival was the most important issue and the uppermost problems were food, employment, health, and obviously, housing. The women struggled with constant fatigue and relayed stories full of pain and suffering. Another facet revealed in their accounts of becoming homeless and in their daily accounts of living homelessly was the compound effect of problems. Having one problem made them vulnerable to having other problems. Sometimes the effect of having one problem made the next problem worse. The effect of unemployment, family problems, and health problems were not only additive but geometric. Once homeless a person is vulnerable to a myriad of difficult problems all at the same time. Being out of money is like being in a lion's den. A thirty-one-year-old homeless woman (encountered during participant observation) illustrated this concept in her account of the problems she and her husband were contending with.

They had moved here from one of Ohio's former steel towns in search of work. They had their belongings stored in their car, which was impounded because of unpaid parking tickets. Now it would cost over one-hundred dollars to pay the fines and get the car. They were stuck. They could not go on job interviews without clean clothes. With the assistance of a church group they finally were able to retrieve the car. But apparently a mouse had come through the hole in the car floor and chewed through the garbage bag which contained their clothes. Her husband's new pants, recently purchased at a thrift
store, had a huge hole in them. The next day they got another parking ticket.

Because there are no shelters for married couples, they had to separate and use separate women's and men's shelters. They found work some days doing spot labor, but they could not make the shelter's curfew. They used their last quarter to call the shelter but the message was never relayed. She was 'banned' from the shelter for a certain period of time for breaking curfew, but her husband was not, although the shelters are under the same organizational auspice.

Homelessness compounded whatever problems were at hand and made them foreigners, outcasts and inmates in a world of institutions such as shelters, missions, soup kitchens, food pantries, sandwich lines, and welfare offices. It was far from a chosen existence, yet they assumed personal responsibility.

Implications

Although homelessness was experienced as a personal problem, it is a public issue when a significant segment of society cannot meet basic human needs. The social welfare institution has failed in its mission to relieve distress or contribute to the solution of social problems. Has income inequality reached a point such that social welfare is unable to mitigate? The term safety net implies holes, but these holes are not just cracks that people slip through, they are huge craters where two and three million Americans have fallen, and those represent only the tip of an iceberg of human misery and devastation.
The social welfare institution is not a system but rather a loose collection of organizations which are oriented to individual change rather than societal change. As the testimony of the study participants indicated, social welfare organizations attempt to change the person, not the complex conditions of inequality which cause homelessness. The agencies mirror the larger society and expect the individual to adjust to these conditions. Many homeless persons felt that these organizations made their problems worse.

Although social welfare organizations are not oriented to social change, neither are they equipped to assist homeless individuals in meeting their needs. There is very little in the way of job training and virtually nothing in the way of real housing assistance, such as cooperatives and other nonprofit organizations, which could build and manage affordable housing, especially for single women and their children. As documented in Chapter Two, the massive budget reductions and elimination of many social programs threaten the continued existence of an already less-than-adequate social welfare institution.

The implications are grave for a nation that professes to be a democracy. The social welfare institution is not the cause of inequality, it merely perpetuates it. The inequality is embedded in the major institutional structures of this country, which has produced homelessness among its citizens.

Conclusions

Three basic conclusions emerged from this study of homeless women. The first conclusion is that the value systems of these women
were not deviant from the dominant belief systems in the United States. These values included achievement, success, work, efficiency, progress, patriotism, private property, free enterprise, belief in a supreme being, and in particular for women, family and children.

The second conclusion is that these women were victims of those values. That is, the social structures which describe and explain the lives of homeless women in American society are the economic and familial institutions and the value system described above. The myths did not match the reality.

Finally, the highly prized middle class status is precarious for increasing numbers of Americans. The long arduous journey to the middle class includes many roadblocks. Even once attained middle class status is tenuous. In other words most people are closer to homelessness than they are to great wealth. The fall to homelessness for women is a much much shorter distance than the climb to the top.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


2  Ibid., p. 58.
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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
A Study of the Experience of Homelessness

This is a study of your experience with being homeless. I am interested in your life story and how you feel about the different events in your life. This study is called a life history because one learns all about a person's life.

You can talk about anything you like, such as what your typical days have been like, problems in the world you would like to see changed, and your hopes and dreams. The questions I am interested in are: How did or do you manage? What did you do? To whom did you turn? How did you feel? I also want to get to know you and would like to learn your life, and where you grew up and went to school.

There are no right or wrong things to say. I am truly interested in your feelings and your experiences. All information will be kept strictly confidential, and you will not be identified when the research is written. Your name and anyone you mention will not be used. I will be looking at other women's experiences as well as yours and will be looking at similarities and differences.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If at any time you wish to stop, or just take a break, please let me know. If you do not feel like talking about a particular subject, that is perfectly acceptable. You are under no obligation to answer any questions.

I would like to ask your permission to tape record our time together so I can preserve exactly what your experiences have been, in your own words, rather than my taking notes. The tape will be destroyed after the material is typed. Again, your name will not be used nor will anyone else's. No one but me will hear the interviews. They will not be used for any other purpose. I want to assure you that everything is confidential.

Here are some general areas that I would be interested in learning from you. Please add or leave out any area. I am interested in learning about your life and so you can structure this interview anyway you like. We can divide our time together into sessions in which we focus on certain topics. It will probably take four or five meetings (six to eight hours) together. After we are finished, I will give you a small sum of money as a gift for participating in the study. The topics I would like you to discuss are:

1. Your current situation and how you feel about it. What your days have been like.
2. The places and neighborhoods where you have lived before and what you liked and did not like.
3. Your family, friends, and relatives.
4. Jobs and income.
5. Things important to you.
6. The future.
7. What HOME means to you, and anything you would like to share.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask at any time. Do you have any now? Would you like to begin?
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE
A Study of the Experience of Homelessness

Interview Topics

I. What Is Going On Now

A. Where are you staying now? How long? What has your experience been like? How do you feel about it? Have you ever felt like this before? How do you feel today?

B. Describe the most recent housing situation and what happened. What did you do that very night or day? With whom did you come in contact? What were they like? How did you know what to do? How did you manage with children? What did you do the next day? Describe what your days have been like lately. How have you taken care of needs? What has been the worst of your experience? Can you think of anything good?

II. Other Places You Have Lived

The purpose of this session is to discuss prior living arrangements and what you remember and feel about then. Can you construct a time table from birth to present of all the places you have lived? Can you discuss the neighborhoods, landlords, and what was going on in your life at that time? Which place was your favorite? What do you remember about each place? What about a sense of belonging? The quality of life at each place? Were you happy or sad? Did you feel at home in all of them?

III. Family, Friends, and Relatives

In what kind of family did you grow up in? Can you discuss your parents, grandparents, siblings, or relatives? What are some of your memories (good and not so good)? What kinds of friends did you have? How did you feel about yourself and family when you were growing up? What about being a teenager? Did you have many friends or a few? Did you have any boyfriends? How did you feel about yourself as a teenager? How did you see your future then? What about school? What have your relationships with men been like? Do you have women friends? Describe beginning, middle, and ending of major relationships. Who are the people most important to you? Why?

IV. Jobs and Income

What kinds of jobs have you had - beginning with childhood? What was the work like? What was the boss like? What was the pay like? Did other family members have jobs? What did you think of the job? What kinds of jobs did your parents have? Their bosses? What was the money situation like in your home? How would you classify your family (that you grew up in) in relation to other families? What would be an ideal job? Ideal pay? Have you ever been your own boss? Would you like to? What is your current money situation? How would you classify yourself in relation to other people, money-wise? What kinds of jobs do your friends have?
V. Values - Things Important To You
At this session we want to talk about values. What is important to you? What is most important in your life? What are your hobbies? How do you spend leisure time?

VI. The Future
What would you like to see happen in the next months? Next six months? Next year? Next five years? What are some of your hopes and dreams? If you were to live your life over again, would you do it the same? What would you do differently? Do you have any regrets? What are some of the best and happy times in your life? What are some of the worst times?

VII. Final Session - The Meaning Of Home
What does the word "home" mean to you? What would be the ideal home? What effect has being homeless had on your life? Have you changed your opinion on anything? Do you see yourself differently? What advice would you like to pass on to others who find themselves in your situation? What things could be done to make things different for the future? How do you feel about our time together? Can you think of other things to add to the things you have said? What was your favorite part of the interview? Least favorite part?

Demographic Sheet

Age ______

Race ______

Education ____________________________

Length of Time Homeless ________________________

Referral Source (How did you become part of the study?)
_________________________________________
_________________________________________
_________________________________________

What categories on matrix? ________________________

Marital Status ______

No. of Children ______