

Down and Out on the Kaw:  
An Examination of Emergency Shelters in Lawrence, Kansas.

By

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## **Abstract**

Down and Out on the Kaw:

An Examination of Emergency Shelters in Lawrence, Kansas.

Homelessness poses an enduring and formidable challenge to 21st-century urban America. My work draws from three years of ethnographic research on the streets and in the social service agencies of Lawrence, Kansas. I formally interviewed 31 people made up of shelter employees, board members, and homeless clients of the Lawrence Community Shelter and the Salvation Army emergency shelter. Eight people defined themselves as homeless, six were members of advisory boards associated with the shelters, and 17 were shelter employees. The central claim of this thesis is that beliefs about the causes of homelessness, and constructions of the homeless person, contain two distinct discourses: the systemic and the individual-based. Embedded in social policy, academic literature, and popular culture, these discourses influence care-provision for the homeless. My research investigated discourses at two emergency shelters and how they affected the shelter's operational strategies. "Theories on Homelessness" outlines the two discourses I identify as primary. Chapter Three traces those discourses through American history. The final chapters present my data and findings, offer some conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Homelessness, Emergency Shelters, Discourse, Salvation Army, Individualistic, Systemic.

## Acknowledgments

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I had the good fortune to learn from a number of excellent teachers. At the University of Kansas, my chairperson, Dr. Bartholomew C. Dean, provided guidance and critical insight when I needed it most. Dr. F. Allan Hanson provided essential criticism and support. Dr. Brent Metz was both a comrade and voice of reason within the hectic world of the academy. Dr. Felix Moos was gracious enough to provide an external view throughout my academic career. Dr. Jane W. Gibson suffered through my painful early drafts, offering insight and critique. Most importantly, all the professors at the University of Kansas expressed continued faith in my potential abilities even when I did not. As an undergraduate, I was encouraged by Dr. John Wingard and Dr. Richard Singhas of Sonoma State University.

I dedicate this project to the memory of my loving mother, Victoria Marie Mathison. Although she was not able to see it begin, I hope these pages reflect her grace and beauty.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

“Hey kid, got a smoke for me?” asked Charlie as he walked across the porch. I had learned during the last few months of fieldwork to stop buying pre-rolled cigarettes in favor of a can of loose tobacco and a bunch of rolling papers. More tobacco on hand meant more time on the porch of the Lawrence Community Drop-In Center learning from people staying at the homeless shelters in Lawrence, Kansas. Charlie explained, in a soft-spoken manner with a slight southern drawl, that he could not roll by hand. I asked how long he had been staying at the shelter as I loosened up the tobacco, pulled out a paper, and turned on my mini tape-recorder.

“About four months now,” he responded. Charlie was in his late fifties with blue eyes and graying blonde hair. “What do you have to say about homelessness in Lawrence?” I asked as I finished rolling. Charlie took the cigarette, lit up, took a long, deep pull and explained, “What you see at the Salvation Army is this: they don't really want to put up with you but it is *what they are paid to do...*” As I settled into the interview, I could not help wondering, ‘if shelters provide assistance because of economic incentives, do the services they offer reflect this arrangement’?

Over the past five years, my primary research interest has concerned social justice and homelessness in the United States. This thesis will test the following hypothesis: Emergency shelter staff and board members’ explanations about the causes of homelessness relate to shelter system’s policies and programs. For example, I propose that shelters run by those with individualistic explanations that blame homeless people for their conditions will operate with restrictive, disciplinary policies aimed at reforming

the flawed individual. Shelters run by those that follow systemic explanations that blame problems of homelessness on the social system will operate with open, empowering policies aimed at rehabilitating the disabled individual.

### **Homelessness in the United States and Lawrence**

Returning to Charlie's comment, he does a good job at summing up the federal government's response to homelessness over the last 30 years. During this period, the American welfare state (a collection of programs that at one time provided a safety net for people experiencing poverty in the United States) has been largely dismantled in favor of a market based neo-liberal model where bio-medical treatment of the individual is dominant (Piven et al. 2002). The current shelter system is a collection of charity-based organizations and public/private funded emergency programs targeting homeless people in an attempt to make them "housing-ready." Towns and cities, prompted by federal programs like the Continuum of Care, treat the problem of homelessness locally. Lawrence, Kansas, is no exception. In 2005, over 40 newspaper stories with the keyword homelessness appeared in the *Lawrence Journal World*, with over 200 in the previous five years. According to a count performed in January of 2007, Lawrence's homeless population was more than 413 (Lawhorn 2007). Thirty-two people, or eight percent of the total population, were designated as chronically homeless (*ibid*). The largest single category of homeless people was parents with children. There were 81 homeless families, which accounted for 232 people. A Salvation Army emergency shelter employee explained to me:

Lawrence is really struggling with the issue of how to address homelessness right now. It has been in the newspaper, it has been on the front pages, it has really become an issue. The question is can we take care of all of it? Should we take this up as a community and say, "Should we find a place for everybody?"

Finding a place for everybody may be difficult. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimated 3.5 million Americans, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 2004). Burt (1997) found that homelessness rates in 182 U.S. cities with populations over 100,000 had tripled between 1981 and 1989. A 1997 review of research conducted between 1987 and 1997 in 11 communities and four states found shelter capacity had more than doubled in nine communities and three states during that period (National Coalition for the Homeless 1997). In 1999, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released a comprehensive study of homelessness in the United States, demonstrating a pervasive homeless problem throughout the nation (Interagency Council on the Homeless 1999; Lyon-Callo 2004: 9-10). This report confirmed many other studies (for example: National Coalition for the Homeless 1997; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 1999; United States Conference of Mayors 1998) in demonstrating increasing homelessness, hunger, housing stress, and inequality in America (Lyon-Callo 2004: 10). In 2000, the Urban Institute released a study finding one percent of the American population experienced homelessness a year, with 38 to 39 percent being children (Urban Institute 2000).

## **Theoretical Relevancy**

There is precedent for this research in ethnographic studies on homelessness. Research by Williams (2003) found a correlation between strong support of individualistic causation, hierarchical surveillance, restrictive access, and extensive punitive rules at shelters. She argues the American shelter system defines homelessness, at least in part, as a behavioral problem of the individual. She found shelters "reflect particular beliefs about homelessness...homeless people are constructed as part of a lazy, irresponsible, addicted, or criminal underclass" (Williams 2003: 176). In this context, the discourses in use suggest homelessness stems "from individual decisions and choices or from psychological problems ranging from low self-esteem to mental illness" (*ibid*). Increasingly, elected officials across the country are turning to punitive policies toward homeless people (Lyon Callo 2004, 2001; National Law Center on Poverty and Homelessness 1999).

The shelters in Williams' study focused on work programs as the primary method of rehabilitation. This often resulted in shelter operators creating programs that evaluate homeless people's ability to gain employment. Few programs recognized that re-entry job markets are limited and only rarely pay enough for an individual, much less a family, to become self-sufficient. In addition, at least "20 percent of the homeless population in the United States may not have the physical and mental capacity to find and hold even a low-paying job" (Williams 2003: 180). Williams concluded the first step toward re-evaluating the shelter system in America is to "separate homelessness from a concept of deviance" (Williams 2003: 182).

I propose emergency shelters using little or no surveillance, with open access to services and few exclusionary or punitive rules, will place more emphasis on structural causes for homelessness. The opposite should be present at shelters that assign causation to personal choice. This thesis tests this hypothesis through an ethnographic study of Lawrence, Kansas's two homeless shelters, the Lawrence Community Shelter and the Salvation Army emergency shelter in Lawrence, Kansas.

### **Contributions to Anthropology**

The chief contributions this thesis makes to anthropology are within anthropological studies of homelessness and the discursive construction of the homeless person (Kingfisher 2007, Kyle 2005, Lyon-Callo 2004, Gowen 2003). In particular, this thesis adds to current knowledge about how shelter operators view the homeless shelter system, the population they serve, and how homeless people perceive shelters and shelter staff. Understanding how shelter staff and board members perceive the causes of homelessness is helpful in understanding how certain policies develop and why they succeed or fail. It contributes to the anthropological literature on homelessness by further expanding ethnographic inquiry into emergency shelters. I also offer a North American urban case study that will aid future research, contributing to the growing literature of "at home urban anthropology." Like Kingfisher (2007), Kyle (2005), and Gowen (2003), who each investigated discursive constructions of homelessness, my study of emergency shelters resonates within and contributes to both urban anthropology and the anthropology of homelessness. This thesis also demonstrates how useful anthropological

perspectives and methods are to the area of urban homelessness, and articulates intriguing and vital questions that remain open and need attention from researchers in anthropology and beyond.

The theoretical framework of this research project stems from the anthropological study of homelessness. An early example is Spradly's ethnographic research on inner city "street people" (1970, 1972). It has roots in Williams' (2003) study on homeless shelters and operational structures. The method of analysis for this research derives from discourse analysis. The anthropological study of discourse brings together ideas from several different disciplinary sources. Each of these sources shares an interest in understanding the interaction between language and knowledge. In this instance, discourses are the means by which social action, cultural knowledge and social institutions are maintained, achieved, and enacted (Farnell and Graham 1998). My analysis of the intersection of popular discourses and the shelter environment adds to the growing discussion of discursive constructions within cultural anthropology (for example see Kingfisher 2007), especially how cities repackage emergency shelters in light of changing federal policy.

The long history of North American anthropology sets both a theoretical and methodological precedent for this research. Over the last two hundred years, a large body of work concerning the Anthropology of the United States has developed. This began with early Cultural Evolutionists such as Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), who was one of the first scholars to conduct anthropological research on native populations in the U.S. Franz Boas (1858-1942), the "Father of American Anthropology" and champion of cultural relativism was paramount in the development of American anthropology. His

many students, such as Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Robert Henry Lowie (1883-1957), all contributed to the strong Boasian tradition in U.S. anthropology with their work on Native American populations. From the 1870s to the 1930s, massive research studies among Native Americans helped to describe and analyze indigenous cultures. This time, known today as a period of “salvage ethnography,” found anthropologists concerned with the practice of salvaging a record of what was left of a culture before it disappeared (Bodley 2005). Many ethnographers of this time chose what was important to document without impute from informants, leaving later critics the argument that the research was notably colonialist, paternalistic, and lacked the cultural sensitivity associated with modern at-home ethnography. The theoretical paradigms of this period transitioned from strict Boasian relativism to the emerging political ecology and structuralist concepts. Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) in the 1930's developed the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Near the same time, Julian Steward (1902-1972) published a seminal essay on the economic and social basis of bands. Adaptation became the rubric of cultural ecology, and Steward's research prompted some Boasians to rethink their eclectic approach to anthropological explanation and concentrate instead on cultural ecology. What emerged came to be known as cultural neo-evolutionism, a reformulation of 19th century classical cultural evolutionism and in some ways was anti-Boasian. In the post-Boasian era, historical particularism faded into the background of an increasingly crowded picture of anthropological theories developed.

During the early and mid-twentieth century sociologists viewed urban life as a significant area of study. On the other hand, anthropologists, prior to and during this time-period, focused on the “exotic other” at home and/or abroad. Few American

anthropologists saw any value in studying non-native American populations, and many continued to distinguish themselves from the more positivist sociologists by conducting fieldwork outside of the United States. Sociologists of this period conducted systemic research among immigrant populations, the impoverished, and minority groups in the U.S. The emerging paradigm of social ecology soon swept through sociology, marking a formative period for the discipline. Together, these factors significantly delayed mainstream anthropological research on urban populations in the United States.

The University of Chicago sociological studies of American cities from the early and mid-twentieth century had a significant impact on the anthropology of the United States. The first “Chicago School” of urban sociologists argued that economic, ecological, and cultural processes were fundamental to shaping modern cityscapes. Anthropologist Robert Redfield (1897-1958), a graduate of the University of Chicago during this period and deeply influenced by the Chicago School of sociologists, acted as a catalyst to stimulate further anthropological study of urban life and culture in North American cities.

American anthropologists’ reluctance to study outside of the United States during the war years influenced the emergence of Applied Anthropology during the post WWII era. So many studies emerged that the prominent journal *American Anthropologist* devoted an entire issue to the subject, "The U.S.A. as Anthropologists See It," edited by Margaret Lantis (1955). This volume provided a discussion of what anthropologists were interested in when looking at North America, and made suggestions for further research.

One suggestion was the study of poverty in an urban setting. Perhaps the most influential anthropologist to study urban poverty at this time was Oscar Lewis (1914-

1970). Lewis' "Culture of Poverty" (1968) was a fire-point for criticism (Leacock 1971), but his work did stimulate others to ask equally important questions about urban culture in industrial countries. Joyce Ladner (1971) looked at the African American woman in urban America, championing a feminist and ethnically critical perspective. Carol Stack (1975) looked at African American kinship systems and strategies for survival in a Black community. Ida Susser (1982) conducted a massive study of working class neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. Her research focused on the changing patterns of inequality and poverty, social movements, gender and HIV/AIDS. The 1980s saw a growth in immigrant studies, such as Robert Alvarez's (1987) study of Mexican Americans. In 1987, William Julius Wilson began a political-economic study of urban under-classes in his "The Truly Disadvantaged." This work became foundational to urban poverty studies. The explosion of homelessness during the 1980s also contributed to a new area of study for anthropologists. Kim Hopper is perhaps the most influential anthropologist in this field, amassing a wealth of knowledge on the subject of homelessness during the 1980s (Hopper and Hamburg 1984, Hopper et al. 1985, Hopper 1987). His work investigating abeyance and liminality in populations of homeless people helped to describe modern poverty.

The 1990s saw more growth in debates about race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in relation to North America. Faye Harrison's (1995) argument for increased anthropological study of race became a call for anthropology to look back at itself and its own opinions about race and ethnicity. In the 2000s, ethnographers such as Lyon-Callo (2000; 2001) and Jean Calterone Williams (2003) explored causes and structures of homelessness in a capitalist, neo-liberal, and consumerist society.

Bridgman (2003) examined a different kind of shelter. The shelter in her study sought a less defined or structured organization (Bridgman 2003: 57). The design emphasized spatial flexibility, choice, and sense of ownership for homeless women (*ibid* 73). This led to staff learning about the “strengths, skills, and survival abilities of the women” and determining what, if any, “supports, programs, and services” they want (Bridgman 2003: 125).

Lyon-Callo (2004) began a call for activist ethnography in his study of neo-liberalism and its influence on homelessness, and Ken Kyle (2005) linked federal policy, discourse, and homelessness in the United States. Finally, and most relevant to this research, Catherine Kingfisher (2007), professor of anthropology at the University of Lethbridge, investigated the discursive constructions of homelessness in a small Canadian city. She explored “the conversations, debates, and constructions that inform and precede actual policy formation regarding homelessness in a small Canadian city” (Kingfisher 2007: 91). To summarize, this thesis will contribute to the growing tradition of the anthropology of homelessness in the United States and beyond as it has developed over the last four decades.

## **Methods**

The methods of investigation used for this study included participant observation and formal/informal interviews. From February to May of 2005, I worked as a night monitor at both the Salvation Army and Lawrence Community emergency shelters. From June to August of 2005, I spent my days at the Lawrence Community Drop-In Shelter,

the Lawrence Inter-denominational Nutritional Kitchen weekday lunches, and the Salvation Army day shelter.

Participant observation in this study involved immersion in, and observation of, the emergency shelters in Lawrence where I volunteered. Such interaction and inclusiveness allowed me to partake in casual conversations and helped me to comprehend multiple perceptions of the shelter system and homelessness. I observed interactions between homeless people and service-providers, along with the everyday operations and the general social environment of the shelters.

Informal and formal interviews, carried out between May 2005 and January 2006, ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length. I recorded and transcribed all interviews, and changed all staff and board members' names to protect respondent confidentiality. Formal interviews that took place at the Lawrence Community Shelter were conducted privately in either the shelter director's or the lead caseworker's office. I conducted formal interviews at the Salvation Army in the Chapel. I developed and used an interview guide geared toward three distinct groups: homeless people staying at emergency shelters, service-providers, and board members.

I formally interviewed 31 people made up of shelter employees, board members, and homeless clients of the two shelters. Eight people defined themselves as homeless, six were members of advisory boards associated with the shelters, and 17 were formal shelter employees. This direction of inquiry allowed for discussion about the causes of homelessness, other factors that contribute to the operation of homeless shelters, their perceptions of homeless people, and their perceptions of service-providers.

Informal interviews consisted of casual conversations. I regularly ate lunch at the

Lawrence Interdenominational Nutritional Kitchen. Volunteers there served food in the basement of the First Christian Church across the street from Lawrence Community Shelter. It was a time not only for eating but also for socializing and sharing information among low-income community members. This gave me an opportunity to visit with a variety of homeless people and care-providers in what was generally a relaxed and open atmosphere. After eating, patrons often walked over to the Lawrence Community Shelter to smoke cigarettes and talk, and I tagged along. Over time, people began to recognize me and relationships began to form. I came to know many of the regular guests, volunteers, and community philanthropists at both shelters.

## **Analysis**

Discourse analysis is the method I used to analyze my data. It is a qualitative method of investigation focused on the representation and creation of meaning through language (Kyle 2005). My analysis identified patterns of language and their associations with particular discourses. These patterns of language I define as narratives within a discourse. For example, within the popular American discourse on homelessness there are narratives about the lazy homeless person who chooses to live a homeless lifestyle dependent on relief agencies. Isolating such narratives allowed me to place them into association with one of the primary discourses on homelessness. I argue the prevalence of such narratives at a single shelter will denote the emphasis of a particular discourse by respondents at that shelter.

I focused on transcripts from interviews of the staff, board members, and clients

at each shelter. I sifted the raw data looking for staff and board members' descriptions of homelessness. Totals helped to denote to what level popular American discourses about the causes of homelessness were present at which shelter. I hypothesized staff members and administrators in shelters with excessive punitive rules, video surveillance, and restricted access to services would place more emphasis on individual-based causes for homelessness. For example, this statement, "[the causes of homelessness in Lawrence are the result of] a combination of a lot of things, from alcohol abuse to drug addiction, to a lack in social skills, to bad employment histories, to generational poverty" illustrates parts of the individualistic discourse. The speaker claims certain people's social failings lead them into homelessness, which fits within the individualistic discourse's claim of "homeless people are socially inept." A statement such as this one, "the lack of jobs with a living wage [contributes to homelessness]" illustrates the systemic-based discourse. The speaker claims the owners of the means of production will not provide a wage that can support laborers in the current economy, which fits in the systemic-based discourse's claim of "the current social system creates homelessness."

### **Why study Lawrence?**

Most studies of homelessness and poverty in the United States have focused on large, urban areas (Lyon-Callo 2004). Why did I choose to study a mid-size city of about 80,000 people settled in a river valley in eastern Kansas? Lawrence has two homeless shelters, has embraced the federally instigated Continuum of Care model and the Chronic Homelessness Initiatives. Lawrence has also adopted a 10-year plan to end chronic

homelessness, and commissioned a city-funded task force on homeless services. The Salvation Army, a conservative religious organization with a long history of assisting the poor, operates one shelter. The Lawrence Community Shelter, operated by a local non-profit organization, describes itself as an open establishment willing to treat any person regardless of sexual orientation or intoxication. The combination of these opposing operational styles and the adoption of federal programs fit well into my research design, allowing me the opportunity to develop a hypothesis based on Williams' 2003 study investigating homeless shelters. Lawrence has a well-established homeless care-provision infrastructure suitable for this study.

### **Study Limitations**

My access to the board members of the Salvation Army was limited. I was only able to secure an interview with two board members, the current president of the board and the current Salvation Army operations director. This was due, in part, to the political climate in Lawrence during my research. Newspaper articles that questioned the Salvation Army's operating procedures at the overnight shelter were written as I began my fieldwork, and resistance to the development of a new multi-service shelter was quite strong among community members as I conducted my data collection. The board of the Salvation Army is not a public entity, and only acts in an advisory manner with the shelter. I believe these factors affected my ability to gain interviews with the board members of the Salvation Army emergency shelter.

My recruitment of homeless informants included posting fliers with contact

information and waiting for homeless people to approach me. I only interviewed homeless people who stayed at least once at local shelters during the course of my study. Some people experiencing homelessness viewed my research as intrusive and refused to participate. Additionally, I did not formally interview a female homeless person.

### **Structure of Thesis**

Chapter One provides an introduction, methods, and study limitations. Chapter Two is an overview of theories about the causes of homelessness. Chapter Three is a description of the popular discourses on homelessness in the United States from the Colonial period to present, detailing the evolution and contributions to modern thinking about homelessness. Chapter Four is a brief overview of American governmental policy about homelessness from 1980 to the present. Chapter Five describes the services provided to homeless people in Lawrence, Kansas, with an emphasis on the two overnight shelters. Chapter Six presents the interview data collected during my research. Chapter Seven analyzes the data described in Chapter Six, and offers a discussion of my findings and their implications for future research.

## Chapter Two: Theories on Homelessness in the United States

This chapter will track theories about the causes of homelessness in the United States. Theories explaining homelessness can be placed on a continuum between traditional individualistic thinking about the sources of poverty, and the conviction that homelessness is an involuntary, externally inducted state (Kusmer 2002; Hopper 2003; Lyon-Callo 2004). At present, there is a wide recognition of systemic causes such as how governmental policy, social and cultural ineptitude, unemployment, and housing shortages contribute to homelessness (Hopper 2003; Lyon-Callo 2004).

Table 1.1 outlines two opposing discourses and how they explain the causes of

<b>Table 1.1: Opposing Discourses in Homelessness</b>	
<b>Individual-Based Discourse</b>	<b>Systemic Discourse</b>
Flawed individual	Flawed social system
Homeless people are weak-willed, lazy, and stupid.	Homeless people are discriminated against and are economically repressed.
<b>Individual-Based</b>	<b>Structural-Based</b>
The homeless are deviant individuals who are lazy, opportunistic, irresponsible, and often criminal. People become homeless because of these attributes.	Homeless people are just like us. Economic stratification, low wages, high cost of housing/health care/fuel, racial discrimination, and class stratification leads people into homelessness.

homelessness. In general, explanations about the causes of homelessness in the individual-based discourse construct the problem of homelessness as the result of personal flaws and choices. The discourse utilizes narratives that construct the

homeless person as deviant, idle, hedonistic, corrupt, and irresponsible. The clearing of homeless people through police sweeps, legislation against loitering or vagrancy, and extensive reform-oriented programs at homeless shelters are physical manifestations of this particular discourse (Kyle 2005).

Narratives in the systemic discourse describe broader inequalities of the social structure and their impact on American homelessness. It constructs homeless people as normal citizens and victims of inequalities. Causes of homelessness include cultural/social issues such as the cultural environment, social constraints, institutional racism, economic/structural issues such as globalization, unemployment, inflation, low-wages, and war. The primary argument of the systemic discourse is the Marxist theory that capitalist societies produce poverty and suffering for many, wealth and prosperity for a few. It argues the problems of homeless people are solvable by addressing problems of the social and economic systems rather than by punishing, bio-medically treating, or reforming (as apposed to rehabilitating) homeless people. Living Wage campaigns that isolate low-wages as a leading cause of homelessness are a political response to this discourse (Lyon-Callo 2004).

Between these two discourses lie a range of responses to the causes of poverty and homelessness. Five possible explanations for homelessness derived from the two opposing discourses are 1) Personal choice –*people choice to live a homeless lifestyle*, 2) Aversion to work –*people are homeless because they are idle*, 3) Alcoholism/mental illness –*the major causes of homelessness are alcoholism and mental illness*, 4) Bad luck –*homeless people are down on their luck*, and 5) Structural forces –*low wages and high rents create homelessness*. The first two represent the individual-based discourse, the last two the systemic discourse. The third item falls in the middle conceptually because alcoholism and mental illness are widely recognized in American culture as diseases. They lack a certain element of pure volition implied in the personal choice and idleness frames. Both are also highly stigmatized. Homeless people whose lives are controlled by

heavy drinking are often perceived by the general public being weak willed. What this implies is that the sickness of alcoholism cannot be exclusively assigned to either the sufferer or the environment as both are thought to foster the condition. Mental illness carries similar connotations, with the general public largely accepting untreated conditions lead people into homelessness. Mental illness carries a stronger implication than alcoholism that the condition is outside of the control of the individual, a result of traumatic events or even genetic conditions.

### **The History of Individualistic and Systemic Theories**

The academic underpinnings of modern individual-based theories concerning homelessness relate to the rise of Social Darwinism (the application of Darwinian Theory to human social systems), which influenced American perceptions of homelessness to the present. Theorists argued natural law decreed the fit survive and the unfit perish. Social Darwinism may bear Darwin's name, but the theory draws from the work of many authors, most importantly Thomas Malthus and Herbert Spencer.

While the intellectual background of systemic-based theories about homelessness can be traced to scholars such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henri Saint-Simon, they are generally applied to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Marx and Engels [1848] 1989). Marx and Engels, while aware of the works of Malthus, Spencer, and other individualists, argued that with the accumulation of wealth came the demand for more labor. However, capital grows quicker than the demand for labor, which results in unemployment (Hanson 1997). To Marx and his followers, the cause of poverty is not personal choice, but rather

problems of the economic and social systems.

Returning to the individual-based theorists, Malthus' writings on population growth and human society were widely read in the United States. Malthus' major work *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) argued that human populations naturally increased in relation to their food supply. He believed that, if left unchecked human populations would eat themselves out of a food supply. Society should control population growth by controlling breeding, stimulating industriousness, production, and the exercise of reason over base passion. Focusing on the poor, Malthus argued they placed no rein on their sexual passions, thus unwittingly plunged themselves into destitution. He argued that through education the poor would develop the finer qualities of character that come from self-control. War, famine, and starvation (natural causes) and moral restraint (social causes) together could help to limit population growth. However, his theories only applied to poor and uneducated classes who he argued did not have proper moral character. Social theorists who attempt to explain complex social problems such as homelessness have often taken up Malthus' ideas.

Spencer and his thinking were born out of early nineteenth-century British industrialism. His major works did extremely well in the United States, where such magazines as *Atlantic Monthly* and *Popular Science Monthly* published them. Spencer's earliest work, *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (1857), argued that social change also takes place through a process of continual advancement from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous:

The advance from the simple to the complex, through a process of successive differentiations, is seen alike in the earliest changes of the Universe to which we can reason our way back, and in the earliest changes which we can

inductively establish; it is seen in the geologic and climatic evolution of the Earth, and of every single organism on its surface; it is seen in the evolution of Humanity, whether contemplated in the civilized individual, or in the aggregation of races; it is seen in the evolution of Society in respect both of its political and economical organization; and it is seen in the evolution of all those endless concrete and abstract products of human activity which constitute the environment of our daily life [Spencer 1857].

Spencer later used his ideas to explain human evolution from the Industrial Revolution to his day. His theories introduced the concept of social progress, believing society was always progressing toward perfection. Perhaps more important in relation to the study of homelessness, Spencer believed the unit of analysis when dealing with social evolution was the individual. Spencer believed present human society is the only logical consequence of its previous stage and a final, perfect society will eventually evolve. Society itself is undergoing an evolutionary process in which the fittest dominate (Spencer 1864). Spencer and his followers believed an enlightened society should permit its unfit individuals to die off. Problems of a society rest on the shoulders of people, with blame placed on the poor for their own condition. The crucial point from Spencer is homeless people represent a biologically inferior group of individuals. They are inferior because they have "lost" their struggle. Followers of this doctrine, such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, believed that the unemployed and the underemployed deserve their destitution.

Spencer opposed all outright aid to the poor as it would be an interference with the "natural" process. He felt we must stand aside and let the Malthusian forces crush the weak and incompetent, the homeless and unemployed. The result of Spencer's ideas (and the founding fathers of American capitalism embrace) has been that many Americans

became convinced sympathy for the less fortunate lessens the competitive spirit that 'makes this country great.' Spencer's theories have continued to influence American thinking about poverty and homelessness into the new millennium. When George Herbert Walker Bush claimed in 1992 "we need to say: Get a job or get off the dole," (DeParle 1992) he was reflecting Spencer's theories.

The first major native-born contributor to individualistic theories on homelessness in the United States was Edward Franklin Frazier, an African American who also emphasized personal faults leading people into poverty and homelessness (Frazier 1931, 1932, 1949, 1957a, 1957b). He argued materially poor families were unstable, disorganized, and unfit to provide social and psychological support for their members (Frazier 1949). Frazier also stressed the marital disruption, decadence, destitution, crime, and vice into which "Negroes" sank when migrating into urban environments (*ibid*). Continuingly associating the problems of poverty in personal character flaws led to particular theories about the causes of poverty and homelessness in the United States. Under such frameworks, people are homeless because of substance addiction, uncontrollable mental illness, or simply because they want to be (Burt et al. 2001), therefore society should manage and control these individuals (Rossi 1989).

The first major American contributor to systemic-based theories about the causes of homelessness was Oscar Lewis (1959, 1964, 1966, and 1968). His controversial theories brought him a level of fame and public awareness few anthropologists have enjoyed. A follower of Marxist ideals, Lewis began to investigate systemic theories when he designed a hypothesis that the poor develop certain behaviors as they adapt from rural to urban life. He argued poor people maintain a "culture of poverty" and suffer from a

lack of involvement in the major institutions of society, often have an inadequate education, show a strong mistrust of law enforcement, government, and exhibit unstable social relationships (Lewis 1968). While the burdens of poverty were systemic, they led to the formation of an autonomous subculture and attitudes among the poor that perpetuated their inability to escape the lowest classes. He also believed poor people--and by extension their homeless counterparts--are resistant to rehabilitation. He argued:

By the time slum children are age six or seven, they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of the changing conditions or increased opportunities that may occur in their lifetime [Lewis 1968: 188].

The virtue of Lewis's theories lies in the clarity with which it demonstrates that poverty's subcultures are not a mere "tangle of pathologies," but rather a positive set of adaptive mechanisms (Harvey and Reed 1996: 466). These adaptive mechanisms are socially constructed, in essence fabricated from the substance of their everyday lives, allowing them to survive in otherwise unlivable material and social conditions (*ibid* 467). Lewis argued the poor have been mistreated by the social and economic system, but he does not level the charge of inescapability. In fact, Lewis's theory can be read as an endorsement of poor people's plasticity and ability to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

Lewis's theories also carry a strong distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. This was not his intention. Nevertheless, it was taken up by many as a way to designate worthiness. What emerged was a renewed belief that the able-bodied poor are to blame for their own misfortunes. Many scholars denied the culture of poverty frame, arguing his view was largely ethnocentric and blamed the victim for their poverty (Valentine 1968, Leacock 1971).

Harrington (1962), an American democratic socialist, used Lewis's theories in application to American poor. In his book, *The Other America*, he argued poverty results from America's current social arrangement. The "invisible" poor were the result of technological advance without social advance (Harrington 1962). Because the poor are both physically and socially separated from the other classes, they did not have the tools necessary to succeed in American culture. Perhaps the most important part of his argument was a revised conception of the nature of poverty. Harrington attempted to debunk the common view that poverty was chiefly the result of defects in character and initiative among poor people. Instead, he argued the poor were victims, trapped in a culture that was structurally sealed off from economic progress and expanding prosperity. Harrington argued that an institutional attack on poverty could help produce the moral regeneration necessary to end poverty. Harrington concluded there is only one institution in the society capable of acting to end poverty, the Federal Government (Harrington 1968). This structural argument supplied the intellectual basis for many expansions of the welfare state.

Moynihan (1965, 1968) also expanded upon Lewis' theory and applied it to American poor people. In commenting about the poverty of African Americans, Moynihan contended that the cycle of black poverty would not be broken so long as the pathological pattern of illegitimacy, divorce and desertion, and female-headed families remained in force (Moynihan 1965). While not a socialist or a follower of the systemic critique, the result of his observations was a move away from individual-based causes for poverty. His report for the Johnson Administration, *The Negro Family*, was a call for federal action to create jobs for black male heads of household in the inner city.

It was through the impetus of Harrington's critique, Moynihan's report, and the New Frontier of President Kennedy that President Lyndon Johnson began his famous War of Poverty. A resounding endorsement of structural causes of poverty and homelessness, a solution to urban poverty was constructed that offered to provide more opportunities for the poor. This led to an expansion of state welfare programs designed to target poverty in the 1960s. Many policy experts, academics, and social welfare professionals, heavily influenced by systemic arguments, believed homelessness in that decade was the result of an unequal distribution of resources and was curable by allowing poor people unfettered access to higher education, job training, and general assistance.

The work of Banfield (1970) argued those living in poverty acculturate to a life of poverty. His book, *The Unheavenly City* (1970), argued the homeless "underclass" is made up of flawed individuals who cannot plan, save, or work for the future. Driven by impulse and immediate gratification, they resent authority, have no sense of community, and lack both friends and stable long-term relationships. Banfield viewed poverty more as a "state of the soul" rather than of the body. He argued,

The poverty problem...in its lower class form consists of people who would live in squalor and misery even if their incomes were doubled or tripled. The lower-class forms of all problems are at bottom a single problem: the existence of an outlook or style of life which is radically present-oriented and which therefore attaches no value to work, sacrifice, self-improvement, or service to family, friends, or community, social workers, teachers, and law enforcement officials - all those whom Gans calls the "caretakers" - cannot achieve their goals because they can neither change nor circumvent this culture obstacle [Banfield 1970: 211]

Research from the 1970s also stressed homeless individuals are "disaffiliated" from their family and friends (Bahr 1970, 1973; Bahr and Caplow 1973; Becker 1964;

Blumberg et al. 1973; Bogue 1963; Wiseman 1979). Disaffiliation describes homeless people who lost connection with their families because of behavioral problems and/or disabilities. Once homeless, people had trouble forming healthy and supportive relationships because they tended to associate with other homeless disaffiliates in similar situations. Jencks (1994) later challenged such notions about disaffiliation among homeless people. He found little evidence that familial support had decreased significantly between 1980 and 1990 and concluded that familial estrangement, regardless of its importance in determining individual outcomes, did not play a significant role in the growth of homelessness during that decade.

The theories of Frazer, Banfield, and others dominated well into the 1980s, when assaults on the welfare state began to dismantle the safety net poor and homeless people needed. Charles Murray, in his 1984 book *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*, in many ways led the attack. Targeting systemic explanations, Murray argued pervasiveness in social and economic policies contributed to the growth in homelessness and poverty in the 1970s, leading to an explosion of homelessness in the 1980s. He argued that, as poverty became engrained and intergenerational, a predominantly black subgroup of the poor, among whom the rates of welfare dependency, crime, illegitimacy, school dropout, and non-work, grew rapidly (Murray 1984). Murray argued that the explanation had nothing to do with the cultural climate, a breakdown in the work ethic, or racial differences. For Murray, and many who followed him, poverty was the result of problems that could have been predicted from the changes that social policy made in the “rewards and penalties that govern human behavior” (Murray 1984). All were rational responses to changes in the rules of the game (*ibid*). In particular,

illegitimacy and non-work soared because the total package of welfare benefits paid to women for having an out-of-wedlock child came to be greater than the take-home pay from a minimum-wage job. Crime went up because the risks it entailed went down, and school failure rose because the penalties shrank. Murray wrote, “The most troubling aspect of social policy toward the poor in the late twentieth-century America is not how much it costs, but what it has brought” (Murray 1994: 9). *Losing Ground* helped frame the terms of the welfare debate, arguing for massive reform of the welfare state. At the core of this argument is the flawed person who becomes pregnant, practices crime, etc.

To the list of individual-based theories, scholars such as Alice Baum and David Burnes (1993) added biomedical explanations. Their argument claimed homelessness is ultimately the result of personal disabilities, including mental illness. Baum and Burnes publication, *A Nation in Denial: the Truth about Homelessness* (1993), suggested that the failure of Americans to admit the role of personal disabilities in contributing to homelessness had skewed data toward a character-flaw explanation. However, a year earlier Burt (1992) had argued if individual disabilities and pathologies were to blame for the rise in homelessness, there should be a corresponding rise of mental illness and substance abuse in the general population. He found rates for mental health problems and substance abuse remained consistent during the 1980s (Burt 1992).

As the conditions of homeless shelters were documented (Hopper et al. 1985; Hopper 1987), national counts attempted (Burt and Cohen 1989; United States Department of Housing and Urban Development 1989), and individual lives contextualized (Golden 1992; Liebow 1993; Vanderstaay 1992), a broader definition of homelessness emerged to include a diverse population. Predominantly, researchers

confirmed largely structural causes for homelessness in the United States throughout this period. For an early example, William Julius Wilson, in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), rebutted Charles Murray (1984), pointing out that Murray failed to address how welfare became less advantageous in comparison to work after 1970, yet female-headed households continued to increase and black employment to decline. Wilson's structural analysis recognized what Murray did not. For example, for an uneducated welfare mother without childcare or good transportation a five-dollar-an-hour job ten miles away might as well be in Africa. Wilson laid the principal blame on loss of jobs following the nation's structural economic shift from manufacturing to service work. He called for a series of ambitious new race-neutral measures, including job-creating policies, childcare, and job training.

Joel Blau in *The Visible Poor* (1993) drew on data he accumulated in the 1980s to build a structural analysis of contemporary homelessness. His analysis focused on the large-scale phenomena of unemployment, underemployment, and welfare reform. He also noted more specific structural changes such as rent inflation and the partial demolition of America's Skid Row hotels.

Research from the mid 1990s provided many causal theories, linking homelessness to the rise in housing costs and the partial dismantlement of the Skid Rows and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels (Dehavenon 1992; Hopper 1991; Liebow 1993). Jencks (1994) argued the rise in housing costs corresponded with very real improvements in the housing infrastructure, but also found policies barring the creation of new SROs had the effect of forcing people into homelessness.

Late 20th-century scholarship also saw challenges to theories about the causes of

homelessness. Continuing Murray's criticisms, Niskanen (1996) argued the welfare state actually created an American culture of poverty and identified six pathologies contributing to its existence. He suggested one possible answer to the problem of homelessness was rehabilitation of homeless people. Wright et al. (1998) argued the growing income gap in the United States affected homelessness. Their research found the average income for poor families decreased as a share of the federal poverty level between 1992 and 1997. Sommer (2001) found a growing share of the poor could be classified as "extremely poor," or having incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty level for their family household size. The causes provided for the growth in poverty levels include transformations in the labor market, demographic trends, and government policies affecting public benefits and taxes. Basing their arguments on largely systemic themes, they foreshadowed many of the theories brought forth by researchers in the early 21st-century.

Kim Hopper (2003) and Vincent Lyon-Callo (2004) both addressed the larger socio-economic patterns leading to widespread homelessness in the United States. Hopper (2003) argued homelessness is not simply a result of administrative failures or personal wrongs. On the contrary, his research found homelessness is the result of fundamental structural problems of inequality, poverty, the lack of affordable housing, an inadequate social safety net, inadequate health care, inadequate substance abuse and mental health care systems, inadequate opportunities for decent living-wage employment, failing public education, and the general erosion of the welfare state (Hopper 2003; Hopper and Baumohl 1994, 1996; Hopper and Hamburg 1984). Similar research has shown there is a strong correlation between household income and housing costs, arguing

if these factors are out of balance, a family or individual is at risk of becoming homeless (Lyon-Callo 2004).

The problems of homelessness require detailed, community-based solutions that have yet to manifest themselves (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002c). Lyon-Callo (2004) called for activists and advocates helping homeless people to resist the hegemony of the shelter system and to construct new folk models about homelessness. Kyle (2005) felt a critical engagement with homelessness will bring an understanding of the discourses, practices, and institutions related to it. He argued developing a critical theory of homelessness requires a “methodological approach that seeks to unpack taken-for-granted terms, concepts, and language itself, as well as social relations and institutions” (Kyle 2005: 5). It also requires an interrogation of the material, social, political, and cultural conditions experienced by the poor, homeless, and oppressed as well as those experienced by the affluent and those with homes (*ibid*). Most importantly, it requires a methodical, in-depth examination of the economic, class, gender, racial, ethnic, and sexual relationships that characterize the particular social moment when people experience homelessness (*ibid*). In general, governmental policy makers in the United States have not taken up these approaches (Kyle 2005; Lyon-Callo 2004).

To summarize, systemic discourses about the causes of homelessness generally focus on structural inequality and flaws in the socio-cultural-economic system. Such inequality is the result of both economic and social pressures. Economically, low wages and the high cost of rent aids the growth of homelessness. Socially, institutional racism and the belief that poverty is cultural aid in the persistence of homelessness. Individual-based discourses about the causes of homeless generally focus on flaws of the individual

and personal choice. Homeless people are homeless because of poor economic decisions, dependence on addictive substances, and laziness. Socially, a permissive system and generational poverty aid in the persistence of homelessness. Between these two opposing theories are a range of biomedical, cultural, and social narratives constructing the causes of homelessness in the United States.

Having tracked the scholarly discourses about the causes of homelessness in the United States, a discussion of the American popular discourses on homelessness will follow. This discussion will situate the American popular discourse on homelessness in Lawrence, Kansas, setting the stage for an analysis of homeless shelters there.

## **Chapter Three: A History of Popular Discourses on Homelessness in the United States**

“Understanding [homelessness] requires paying attention to the various discourses that have shaped this problem over the course of time” (Marvasti 2003: 9). A history of homelessness in the United States examines the lives of people pushed to the margins of housing and beyond (Hopper and Baumohl 1996). It encompasses how care-providers and policy makers have both aggravated and improved homeless people’s conditions. For organizational purposes, this chapter is broken into four sections: Homelessness in Early America, the 19th-century, the 20th-century to 1980, and The Current Era: 1980 to present. These sections follow major changes in the classification and care of homeless people. The first period in this discussion presents the frontier ideology of colonists who viewed homeless Europeans as comrades rather than deviants. Notions of colonial solidarity shaped how authorities responded to poverty. Each subsequent discussion examines the era’s discourses about homelessness. This will situate Lawrence’s present-day care-providing infrastructure historically, showing how it conforms with or challenges the past. It will also set the stage for a discussion of current local discourses on homelessness in Lawrence, Kansas.

### **Homelessness in Early America**

In the United States, the individual-based discourse has always dominated thinking about homelessness, but constructions of homeless people have varied. Colonial America’s reaction to homelessness in its territories, while based in the individualistic

discourse, was often “fragmented at best” (Baumohl 1996: 6). Care-providers for the homeless appealed to secular and religious communities for support (Hoch 1985; Hopper 2003). Emergency relief was “a hodgepodge of local and county control, canonical and secular authority, church collections, and disbursements from the public treasury” (Hopper 2003: 27). Emergency relief was “a hodgepodge of local and county control, canonical and secular authority, church collections, and disbursements from the public treasury” This combination of community and governmental response was so embedded in the Colonial American discourse on social responsibility that the first relief shelters established in New York repeatedly called their clients “family” in the posted rules of their establishments (Hopper 2003: 28).

Homelessness explained as resulting from personal choice, illness, or happenstance. For example, drunks were homeless because they were alcoholics, the mentally ill because of malady, or the unfortunate because of events beyond their control. However, Christian ideas about homelessness, carried over from the ecclesiastical system of jurisprudence in medieval Europe, and a strong sense of American frontier solidarity made it socially unacceptable for many people of this time-period to allow their neighbors to go without food or shelter (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002; Marvasti 2003). The “homeless-as-family” narrative held so long as populations remained small and stationary (Davis 1968; Hareven 1971; Hopper 2003: 27; Rothman 1971).

Throughout the 1700s, increasingly globalized trade networks created through cross-Atlantic trade allowed for unforeseen shifts in economic systems. As increased industrialization robbed artisans of their livelihood, the continuing enclosure movement forced peasants off communally held land, and increased taxation affected wages, a now

landless class of laborers began a new life toiling on factory floors and large-scale farms. Because of this social reorganization, homeless populations stood out during times of economic recession, becoming symbols of hard times. By the late 1700s American society began to describe homeless people as criminal, lazy, and unproductive community residents rather than wayward family members (Kusmer 2002; Hopper 2003). The 18th-century conceptualization of homelessness believed such people were an “idle” population that made a conscious decision not to work, an obvious reflection of the individual-based discourse on homelessness. As these characterizations became common, legislation developed to control such social outcasts. Laws constructed “For the Prevention of Poor People,” obstructed the downtrodden from settling in a given community (Marvasti 2003: 11). Ministers in Puritan New England took to describing homelessness as God’s justice for a life of idleness (Olivas 2004).

Cotton Mather, a minister in early 1700s New England, perhaps best embodied the individual-based discourse when he spoke to a gathering at a Boston poorhouse. “It is the Lord who has Taken away from you what He has Given to others” (Mather, cited in Olivas 2004: 266). Government officials also began to blame homeless people for their poverty. In 1707, New York City officials required “patches of cloth with the letters NY sewn on the shirts or blouses of the homeless” (Nash 2004: 15; Nash 1979). This physical marker of social stigma forced homeless people to advertise their penniless condition, adding to the narrative of “otherness” that became the foundation of the individual-based discourse used to explain the causes of homelessness for the next two hundred years. Homeless people, labeled “paupers,” were part of a newly defined class of deviants who should be, when at all possible, returned to the city of their origin (Marvasti 2003: 11).

During this era, legal characterizations of “transient poor,” carried over from the English vagrancy statutes, remained the norm among care-providers (Barak 1991: 5). The offenders of this era were beggars, vagrants, and those who suffered the “sin of idleness” (Kusmer 2002: 14). William Blackstone, in chapter 13 of the fourth book of *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1768), defines the idle as “those people who sleep in the daytime and frequent alehouses at night, [and] are divided into three classes: idle and disorderly persons, rogues and vagabonds, and incorrigible rogues” (Blackstone, cited in Feldman 2004: 32). Blackstone argued all three groups were “offenders against the good order, and blemishes in the government of any kingdom” (*ibid*). This emphasis on physical/external signs such as cleanliness as indications of inner/innate characteristics influenced legal writings on homelessness, situating the cause of homelessness in personal failings (Chambliss 1964; Feldman 2005). In short, homeless people were, in some way, “not like us” (Hopper 2003: 26). The “idle homeless person” narrative, so deeply imbedded in the individual-based discourse and carried over from English poor laws, helped to define governmental treatment of the poor (Feldman 2005; Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002).

The institutions that emerged to house homeless people in this time-period reflect popular revulsion to homelessness. Rather than house the shelter-less poor in boarding houses or relief shelters similar to modern institutions, poorhouses and almshouses in the 1700s acted more as a “catchall” for those considered social deviants (Hopper 2003: 28). An almshouse from this period in New York City defined its clients as “beggars, run-away servants, trespassers, thieves...and the idle” (*ibid*). They targeted slum dwellers, unemployed workers, or their widows (Kusmer 2002).

Concerns about the “idle” homeless populations influenced institutions such as Philadelphia’s Bettering House. This well-studied example presumed the indigent poor chose their condition (Alexander 1980; Hopper 2003; Nash 2004, 1976). Here we can view a physical example of institutions crafted to serve homeless people during this period in American history. The Bettering House, run by a private corporation and owned by Quakers, persuaded the Philadelphia legislature to turn over poor relief to them in 1766. Soon after opening, the operators vowed to end unconditional relief. Clients were compelled to take up agricultural labor, weaving, and spinning (Nash 2004: 16). The Bettering House became a symbol of the notion that “more and more people owed their poverty to intemperance or were becoming content to live the life of the idler, the profligate, or the street beggar rather than pursue an honest trade” (*ibid*). Such institutions represent a focus on correction through work maintained by the operators of shelters for homeless people in the late 1600s and early 1700s (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002; Nash 2004).

By the turn of the 19th-century, increased mobility of the American population made local solutions to problems of homelessness unfeasible (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002). Homeless people removed from localities quickly returned, often with others in tow, leading to an increased visibility of homelessness (Kusmer 2002). Laws passed “defining transients as deviants from the cultural and economic norms of family life, residential stability, and secure employment” (Jones 1984: 48). Americans came to think of homeless people as different, lazy or idle, and not simply poor. Distinct narratives developed, each contributing to the individual-based discourse that held people were poor because they would not work.

## **The 19th-Century**

Popular discourses about homelessness present in the 1800s contained distinct narratives of idleness carried over from the 1700s. Able-bodied homeless people were set to work in farming or manufacturing (Katz 1986: 23-24). Upper-class women took care of homeless women, their families, and the infirm with food and advice offered through religious charity organizations that operated or funded poorhouses. In so doing, they hoped to expose them to the supposedly better values and habits of the virtuous classes. Upper-class men became the caretakers of able-bodied homeless men, arguing for greater disciplinary measures taken against vagrants, loiters, and drunks – the deserving, the undeserving, and the criminal.

The early to mid 1800s saw a change in the construction of homelessness in America (Kusmer 2002). Women from all age groups, along with literate and skilled men, became visibly homeless (Hopper 2003). By the 1850s, most working class men labored for wages and were vulnerable to economic downturns. Artisans lost their positions to lower paid factory work, and seasonal labors began to lose their jobs to machines. From the 1850s onward, editorial writers began arguing poorhouses served a dual purpose (Kusmer 2002), and two differently constructed groups of poor people emerged. For the sick, disabled and elderly, a compassionate treatment system developed. For the able-bodied poor, punitive regimes involving physically demanding labor was preferred (Kusmer 2002). Because of inadequate government funding for most county poorhouses, managers had little in the way of incentive to care for either the truly infirm or the able-bodied homeless. As a result, physically competent homeless people often

turned to the streets, becoming transients.

Small portions of these new transients consisted of social misfits called “tramps,” “bums,” and later “hobos” in the American vernacular. This shift in language from “homeless-as-family” narratives to the use of words like “tramp” and “bum” reflect a shift toward criminality within the popular discourse. An article the *London Times* (cited in Allsop 1993: 110-113) described American poor people of their day:

Not picturesque characters like the gypsy of the English lanes, [they] does not awaken sympathy like the strapped journeyman in search of a job. He is a low browed, blurry eyed, dirty fellow, who has rascal stamped on every feature of his face in nature’s plainest handwriting.

Kusmer (2002: 37) notes the first usage of “tramp” in print may have been by a Union soldier, John Billings, who wrote of small bands of soldiers, well versed in train riding from their years in the army, going “off on the tramp.” The term “hobo” did not make it into the American vernacular until the late 1800s. The word “bum,” derived from “bummer,” defined by a British soldier in 1880 as people “keen on the scent of ... bacon, or silver spoons, or corn, or anything valuable” (cited in Kusmer 2002: 37). Both “bum” and “tramp” contain criminal narratives within their definitions that came to characterize homeless people of the era. Similar criminal narratives soon came to dominate popular discourse about homeless people.

For example, C. G. Truesdale, head of Chicago Relief and Aid Society, argued that many “burglaries, and not a few murders and outrages of all sorts, are justly laid to these vagabonds” (cited in Kusmer 2002: 58). A care-provider from this time described his charges as having “very little moral rectitude” and they “think it but little harm to take small articles” (New York House of Refuge Papers 1852). The perception of homeless

people as violent and dangerous was widespread by the 1870s and 1880s. Popular portrayals of the tramp such as Lee Harris's *The Man Who Tramps* (1878) and Horatio Alger's *Tony the Tramp* (1890) construct a picture of tramps as "drawn from the most vicious classes of society" (Harris 1878: 3) and depicted them as "synonymous with a life of crime" (Alger 1890: 14-19). By 1883, an issue of the *Journal of United Labor* noted, "men have continually persisted in associating the word tramp with the words vagabond, idler, thief" (cited in Monkonen 1984: 144). Populations of transient poor grew rapidly during the later part of the 19th-century and were viewed as a greater threat to the emerging social order than other criminals. The narrative of a dangerous and unlawful homeless person eventually led to an explosion of workhouse facilities. In the waning years of the 1800s officials from 169 Northern communities answered "yes" when asked whether or not "tramps should be compelled to work" (Kusmer 2004: 59).

Following the Civil War, newly free African Americans moved away from the south in droves. This new wave of immigration added to the labor pools of the industrialized Northeast. Increased competition for both agricultural and manufacturing jobs intensified. As a result, during the last quarter of the 19th-century hundreds of thousands of transient laborers moved across the American landscape (Kusmer 2002). By the economic depression of 1873, huge numbers of men and women were unemployed. The highly visible transients were described as lazy and idle workers rather than displaced laborers. In 1875, the *Cleveland Leader* advocated, "The thing to be done is to stop feeding the army of loafers who have taken advantage of the hard times to inflict themselves upon people not too lazy to work" (cited in Allsop 1993: 113).

Alternative views, while not dominant at any time during this era, was present in

the minds of homeless people themselves. The common plea of the tramp was not one calling for unconditional relief, but rather a call for the improvement of working conditions and pay (Smith 2004; Anderson 1923). Some working class activists argued the crowded labor market forced men to work at wages below the poverty level, and vagrancy laws forced violators into labor camps that stripped them of their ability to move to labor-friendly markets (Kusmer 2002). This eventually led to the famous Tramp Army of 1894. Thousands of self-described tramps marched on Washington D.C. under the banner of Jacob Coxey, demanding the government deal with problems of unemployment and unpaid pensions. However, the movement faltered as the media continued its characterization of the criminal tramp through a rash of stories about vagabonds commandeering trains and destroying property (Smith 2004).

By 1877, the poorhouse system also had its detractors (Kusmer 2002: 73-74). Many opponents of the poorhouse argued the system created idleness and dependency, contributing to the growth of the tramp population (Hopper 2002). These ideas eventually coalesced into a movement powerful enough to influence legislation, constructing Tramp Laws in many states that "reproduced some of the most onerous features of the southern black codes in their legislation against tramps" (Davis 1968: 161).

By the turn of the 20th-century the individual-based discourse on homelessness was well defined. The early images of homeless people as lazy, idle, and criminal, helped develop the modern American popular discourse on homelessness. However, these various designations meant no single stereotype remained, but rather what emerged was a number of "overlapping and frequently competing images" of failed individuals (Kusmer 2002: 169) clearly constructed by the individual-based discourse.

## The 20th-Century to 1980

19th-century discourses on homelessness continued during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Stanford professor Amos G. Warner presented a common narrative in his widely read *American Charities* (1894), arguing that indiscriminate giving was a more important cause of homelessness than unemployment. However, among a minority of young social welfare specialists, there began to emerge a systemic explanation for the causes of homelessness. Men and women entering the vocation took a more “prosaic view of their social role” than their predecessors did (Kusmer 2002: 92). The tramp increasingly became a social rather than criminal problem. A new wave of descriptive research gave a face to the criminalized tramp and a name to the lazy bum.

The National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1903 provided several challenges to the traditional discourses. William H. Allen’s paper, “The Vagrant: Social Parasite or Social Product,” argued homeless people were a product of industrial society (Allen 1903: 379-386). At the same conference, Jeffrey Beckett criticized the work test and argued for a less punitive approach to caring for homeless people (Beckett, cited in Kusmer 2002).

In 1904, Robert Hunter argued the causes of homelessness had more to do with poor wages and the high cost of housing. His book, *Poverty*, was both a critique of the individualistic explanation for homelessness, and a further development of the systemic argument. Based largely on his experiences in Chicago and New York, Hunter, who considered himself a sociologist, attempted to define, describe, and measure poverty. He believed there were over 10 million people living in poverty in America. His research

argued homelessness followed unemployment, and concluded those who do “social and economic forces are continuously producing recruits to that class” (Hunter 1904: 336-337). His most important contribution was an acknowledgment of the large class of accidental vagrants who had become homeless through “force of circumstance alone” (Hunter 1904: 328). However, following its publication, Hunter left social work and took up a career as a muckraking author and lecturer. This lessened the impact of his work on social welfare professionals. Raymond Robins, a director of the Chicago Municipal Lodging House, later picked up Hunter’s ideas. Robins spoke out against unfair working conditions that, he argued, helped produce vagrancy.

During Robins’ tenure at the Chicago Municipal Lodging House, Alice Solenberger began to gather information on homeless persons. Her publication, *1000 Homeless Men: A Study of Original Records* (1911), is paramount in the study of homelessness. No previous observer of homelessness had collected so much data or analyzed the causes and consequences so dispassionately as Solenberger. She compiled data on homeless people by age, nativity, conjugal condition, amount of education, and inquired into their state of health or physical condition (Kusmer 2002: 93). Her work, while embedded within the individual-based discourse, made major contributions to the growth of systemic arguments for the causes of homelessness.

Solenberger’s use of the term “homeless men” in her title rather than the loaded “tramp” or “bum” reflects her attempt to humanize “the homeless.” They are no longer “bums” but rather “men,” with all the corresponding failures and ambitions. This humanizing narrative is evident in her claim that she does not intend to do away with the tramp, but rather alleviate the problem of homelessness (Solenberger 1911: 12-13). In her

introduction, she explains her desire to uncover the “conditions [he] exists under today” and come to understand the “causes of [his] vagrancy” (Solenberger 1911: 3).

While Solenberger provides vivid descriptions of homelessness at the turn of the 19th-century, she identifies with popular individual-based discourses. She occasionally mentions "licentiousness" as a cause of vagrancy, and strongly supports the concept of labor colonies. Solenberger mused, “[Homeless people] really do not believe in working continuously, nor will many of them admit any necessity for saving more than enough to carry them from one season to the next” (*ibid* 144-145). Here, she borrows from the laziness narrative within the individual-based discourse to explain why some homeless people will not take full-time work. She writes:

After an experience of several years, during which one plan of help after another has been tried and has failed, traits and characteristics unsuspected at first have been found to bear important relation to the man’s inability to adjust himself to the world in which he lives [Solenberger 1911: 5].

Solenberger does acknowledge systemic causes of homelessness, but they are never a focus of her study. She explains it is “practical to say...that some particular social or industrial cause...produces vagrancy” (*ibid* 6). She argues each homeless person should be evaluated "on the basis of his personal merits and needs as those shall be discovered through intelligent, thorough, and sympathetic investigation of his history" (*ibid* 187-188). Despite her complex analysis of the causes and types of homelessness, Solenberger did not directly accuse the industrial system the way Allan and Hunter did, but rather argues for manipulating the system at hand to mitigate its negative side effects.

Elements of the systemic discourse are present in the mind of at least one of Solenberger’s informants. Recognizing the limited availability of work, a young Irishman

who had worked for several weeks and accumulated some money argued with

Solenberger (1911: 144) about why he did not want to work in the ice fields that winter:

I am sorry to disappoint you, Miss, since you seem so set on the idea of me working on the ice, but to tell you the truth I really would not think it was *right* to do it. I would just be taking the work away from some poor fellow who needs it, and it would not be right for a man to do that when he has plenty of money in his pocket [emphasis in original].

Solenberger's tone during this interaction is one of disdain. She claims arguments such as the young Irishman's were representative of seasonal laborers, and "the majority of the men would not save and would be no better able to support themselves in times of adversity, illness, or old age than they are now" (Solenberger 1911: 145).

The nascent systemic argument, aided by the work of Hunter and Solenberger, began to challenge the individual-based discourse. A catalyst that drove the systemic explanation into the American popular discourse came from an unexpected avenue, the stock market crash in October of 1929. The market crash triggered a devastating depression that dominated the United States for well over a decade (Morison 1965). Mortgage foreclosures, delinquent taxes, and sharply rising unemployment affected hundreds of thousands of people. Between 1929 and 1933, over a hundred thousand businesses failed (*ibid*). Minorities, women, and the "unskilled" were the first to lose their jobs (Kusmer 2002). By 1933, 13 million people, about 25 percent of the work force, were unemployed (*ibid*). Some of the unemployed became transients, crossing the country looking for jobs and food. As millions of workers lost their jobs, idleness lost its power to explain homelessness. Renamed the "New Unemployment," this social category allowed for the inclusion not only of those impacted by the collapse of the market, but also those homeless people who were there prior to the crash (Gowen 2003: 37).

The Federal Writers' Project of the 1930s also contributed to the systemic explanation. This project told the life stories of more than 10,000 men and women from a variety of occupations and ethnic groups across the United States. The Farm Security Administration, a lead agency in the endeavor, hired literally hundreds of photographers and writers to document the need for relief, and to assess their department's successes or failures. The project documented American poverty in a way never before experienced by the public.

This project was also integral to the shift from hostility and fear of homeless people to sympathy for the many harmed by economic collapse. Americans no longer treated homeless people with disdain when those people were their neighbors, their cousins, or even their former bosses. The move to personalize "the homeless," to humanize homelessness, enabled caring and provided pathways for regular Americans to contribute to the fight against poverty. For example, James Agee and Walker Evans' publication, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), gave a candid look at the plight of three white tenant farmers' families. Their work, along with the thousands of other photographers and journalists, broke open the veneer of the American Dream and exposed the poverty and homelessness beneath. Like Solenberger (1911), their publication highlighted the plight of regular people pushed into poverty because of economic turbulence. Adopting the systemic explanation as it grew out of the Great Depression, James Agee argued the wealthy could not "by any such hope make explanation for what [the poor have] suffered at your hands, and for what you have gained at [theirs]" (1941: 321). Turning away from narratives of fear, criminality, and laziness, Agee goes so far as to implicate the wealthy as culpable in the homelessness

and poverty of the 1930s.

As presentations of homelessness spread through the media, a new image of homelessness developed. The word tramp virtually disappeared from newsprint, and “housewives willingly opened their doors to strangers asking to be fed” (Kusmer 2002: 209). The neutral sounding “transient” replaced the older, loaded terms such as “hobo,” “tramp,” and “bum.” Many agencies began to call for federal assistance. At the same time shantytowns, also sometimes called “Hooverilles” in reference to President Herbert Hoover who was unlucky enough to be in power at the beginning of the Great Depression, sprang up in cities from coast to coast (Kusmer 2002: 201). Many homeless men, women and children took up residence at the Hooverilles in shacks or worse. Social services, still largely based on local governments, charities, and professional caregivers, proved inadequate when dealing with the abject poverty of the 1930s (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002). Care-providers and policy makers, influenced by the works of Solenberger (1911) and her contemporaries, acknowledged the links between national economic hardship and poverty (Arnold 2004; Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002). Earlier methods of diagnosis and case management proved insufficient due to the sheer volume of homeless people (Kusmer 2002; Marvasti 2003). Sheltering changed from communal workhouses and institutional mental health facilities to warehouses in the mold of the 17th-century poorhouse system (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002).

As academics and professionals acknowledged and developed systemic explanations for poverty and homelessness, they influenced government policy. Many New Deal (1933-37) programs crafted by the Roosevelt administration intended to affect economic depression, widespread unemployment, and homelessness. They did so by

focusing on economic compensation to the unemployed, creating entry-level jobs for the unskilled, labor rights, and providing subsidized housing. The Great Depression had shocked America, and the simplistic notion of blaming the homeless for their poverty lost much of its explanatory power. The New Deal social programs that had grown out of the extreme poverty of the 1930s helped to develop the modern American welfare state.

World War II brought a substantial decline in the homeless population, as many transients were integrated into the armed forces or absorbed into the burgeoning war industries (Kusmer 2002). As a result, the American homeless population shrank considerably. The description of a homeless population choosing to live an idle life, or of an alcoholic population of homeless people, or of a mentally unstable population forced into homelessness, slackened (Kyle 2005). Homeless people of the time were more often seen as war veterans, extreme alcoholics, or sick (Kusmer 2002).

By the 1950s, populations of transients again tended to concentrate in the poorer districts of cities where there were cheap hotels and restaurants, bars, religious missions, and casual employment agencies (Bahr and Caplow 1973). Street homelessness became less apparent as most poor people could readily find shelter in rooming houses, cheap hotels, or other forms of substandard housing. Often located near transportation hubs such as railroad freight yards or trucking terminals, these areas gave unattached individuals and migrant workers the opportunity to find work in casual or menial jobs (*ibid*). This combination of high employment, skid row housing, and a strong welfare state helped keep levels of homelessness down. However, it did not eliminate homelessness and poverty. In various rural and urban environments, persistent poverty irked the established postwar American ideology that viewed homelessness as a blot on

its record of accomplishments. Harkening its success against fascism as a call to address other social problems, the American public began to view poverty and homelessness as a tangible thing that could be conquered or destroyed.

President John F. Kennedy's attempt to address the persistent poverty he witnessed during his rise to power reflected this new American vision. The Kennedy administration, which included Robert F. Kennedy, Kennedy's close friend David Hackett, and several influential academics and social reformers, furthered a concept of community action addressing poverty and homelessness. They drew heavily on the Chicago School of urban sociology, Lewis's "culture of poverty" theory, and the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas project that funneled resources into target areas of a select number of cities. Two texts on poverty caught the attention of President Kennedy, Homer Bigart's *New York Times* series on Appalachian poverty and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962). Those works compounded his concerns about poverty roused during his 1960 campaign visit to coal mining regions in West Virginia. This resulted in Kennedy's administration putting into motion a model that became the foundation for his successor, President Lyndon B. Johnson's social policies.

Lyndon B. Johnson committed his administration to expanding New Deal projects and the welfare state. His Great Society marked both an extension and a critical departure from the New Deal. Influenced by academics such as Michael Harrington and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Johnson administration considered the problem of poverty as a symptom of deep-rooted social and political problems (Milkis 2005: 4). With the national poverty rate hovering around 19 percent, Johnson felt action was necessary. His first attempt to address poverty came in his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964,

when he launched the War on Poverty. Its programs and philosophies were born out of the political discord caused by visual poverty amid the abundance of post World War II America, the Civil Rights movement, and three decades of structural-oriented theories about poverty and social reform.

Legislatively, the first two years were the most active of the “War.” Between 1964 and 1966, the Johnson administration pushed through several pieces of antipoverty legislation. The Economic Opportunity Act (1964) provided the basis for the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the Job Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Upward Bound, Head Start, Legal Services, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, the Community Action Program (CAP), the college Work-Study program, Neighborhood Development Centers, small business loan programs, rural programs, migrant worker programs, remedial education projects, local health care centers, and others. Additional antipoverty measures included an \$11 billion tax cut (Revenue Act of 1964), the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Food Stamp Act (1964), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the Higher Education Act (1965), the Social Security amendments creating Medicare/Medicaid (1965), the creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (1965), the Voting Rights Act (1965), the Model Cities Act (1966), the Fair Housing Act (1968), several job-training programs, and various Urban Renewal-related projects. Designed to treat the “deeper maladies” that affected impoverished Americans (Milkis 2005: 5), the War on Poverty’s objective was to emphasize the local level, treating institutions as well as people. The War on Poverty also opened the opportunity for every citizen to access “higher education, job training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity” (Milkis 2005: 11).

Michael B. Katz argued, “By default, the War on Poverty adopted the culture of poverty” (Katz 1989: 94). The War on Poverty sought to change workers rather than the structure of labor market because it lacked resources for the latter. Followers of Johnson’s ideas intended to transform the “culture of poverty into a culture of aspiration” (Boris 2005: 116). The culture of poverty raised the idea that the existence of lower class pathologies, especially among African Americans, that blocked economic and social success. Poverty, in this context, became associated with a way of life transmitted from one generation to the next. State action could cure poverty by increasing income and acculturation into white, middle-class, Protestant norms, including the work ethic, male breadwinning, and sexual restraint (Boris 2005).

The concept of a war on poverty waned after the Great Society of the 1960s. Deregulation and a growing criticism of the welfare state by the new intellectual elite helped quicken its end. Interpretations of the federal antipoverty effort have tended to differ according to the political affiliation and ideology of the interpreter. For example, the reasons for a startling decline in the black poverty rate from 55 percent of all African-Americans in 1959 to 33 percent in 1970 and for a drop in the overall U.S. poverty rate from 22 percent to 12 percent in same time-period have been attributed to both ideologically conservative and progressive theories. Critics have tended to argue economic growth spurred by American entrepreneurialism provided the stimulus. Defenders argue the Great Society was crucial for that growth and for directly moving people out of poverty. An ideological shift toward reducing federal aid to impoverished people in the 1970s spelled the beginning of the end to the American welfare state.

The administration of President Nixon also continued the War on Poverty.

Although President Nixon expressed dislike for much of Johnson's social programs, his administration responded to public pressure by maintaining most programs and by somewhat expanding the welfare state through the Food Stamp program, the indexing of Social Security to inflation, and the passage of the Supplemental Security Income program for disabled Americans. Perhaps the Nixon administration's most noticeable contribution to the War on Poverty consisted of replacing the Office of Economic Opportunity with the Community Services Administration, redistributing control over many antipoverty programs to more traditional federal bureaucracies, and proposing a Family Assistance Plan that failed to gain congressional approval. The Nixon administration also endorsed a "New Federalism," shifting more authority over social welfare programs to state and local governments. This new vision for federalism was realized during the administration of President Ronald W. Reagan, which replaced the Community Services Administration with the Community Services Block Grant system, redesigned job training, cut back the Food Stamp program, and initiated a serious attack on the American welfare state.

As urban renewal changed America's cityscapes, extensive study of skid row residents between 1960 and 1980 showed a demographic change in transient populations (for examples see Rossi 1989; Bahr and Caplow 1973; Blumberg et al. 1973; Wiseman 1970; Becker 1964; Bogue 1963). This research concluded homelessness "is a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures" (Bahr 1973: 17). Its formula of "disenfranchisement not defectiveness" could have supported systemic explanations about the causes of homelessness (Main 1998: 44). Here Bahr

(1973: 286-287) explains homelessness was a matter of a defective homeless person's weak relationships with the important social structures of society:

Morally, mentally, physically they are defective; tubercular and alcoholic, with mangled or missing limbs, visible sores and scars, bandaged, propped up, or stretched out in the filth of the city sidewalk, their defectiveness is advertised to others and reaffirmed to themselves...the imputed defectiveness, validated in interaction and internalized, acts to prevent the establishment of new affiliations or the reactivation of old ones.

Homeless people rapidly became “a side show of social failure and pathology requiring the coordinated treatments of urban professionals” (Hoch 1985: 27) and Americans renewed their distrust for homeless people. Within the popular discourse, homeless people and transients of the early 20th-century became the vagrants, bag ladies, and panhandlers of the 1970s.

Broad changes in social policy, fostered by newly renewed individual-based explanations of depravity and criminality, dominated this period. Dependency and addiction became the narratives of policy experts when addressing homelessness. Throughout the 1970s, shelters were closed, low cost housing restricted, and an attitude of ambivalence toward homelessness returned (Hopper 2003; Kusmer 2002). In New York City, only one city-run shelter was still in operation in 1979 (Hopper 2003). In this dormitory-like structure four inches of plexiglas separated workers from their clients. The physical separation itself signaled employees' fear of potentially dangerous homeless people.

The explosion of homelessness during the late 1970s brought about many changes to the popular American discourse on homelessness. It may have also prompted a review of the welfare programs designed to address the larger systemic problems driving poverty

and homelessness in America.

### **The Current Era: 1980 - Present**

The late 1970s and early 1980s were witness to the development of an economic theory, “neo-liberalism” (Harvey 2005). Neo-liberalism refers to an intellectual and political movement that espouses economic liberalism as a means of promoting economic development and securing political liberty (Lyon-Callo 2004). The movement was both a return to classic liberalism's embracing of the private, “free” market as the solution to social problems, and an embracing of the role of government to promote individualized competition and market-based policies (*ibid* 10). In the United States, privatization and deregulation in the name of efficiency and productivity became the norm. Punishment and imprisonment replaced many social programs targeting homeless people, and those that remained developed a renewed focus on reforming individuals. Coupled with the individualistic notions discussed in prior sections, neo-liberal narratives highlighted the perceived failings of homeless people with the intention of helping them adapt to changing market conditions.

In the 1980s, President Reagan and others on the political right argued the American Welfare state in fact represented a failure of big government. Instead of alleviating poverty, such programs encouraged laziness, dependency, crime, and single parenthood. Critics, such as Charles Murray in his book *Losing Ground*, felt most of the programs were misguided, mismanaged, mangled attempts at social engineering where overspending countered market-oriented solutions and covered up personal faults.

Advocates for federal welfare programs retorted that the social programs, while underfunded and besieged, helped lower the poverty rate, reduce disorder, and absorb the shock from Baby Boomers entering the labor market.

Advocates of neo-liberalism called for a restructuring of the welfare system (Morgan and Maskovsky 2003). Narratives began to develop describing abuses of the welfare program, most notably the “welfare queen” narrative first used by Ronald Reagan during his presidential campaign in 1976. This narrative describes an urban-dwelling (usually black) single mother of six sitting in front of the television while collecting tax-funded welfare checks. In Reagan’s words (cited in *The New York Times* 1976: 51):

There is a woman in Chicago...she has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands.

Such narratives contributed to the privatization of various public agencies, including those geared toward poverty and homelessness, by providing fodder for anti-welfare arguments. This had the effect of pushing homeless and mentally ill people into a private community care system that was not prepared for high volume need (Marvasti 2003). The decriminalization of many status crimes such as public drunkenness also slowed absorption of homeless people into the penal system (Hopper 2003; Hopper and Hamburg 1984). Skid Rows and Single Occupancy Hotels continued to disappear as urban renewal changed the face of American cities. Responses to globalization included mechanization, downsizing, and outsourcing, that removed thousands of low-skill and entry-level jobs.

One result of these conditions was an explosion of homelessness in the United States (Hopper 2003). The American government’s response, still largely based on

research produced during the 1960s and 1970s, targeted the causes of homelessness in personal choice. This made it easier for Americans to view homeless people as deviants and to accept vast social inequality and widespread homelessness. Hunger and homelessness within the general population became an “ordinary and largely uncontested part of life” in the United States (Lyon-Callo 2004: 10).

Within the academy and on the streets, critiques of neo-liberal reforms to programs targeting homelessness emerged by the mid to late 1980s. A new wave of sympathetic researchers pointed toward systemic causes of homelessness, such as unemployment, rent costs, and wage depression (see Hopper et al. 1985). However, the mainstream media did not follow suit. What developed, as often happened in the American past, was an alternative individual-based discourse steeped in moral clauses denoting personal pathologies and bad behaviors (Gowen 2003). Because care-providers are restricted by the current shelter system from working on systemic solutions (i.e. subsidized housing and low-skill/entry-level job creation), many turned to available programs that focused on individual pathologies (Lyon-Callo 2004). Change within the person came to define the transition from homelessness (*ibid*). Care-providers sought to help homeless people adapt to “traditional” housing. With strong support from governmental funding sources, the individual-based discourses quickly became primary. Advocates of neo-liberal reforms argued providing housing to poor people increased their dependence on government and decreased their drive to become self-reliant individuals able to compete in the global market (Lyon-Callo 2004).

By 1999, earlier attempts to address the continued growth of homelessness in the United States came under considerable criticism (National Coalition for the Homeless

2002). In 2001, the Interagency Council on Homelessness chose a new direction based on two studies of homelessness conducted in New York and Philadelphia (Culhane and Kuhn 1997; Culhane et al. 1994). The studies concluded 80 percent of shelter users experienced a single episode of homelessness and stayed for a relatively short period. Another 10 percent had four or five episodes of homelessness in a year and stayed in shelters for longer periods. A final 10 percent had an average of two episodes of homelessness annually, but stayed an even longer cumulative period in emergency shelters (Culhane and Kuhn 1997). This last group of people, classified as the "chronically homeless" and often suffering from serious physical and mental health issues, was believed to occupy 50 percent of the total number of shelter days over a three-year period (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). The study's authors argued the "chronically homeless" only represent 10 percent of the homeless population, but use 50 percent of all homeless services (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002).

Governmental policy and the national media took up these concepts *en masse*. Between 2001 and 2006, over 160 major newspaper stories carried the phrase "Chronic Homelessness" in their title. Narratives exploded that contained these talking points, becoming very popular and persisting up until the present. For example, Shea writes in

*The Modesto Bee*:

The chronic homeless--those who have been on the street a year or more or several times in as many years--make up only about 10 percent of the homeless population, but they consume more than 50 percent of the federal, state and local dollars dedicated to fight homelessness. The White House has realized that whether or not the county wants to pay for homelessness, the country pays for homelessness [2007: SECTION: A; Pg. A1].

By 2001, national policy soon began to form around ten-year plans to end chronic

homelessness by targeting those people defined as chronically homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). As a result, resurrected and reinvigorated individual-based discourses swept the country. Within the transitional shelters, such discourses became dominant (Williams 2003). A broad resurgence of this focus in the media, neighborhood meetings, and city council hearings across the country moved the public debate on homelessness away from sympathy and toward apathy (Gowen 2003). The revised explanations drew on long established American desires to exclude problem people in order to protect decent citizens. A narrative of aggressive, criminal, predatory, and cheating “street people” took up many of the same arguments used to describe the tramp of the 1870s. For example, Teya Vitu writes in the Tucson Citizen on September 14, 2007, about steps taken by local authorities to address “criminal homeless.” She describes a group of over “50 merchants, police, city prosecutor, homeless advocates and Councilmember Nina Trasoff” who sorted through merchants' complaints about the criminal homeless. Claims were raised about homeless people “knocking sidewalk tables over on customers, asking for money inside a sandwich shop and defecating daily in the entryway of the Fox Theatre” (Steps taken to address 'criminal homeless' 2007).

Outside of the shelter industry, many cities and towns across the country began to shift their focus from the problems *of* homeless people to the problems caused *by* homeless people. For example, many municipalities began to relate an aesthetic or economic problem caused by the presence of homeless people who panhandled or otherwise took up public space (Gowen 2003; Hopper 2002; Lyon-Callo 2004). Local governmental policies became increasingly concerned not with service provision but with introducing new methods to exclude homeless people from gentrified urban

environments.

What makes the contemporary individual-based popular discourse distinct? Hanson (1997) notes the larger significance of poverty to Americans has lessened. The non-poor are no longer motivated to take concerted action to alleviate it (*ibid*). This is not because the solution is too difficult or expensive, but because they have lost all confidence that any long-term, large-scale plan can work. While people may lend assistance and support on a personal level, the idea that anyone can have any lasting influence on problems like poverty and homelessness is subjugated to the idea that humans exercise very little control over the social reality they themselves have created. The current eras' thinking about poverty has prompted a retraction of large-scale solutions and a return to personalized assistance.

Many scholars mark homelessness as an aesthetic problem of dirty and disorganized public space (Gagnier 1998; Gowen 2003; Hopper 2002; Kyle 2006; Lyon-Callo 2004; Mitchell 1997). This new form of the discourse emphasizes protection of a non-homeless aesthetic and economy over protection of the rights and needs of homeless people. Stories, such as the criminal homeless people in Tucson, about the physical presence of homeless people introducing disorder, breaking down barriers of private and public space, and impinging on the security of homed people have been highlighted over the last ten years. This has led to new narratives about homelessness in relation to public space that focus primarily on the presence of homeless people rather than the causes of homelessness.

American municipalities have passed quality-of-life ordinances directed at homeless people. Sleeping, grooming, and bodily functions are all private activities that

homeless people must sometimes perform in public. Advocates of neo-liberal homeless policies argue conducting such activities in the public domain restricts homed people and business owner's use of the commons. For example, commercial streets are for shopping, not sleeping or eating. Public transportation is for traveling not for basic shelter. Parks are for playing sports, but not for long periods of sleeping. Often the only areas ceded to homeless people are degraded or abused environments resulting from the post-industrial landscape. Few American cities retain skid rows or shantytowns, although most still maintain red light districts filled with pornography shops and check-cashing services. In such areas, shelters and soup kitchens abound, and it is often acceptable in these areas for people unable to find a bed inside to sleep on the street (Gowen 2003).

New ordinances aimed at controlling the movement and behavior of homeless people are the most visible methods of excluding homeless people from gentrified areas. In a move reflective of a 1707 New York City law requiring beggars to wear letters sewn into their clothes advertising their city of origin, Orlando, Florida requires panhandlers to acquire laminated permits and wear them in a visible place on their bodies while begging. In an article published by the *Orlando Business Journal* (April 26, 1999), Jill Krueger writes:

Orlando already has one of the toughest panhandling laws in the country. Panhandling at a bus or train stop is barred, as is asking for money in a public park, a fairground or sports facility, at an ATM machine or on private property. In addition, the panhandler cannot block the path of the person solicited, follow a person who walks away, panhandle in a group of two or more – or panhandle without the free registration card from Orlando police.

In 2002, over 75 percent of American cities passed laws prohibiting or restricting sleeping or loitering in public places (Gowen 2003; National Coalition for the Homeless

2002). Downtown merchants now lease the sidewalks of commercial strips so trespassing laws are enforced. Authorities regularly destroy campsites, confiscate property stored in public, close public restrooms that are found to be heavily used by homeless people, board up abandoned buildings, and install ‘flip seats’ at bus stops to discourage loitering. Cities have also embraced passive techniques like lighting or loud speakers playing disturbing music during non-business hours (Gowen 2003).

National homeless policies isolate and treat the chronically homeless. Proponents use narratives arguing this will open up shelter space for use by the less unfortunate poor, leading to better treatment of homeless people (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002). The narratives used to support these conclusions come directly from the individual-based discourse. At the present, neo-liberal ideologies guide American governmental policy toward homelessness (see Lyon-Callo 2004). In contrast, many academic researchers have exposed systemic explanations for the causes of homelessness (See Kyle 2005; Lyon-Callo 2004; Gowen 2003; Hopper 2002).

Having discussed the popular discourses on homelessness in the United States over the last 200 years, I will now provide a brief discussion of American governmental policy concerning homelessness from 1980 to the present.

## **Chapter Four: A Brief Overview of Federal Policy Regarding Homelessness from 1980 to the Current Era**

In 1980, Ronald Reagan won the presidential election on the promise of economic reform. Loss of jobs, coupled with continued deindustrialization, contributed to an unemployment level of 11 percent by the economic depression of 1982. At this time, the number of visible homeless people in the downtown areas of major American cities increased substantially. When it became clear that a high percentage of the “new homeless” were white, formally middle-class men, women and children, it became harder for the media and governmental officials to argue they were merely present day manifestations of earlier cultural rebellions (Kusmer 2002).

By 1983, the first federal task force on homelessness provided information to state and local governments on how to obtain surplus federal property to provide emergency shelter (Burt et al. 2001). Shortly afterward, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), an organization intended to provide temporary help after major disasters, addressed the growing problem of homelessness. However, FEMA--geared as it was toward dealing with natural disasters--proved ineffective when dealing with widespread homelessness (Foscarinis 1996). Emergency shelters, designed to service short-term homelessness, also proved to be ineffective. In 1986, and in reaction to FEMA's earlier failure, the passage of the Homeless Persons' Survival Act and the Homeless Housing act helped to create the Emergency Shelter Grant and Transitional Housing Demonstration programs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administered both of these programs. Large bipartisan majorities in both houses of Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. The

McKinney Act originally consisted of fifteen programs providing a range of services to homeless people, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education, and some permanent housing (Foscarinis 1996). Congress amended it four times, in 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994. These amendments have generally expanded the scope and strengthened the provisions of the original legislation (Burt et al. 2001).

The McKinney Act considered a person homeless if they:

lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and... have a primary nighttime residency that is: (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations... (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings [National Coalition for the Homeless 2002b].

Despite the plethora of academic studies outlining the systemic causes of homelessness, governmental policy throughout the 1980s centered on the treatment of individual homeless people and their various pathologies. The shelter industry that developed in the 1980s became a “transitional” or “multi-service” system by the early 1990s. Such shelters offered comprehensive services but required longer-term commitments from both clients and service-providers. While the drive for more comprehensive shelters came primarily from advocates and academics concerned with the problems of homelessness, the actual funding and organization came from the federal level.

In 1992, Bill Clinton ran for the presidency promising a major initiative to address homelessness. In 1993, the Clinton administration launched a pilot program called the Continuum of Care. It sought to create localized “continuums” of services, from outreach

workers to subsidized rents, to help homeless people off the streets and into supportive housing. By 1994, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released two reports calling for the adoption of the Continuum of Care system. Academics and advocates for homeless people had been calling for such a transitional system since the late 1980s, arguing federal money spent on emergency shelter was having little effect on long-term homelessness. Advocate groups such as the Coalition for the Homeless argued hundreds of thousands of single people and families were circulating in and out of the emergency shelters and other transitory situations, unable to make the transition into long-term housing. Emergency shelters were creating a “shelter complex” in which full-time specialists relied on the shelter industry for employment, and clients became embedded in the system (Grunberg and Eagle 1990; Gounis 1992; Schutt 2003; Stark 1994). Programs funded by HUD and the Continuum of Care created thousands of new positions for case managers and program administrators. Generally well educated and trained to identify individual pathologies, such care-providers examined and categorized their clients into various categories of disability--mental illness and addiction--and general social dysfunction. Intake assessments designed composite models of each person’s problems, helping channel them into various rehabilitation programs designed to make the individual housing-ready.

In theory, the new plan would move homeless shelters away from simple warehousing and transform them into “gateways out of homelessness” (The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development 1994). However, little overall funding was spent on low-cost or subsidized housing. Noticeable cuts came in 1995 to the Homeless Assistance Program and Projects for Assistance in Transition from

Homelessness program, the very programs constructed to fund permanent housing. Overwhelmingly, the remaining funds went to the treatment of individual homeless people. The Continuum of Care programs themselves contributed to this direction of funding because of intake assessment programs that pathologized homeless people, pushing them into various categories required to rationalize rehabilitation. National policy began to form around the Chronic Homeless Initiative, a set of policies revolving around treatment of the individual homeless person (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002b). Proponents of the Chronic Homeless Initiative believed if the bulk of federal funding was going to a very small section of the population, subsequently rehabilitation of that population should become a priority of emergency shelters. At present, the Chronic Homelessness Initiative and Continuum of Care models dominate the American response to homelessness.

In a reflection of national policy, my research site of Lawrence, Kansas, has embraced the Continuum of Care model and the Chronic Homelessness Initiative. In accordance with the Continuum of Care, a Practitioners Panel developed to guide funding toward programs that follow the continuum requirements. Services have been coordinated toward treatment of homeless people through addressing individual pathologies. A ten-year plan to address chronic homelessness developed in Lawrence in accordance with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness “10-Year Planning Process to End Chronic Homelessness in Your Community: a Step-by-Step Guide” (The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness 2004). A Task Force on Homeless Services, created in 2003, and made up of community members, studied the issue of homeless services in Lawrence. The final report is indicative of current thinking

about homelessness, recommending development of a mental health inpatient facility in Lawrence and a comprehensive 24/7 emergency shelter. While there were recommendations oriented toward transitional and fulltime housing, both the transitional housing and permanent housing programs should be based on a rent structure that is affordable but also sufficiently high to require the individual to work (where possible) in order to pay rent. Job training programs were recommended as a component of the community's approach to addressing homelessness and would serve as a vehicle for providing job preparation training and access. In the absence of the ability to work as a means of earning income, the case management program plan intend to secure social security disability income for those unable to work due to a disability. Transitional housing is not defined as a physical type of housing arrangement, but rather as a personal skills building and support services plan, expressed in a written contract that contains specific objectives and activities for transitioning the individual from a homeless person to an independent living and self supporting individual.

While prevention strategies are implicit in the current plan, they are not the main thrust. The task force's final report revolves around "Continued and increased support for existing homeless service providers to establish options for a full-time, twenty-four hour, wrap-around program of relief or shelter services linked with rehabilitation services for people experiencing homelessness in Lawrence" (City of Lawrence 2005c). Structural causes play a secondary role to the themes of personal responsibility. This may have contributed to the city passing three "civility" ordinances in 2006, including an aggressive panhandling law, a law prohibiting trespass on rooftops, and a law limiting sleeping or sitting on city sidewalks. This resulted in the National Coalition on Homeless Concerns to label Lawrence as the second meanest city toward homeless people in 2006.

Having outlined the America government's policy regarding homelessness over the last two decades, and the current local policies in Lawrence, I will now turn to a discussion and analysis of the homeless shelters in Lawrence, Kansas.

## **Chapter Five: The Emergency Shelters of Lawrence, KS**

Lawrence, Kansas, is home to two year-round emergency shelters, the Salvation Army emergency shelter and the Lawrence Community Shelter and Drop-In Center. They include facilities for overnight stays and offer individual meals. This chapter presents a description of the emergency shelters in Lawrence, their physical and operational policies, and identify if they operate as per Williams' (2003). She found shelters "reflect particular beliefs about homelessness...homeless people are constructed as part of a lazy, irresponsible, addicted, or criminal underclass" (Williams 2003: 176). She hypothesizes there is a correlation between strong support of individualistic causation, hierarchical surveillance, restrictive access, and extensive punitive rules at shelters. I argue the opposite should be true in open, empowering shelters that do not use hierarchical surveillance or keep extensive punitive rules.

### **Salvation Army Emergency Shelter**

#### **“Put another Nickel in the Drum, Save a Drunken Bum”**

### **Background**

The longest continually operating charity organization in Lawrence is the Salvation Army. Capt. Gurney and Lt. Stonehouse established the Lawrence division of the Salvation Army in January 1886. For over a century, the Salvation Army has helped tens of thousands of homeless and poor people from Lawrence and the local communities. At the present, the Salvation Army provides community feeding programs, emergency shelter for the homeless and poor, a food pantry, homebound and elderly

services, rent and utility assistance, seasonal assistance during Thanksgiving and Christmas, winter coat distribution, toy shop, back to school shoe distribution, worship such as bible study, Sunday school, vacation bible school, and youth character building programs such as basketball leagues, music instruction and scouting.

The Salvation Army is an evangelical arm of the Christian church. Its message, philosophy, and doctrine are based on the Bible. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination. This is expressed by a spiritual ministry, the purposes of which are to preach the Gospel, disseminate Christian truths, supply basic human necessities, provide personal counseling, and undertake the spiritual and moral regeneration and physical rehabilitation of all people in need who come within its sphere of influence regardless of race, color, creed, sex or age.

William Booth (April 10, 1829 – August 20, 1912) was a British Methodist preacher who founded The Salvation Army and became the first General (1878-1912). Though Booth was a prominent Methodist evangelist, he was unhappy that the annual conference of the denomination kept assigning him to a pastorate, the duties of which he often neglected to respond to the frequent requests that he do evangelistic campaigns. After the Liverpool conference in 1861, Booth's request to be freed for evangelism full-time was refused, prompting Booth to resign from the ministry of the Methodist New Connexion. Soon after his resignation, he was barred from campaigning in Methodist congregations, and he became an independent evangelist. His doctrine retained many Methodist principles. Traditionally, Methodism has identified with the Armenian view of free will, via God's preeminent grace, as opposed to absolute predestination. Several

impressions about Methodism in eighteenth-century Britain strongly influenced Booth. Early Methodists were primarily manual laborers and often destitute. Methodists also had a mission to the poor of society (John Wesley had a “preferential option for the poor”). Finally, early Methodists were known to stand on the street corner and beg for the poor. These ideals undoubtedly motivated Booth to take his Methodist styled ministry to the deeper and darker corners where traditional Methodists were unwilling to venture.

As a result of these choices, thieves, sex workers, gamblers and drunkards were among Booth’s first converts to his version of Christianity. His sermons advocated hope and salvation. His aim was to lead the poor to Christ and link them to a church for further spiritual guidance. Booth claimed to give the poor direction in a spiritual manner and put them to work to save others who were like themselves. By 1874, this cornerstone evangelism grew the movement to 1,000 volunteers and 42 evangelists. By this time, Booth had assumed the title of General Superintendent. His followers called him "General." Known as the "Hallelujah Army," his converts spread out of the east end of London into neighboring areas and then to other English cities (Sandell 1947). Originally, Booth named the organization the Christian Mission, but in 1878 Booth reorganized the mission along military lines when his son Bramwell objected to being called a volunteer and stated that he was a regular or nothing (Sandell 1947). The name then became “The Salvation Army.” Converts became soldiers of Christ and are known today as Salvationists. Lieutenant Eliza Shirley held the first meeting of the Salvation Army in America in Philadelphia in 1879.

The Salvation Army gives quasi-military rank to its ministers (who are known as Officers). The Officer of the Salvation Army who is elected General is the worldwide

spiritual leader of the Salvation Army. Since the Salvation Army maintains a military structure, all appointments are made, and all regulations issued, under the General's authority. Appointments to the church's highest office are considered lifetime, although a General often "retires" at age 70. The General is elected by the High Council when his or her predecessor is removed by the High Council, retires, or dies (known within the Salvation Army as being promoted to Glory) while still in office. The High Council is made up of the Chief of the Staff, all active commissioners, except the spouse of the General, and all territorial commanders. While General Booth passed on the command to his eldest son, Bramwell Booth, all Generals after Bramwell Booth have been elected. The Salvation Army's long history is deeply tied to homelessness and poverty. In 1891, The Salvation Army opened its first American food and shelter depot in Greenwich Village, New York City. The Salvation Army "engaged in two works - personal salvation and social salvation" as its congregations grew (Green 1985; 130).

The operations director of the Lawrence Salvation Army, Walter, described the history and mission of the Salvation Army in his own words:

In 1865, Methodist minister William Booth founded the Christian Mission in London's East End. His desire was to preach to the masses, to the poor, who he felt called to preach to. He ended up in the slums of east London and discovered most people did not want to listen to his preaching because of the poverty and circumstances that people found themselves in was so dire that thinking about their spiritual being was the farthest thing from their minds. So, he found he needed to start meeting some physical needs of the people. One of the early mottos of the Salvation Army was "soup, soap, and salvation." If you feed a man, clean him up, put him to work, and then he is in more of a condition and more of a capacity to consider his soul.

This last statement is the most important. People, especially those lost to vice,

must be reformed before they can be saved. People who are living in poverty and homelessness may also be in their condition because of their own actions. Helping people change those actions will also help them change their beliefs about the Church. This core charter of the Salvation Army describes the organizations treatment of the homeless accurately. Homeless people are to be cared for in such a manner as to facilitate their recovery from their homeless state. Shelter patrons are often prompted by the Church to attend rehabilitation services, bible studies, unemployment services, and life-skills training.

The mission of The Salvation Army is to bring the whole world under the authority and rule of Jesus Christ. This mandate is based on the Army's interpretation of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The Salvation Army believes, as stated in their first doctrinal statement, that only these scriptures "constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice" (Sandall 1947). The beliefs of The Salvation Army rest upon the following eleven doctrines:

1. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.
2. We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.
3. We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead - the Father, The Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.
4. We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.
5. We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

6. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by his suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.
7. We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation.
8. We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.
9. We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.
10. We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
11. We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked [Sandall 1947].

Overnight monitor Steve explained to me, “First and foremost the Salvation Army is a church, and then they branch out to do all kinds of things. This town just happens to need an emergency shelter...” Walter, Steve, Raymond, and one unnamed employee who did not grant me a formal interview, all pointed to the religious aspects of the Salvation Army emergency shelter as the primary cause of their involvement. Each of these people made sure I was clear in understanding what their religion meant to them in relation to the shelter and the Salvation Army’s mission. For these employees, first and foremost the Salvation Army is an evangelical sect with the intention of Christianizing the world. This is done through spreading the word of Jesus Christ. Just as Booth did, modern followers of the Church found the impoverished critical in building a worldwide Christianity.

## **The Shelter**

In 2007, the Lawrence Salvation Army provided overnight emergency shelter for homeless people 365 days a year along with religious services such as Bible study and social services such as the youth athletic programs. Between June 2004 and May 2005, the Salvation Army served 305 unduplicated individuals in its shelter (City of Lawrence 2005a). In 2006, the Salvation Army employed several part-time workers and volunteers. The day-to-day administrative decisions are made by a full-time staff composed of the operations director, Walter, the shelter director, Marty, the lead case manager, Caroline, and three full-time overnight monitors, Richard, Burt and Murphy. An advisory board made up of community members acts as a steering committee for the shelter.

Walter coordinates the overall operation of the Salvation Army in Lawrence. He is involved in crafting budgets, fund raising, and coordinating functions of the church. The shelter director runs the day-to-day operation of the emergency shelter, hires employees, recruits volunteers, and runs food services. Staff members come from the local community and within the Salvation Army ranks. Four staff members were explicit they took employment at the Shelter because of a religious calling to serve the Salvation Army.

Case managers primarily conduct intake interviews and weekly-required “check up” interviews with clients. Overnight monitors assist in opening and closing the shelter, and perform overnight surveillance duties. Overnight monitor Richard explained, “I keep everything under control.” The Salvation Army maintains five full-time employees associated with the emergency shelter. Additionally, the Salvation Army maintains between ten and fifteen part-time volunteers.

The building where the Salvation Army emergency shelter resides is located near

downtown Lawrence. Its community center has been at the current location since 1957. It began operations as an emergency shelter in the late 1980s, only opening October through March. It became a full-time, year-round shelter in 2002. In 2004, a formal motion to build a larger, family-oriented and rehabilitation-focused facility was initiated. Ground was broken on the project, but building had not begun in 2007.

Structurally, the 3000 square foot, single-story building consists of a basketball court where up to 100 men sleep, a common room where up to 25 women sleep, a kitchen, 2 small rooms for families with children, and a chapel. Religious services are conducted in the Chapel on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. During the first eight months of my fieldwork, operations director Richard Forney gave sermons in the chapel two nights a week, and Sunday morning. Clients of the shelter were encouraged to attend, but attendance was not mandatory. Volunteer ministers give sermons on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings.

The Salvation Army requires clients meet certain conditions to gain services. The shelter undertakes investigative processes to determine whether an individual or family is eligible to receive certain types of benefits. The Salvation Army emergency shelter, the primary method used to screen clients is alcohol consumption. Since 1997, the Salvation Army has required guests to submit to a breathalyzer test. To gain admission, a person's blood alcohol level must be below .04 percent. However, this rule is not absolute, especially in cases of extreme weather. A caseworker at Salvation Army explained:

The only requirement is that you not have been drinking. Everyone is subject, except when the weather is cold. When the weather is severe, we do not turn anyone away. The only thing we ask is that if people are drunk or have been drinking then they should at least physically behave themselves. If they do not, well, what I do is have them

spend the night in a different facility down the road here...the city jail.

The Salvation Army publically explains its policy on alcohol use as a result of serving both families and children. A special room in the building is set aside for families. Shelter policy defines a family as a married husband and wife with or without children. Overnight monitor Richard described this policy:

If they have IDs with the same last name, and a marriage certificate, then they can go together in a separate room. We will not let them sleep together anywhere else, just in a private room that we keep open for that purpose. Same with families, if we have a mother with kids, we will not put them in with the other people.

A second requirement for use of the shelter, instituted in the late 1990s, requires shelter users to attend self-improvement classes. Shelter employees, administrators, and local residents create the classes. They range in topics from computer literacy to Bible study. The classes, conducted in the chapel area, are held Monday through Friday during regular business hours. Four desktop computers line one side where a dry-erase board hangs on the wall. Opposite all this is a large L-shaped desk covered in pamphlets and another desktop computer. Wooden pews take up the rest of the chapel area, leading to a pulpit recessed into an alcove and set beside an old organ.

Homeless people can choose from a variety of classes geared toward improvement of staff perceived individual-based failures. Caroline, the lead case manager, provides a description of the classes and a rationale for their use:

It is important to help people find some structure. That is why we require people who have stayed here over one week to attend classes, at least 9 hours a month. When we started the program here, we got so much negative press, because we ban and we were cruel and inhuman, and blah blah blah. On the other hand, we got a lot of support that

was not published. Calls and letters...saying, "I like what you are doing."

Such a program requires the Salvation Army to keep records on each patron to assure they have attended classes, weekly case-manager meetings, and are complying with the shelters various rules and regulations. Because of these requirements, surveillance of people using the shelter is a key component of the Salvation Army. A file is kept on each patron, showing the number of days they have stayed at the shelter and information concerning past conduct considered important to the shelter managers. Closed circuit cameras mounted in the gym, kitchen commons, chapel, and beside the exterior front and rear doors of the building, maintain continuous surveillance. A staff member monitors the surveillance camera during the emergency shelter's hours of operation.

Upon arrival in the evening, patrons of the shelter receive a cardboard box for bed linens: two sheets, a pillowcase, a pillow, a blanket, and a mat. Laundry facilities are available on a first come, first serve basis. Staff members serve the evening meals one hour after the shelter opens. By 9:00pm, all lights are off. At 7.30am, a cold breakfast is served. Clients must leave by 8:00am, when the gym area and kitchen close. The office/chapel area is open for staff only during regular business hours, from 9:00am to 5:00pm. The dining room area reopens at 5:00pm and stays open until 8:30pm, serving as an ad hoc temporary shelter. This practice began in fall of 2004 when no other shelter was open during these hours.

### **Salvation Army Emergency Shelter Policy and Mission Statements**

Beginning in 2004, people using services offered by Salvation Army could also use the facility to maintain a permanent phone number and address in order to search for employment. A secretary would receive mail and phone messages between regular business hours for those who utilized the overnight shelter. These services were only available if the correspondence was concerned with gaining employment. In 2006, this practice was halted.

Patrons using the Salvation Army were subject to rules banning them from the shelter. Banning offences include consumption of alcohol on the premises, fighting on the premises, disruptive behavior (including verbal abuse), drug use, smoking inside, and use of property without permission (such as cooking in the kitchen without permission). Banned periods last the evening, a week, a month, or a year. Single offences at the Salvation Army shelter often result in short periods of banning. Multiple offences can lead to long-term banning or even total restriction of access to services. Overnight monitor Murphy discussed banning with me:

Most of the reasons people are banned involve anger control issues. A lot of it stems from anti-authority issues. People just do not want to follow rules that they do not think apply to them. One of the rules is that they are only allowed one mat to sleep on, unless they have a doctor's requirement to sleep on a softer surface. Some evenings, people will take too many mats, and there are not enough for all the clients. You have to go around and check everyone's mats to see where they are, and so you go up and ask people to lift their mats up, and they get pissed and say "f\*#k you, I don't have to move for you". Then you have to enforce the rules. A ban like that is short. We can just kick them out for the night. But, if they start to make threats toward you, then it can be three nights to a week.

While there is a formal set of offences that result in a ban, monitors also have authority to ban people from the shelter. Primary offences that will lead to banning are:

1. Consumption of alcohol on the premises
2. Inappropriate behavior (rude, disruptive, behavior such as arguing or verbal abuse)
3. Minor rules offences (too long of a shower, using two mats to sleep on)
4. Misuse of property (some examples are washing of shoes in clothes washer)

Offences that resulted in banning periods of over a month included:

1. Fighting on the property
2. Carrying a weapon
3. Distributing drugs
4. Assaulting a monitor or other staff member

Each shelter in Lawrence operates under the rubric of a mission statement. The mission statements are guides for the shelter when presenting their operational structure to the public, and as structures to design programs. The Salvation Army mission statement notes it is "an international movement. It is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination." The operations director, Walter, described the mission statement of the Salvation Army to me:

There are a lot of principles driving the Salvation Army, and I would say that most of them are spiritual principles. As I explained earlier, we still have that same desire to share the gospel and in fact, that is our main mission, is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people.

Caroline added the Salvation Army was there to "provide a safe place for the people that want shelter." Richard argued the Salvation Army's mission in Lawrence was "to do the

work of God and to change things.” Walter summed up the two reasons he saw for the Salvation Army as, “The opportunity to share the Gospel. Beyond that, I feel that our purpose is rehabilitative.” The shelters purpose is to provide emergency housing and rehabilitation programs, but the Salvation Army’s purpose is to spread the Gospel. In many ways, these two missions are inseparable.

The discourse of rehabilitation fits within the Salvation Army’s doctrine of salvation. If one is homeless because of personal choice (within the individual-based discourse, this is explained by narratives of drug use, alcoholism, independence, laziness, criminality, and disaffiliation), in the same manner as the choice to deny the teachings of Jesus Christ (i.e. not accepting Jesus as the only savior), then personal reformation, like personal salvation, is a pathway out of homelessness reliant on the free choice of the individual. Just as not taking in the teaching of Jesus Christ can lead someone to hell in the afterlife, so not taking seriously the rules of the shelter will lead the client back into homelessness, or at least kicked out of the Salvation Army emergency shelter. This is at the core of the Salvation Army’s mission and philosophy. Attacking personal failings, allowing people to see themselves as “reform-able” and providing the means to do so, it is believed, will open the person’s heart, mind, and soul to the teachings of Jesus Christ, as interpreted by the Salvation Army. This core value, exposed by the “General” William Booth, and clearly articulated by the operations director Walter, guides the actions of the Army in their care for homeless people in Lawrence, Kansas, and beyond.

Under this theory, a person’s homelessness is curable through regimented schemes. If a person’s actions can be modified, the person’s life can be changed. This reflects all the way back to William Booth’s rallying cry “Soap, Soup, Salvation,”

arguing once a person's physical needs are met, they may be more open to addressing their spiritual needs. Such ideas are reflected by several Salvation Army policies. For example, the testing for alcohol, the setting of time limits on stays by people who do not wish to take reformatory classes or bible study, and in some locations charging for overnight stays.

The following story illustrates the Salvation Army's beliefs about poverty, and it touches on how the Salvation Army views personal choice and its impact on homelessness. I collected three different versions of the story during the time of my fieldwork. The Lawrence Journal World (Ranney 2003) also published it on October 7, 2003. It concerns a young woman named Eillene Miller and her 18-month old son Tristin, whose request for shelter was denied one night in September of 2003. Miller had been in and out of housing and occasionally used the Salvation Army emergency shelter. The staff that night knew she occasionally used the shelter, but was not designated as chronically homeless. On the night in question, she arrived after the doors had closed for the evening. Other staff members had approved her late arrival the previous day, but no one told the night monitors. Shelter staff, contending they were just following the rules, denied her admission. This story was used as an example of the Salvation Army's strict policies and inflexibility by clients of both shelters and staff members at Lawrence Community Shelter during my fieldwork. Structuring policy in this way makes possible the application of rules that might, under other circumstances, be regarded as cruel or insensitive. It sets a standard, noting that regardless of the person's status, gender, or regular use of the shelter, the rules of the shelter must be upheld. Irrational choices must be framed against a strongly enforced rule structure. Such strict systems are believed to

help patrons find structure in their lives. In this way, the Salvation Army reinforces its system and helps people reform from structure-less street life to structured housed life.

Policies of the Salvation Army reflect their mission, philosophy, and religious doctrine. At its heart, the Salvation Army is an evangelical movement. While it is not part of their requirements for the use of the shelter, the operations director and various employees all emphasized helping the poor and homeless understand their interpretation of the teachings of Jesus Christ as primary. The operations director and others often reminded me early in my fieldwork, “soap, soup, and salvation” was the original rallying call of the organization.

To reiterate, the Salvation Army shelter’s policies focus on reforming the individual. This is necessary to create an environment where people can be made housing-ready. The shelter requires clients to take a breathalyzer test to gain admission. Patrons are required, after their first overnight stay, to conduct an intake interview with a caseworker. After a person stays at the shelter for one week, clients must begin taking self-improvement classes or show a concerted effort to gain employment in order to continue their stays. Clients who refuse to take classes may be allowed to stay if they show extreme mental or physical distress. Bible study is not required, but it does fulfill the class requirement for continued inhabitation. Clients who do pick bible study are allowed into the shelter an hour earlier than clients who do not, and are fed a light meal after the sermon.

Despite the necessity of the Salvation Army’s strict system, monitors are given some leeway to interpret policies on a case-to-case basis. While Walter placed a lot of emphasis on the breathalyzer requirement, monitors can wave it under certain

circumstances, such as conditions of extreme weather. Caseworkers have some wiggle room in reference to class requirements. These two clauses provide some non-punitive structure to the shelter's policies, and allow staff members the room to assist certain patrons who fall outside of the traditional roles of the homeless and poor.

To summarize, the Salvation Army is the oldest continually operating care-providing institution for the homeless in Lawrence. Its operating principles come from the Methodist faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Salvation Army's shelter centers on treatment of the individual through reformation. Access is restricted via screening and continuing stay requirements. Surveillance helps maintain compliance with rules believed to be necessary for the protection of its guests and staff.

## **Lawrence Community Shelter**

### **“A Pathway to a Brighter Future”**

#### **Background**

Before 1995, local churches provided day shelter against inclement weather in Lawrence. Recognizing a gap in services where daytime shelter was not being provided to homeless people, community members opened the Community Drop-In Center in fall of 1995. In 2000, the Community Drop-In Center secured a permanent location near downtown and began to offer services such as showers, laundry facilities, breakfast, and lockers for personal belongings. Rehabilitation as well as general relief services allowed guests to receive assistance securing housing, employment, counseling, and educational

opportunities. It is important to note that from its very beginnings, the Lawrence Community Drop-in Center was created in direct response to a perceived need, and its treatment focus was the individual homeless person who required shelter from inclement weather that was not being provided at that time.

In the summer of 2001, a group of citizens, who later became the Lawrence Coalition for the Homeless, identified that intoxicated homeless people were not being served by any existing shelters. The only other emergency shelter in Lawrence did not admit homeless people considered drunk (i.e. those who provide a breathalyzer test over .04 percent). In September of 2001 and May of 2002, two people experiencing homelessness died from alcohol consumption and exposure (Malthus 2001). These were the fourth and fifth deaths in Lawrence among the homeless community in three years. The deaths demonstrated to homeless advocates and city officials that Lawrence had a need for an all-access emergency shelter. From June through August of 2002, the Summer Open Shelter, located in the gymnasium of St. John's School and staffed by five paid employees, was open for 48 nights and served an average of 22 individuals per night. The new shelter was formed to serve people using alcohol or drugs, of non-traditional sexual persuasions, and those who choose not, or were not allowed, to utilize the Salvation Army's emergency shelter.

The Lawrence Community Shelter is the outgrowth of concerned community members' reactions to a perceived need in the city. However, in comparison to the Salvation Army, it is not motivated by a particular ideology. Rather, the people who started the shelter (either the Drop-In Center or the Lawrence Open Shelter) were a mix of Catholic, Quaker, Methodist, and secular beliefs. Catholics have a clear commitment

to serving the poor. While the Catholic social tradition can be traced back to medieval notions of poverty and pauperism, modern notions are slanted toward individualistic beliefs about the causes of homelessness. Hunt (2002) noted the article *Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs about Poverty*, how his data showed "Protestants and Catholics are strongest on individualistic beliefs." He also cites the work of Feagin (1975) who reported descriptive statistics suggesting that individualistic beliefs are the most popular among white Catholics, whereas regarding structuralist beliefs, white Catholics showed the least support. Kluegel and Smith (1989) built on Feagin's findings utilizing multiple regression modeling and found that white American Catholics uniformly ranked individualistic causes higher than systemic ones. These findings are important in relation to the Lawrence Community Shelter, whose founding members included white middle class Catholics.

Quakers are guided by a personal faith. This is perhaps best expressed by the belief that one could not attain salvation through the words of others, but rather from direct communion with God. As a result, Quaker teachings came to emphasize spiritual equality. In 1681, the Quaker William Penn received land from Charles II as a debt payment, and founded a Quaker colony in America. Quaker settlements promoted liberty and religious tolerance. American Quakers soon withdrew almost entirely from political concerns and began to focus on moral issues, mainly social justice causes such as abolition, temperance, prison reform, and women's rights. Quakers are often found working to overcome social, legal, economic, and political injustices, locally and in the wider world. As a result, Quaker notions about the causes of poverty include larger systemic explanations.

The general outline of the early Methodists' work with the poor is well known. Methodists gathered clothes and food to send to the poor; opened free medical clinics to draw in the sick from the streets; and stood on street corners and begged for the poor. Early Methodists such as John Wesley articulated a combination of serious stewardship and personal concern for the plight of the poor, which became a hallmark of the Methodist movement. In effect, Methodists were fascinated by the breadth of the problem of poverty, and universalized the responsibility for dealing with it within their religious movement. As early as 1742, Methodist people were expected to give a penny a week to their class leader in support of the beneficent programs of the connection. The Methodist program of assistance to the poor is, first and foremost, a way to help those in their own societies who had special needs. This certainly is true of the founding members of the Lawrence Community Shelter, who were reacting directly to the presence of homeless people in the streets of their town who were not being cared for. Like most Christian denominations, Methodists see addressing poverty as a part of their religious ideology.

While the religious beliefs of the early members of the shelter certainly influenced its history, my research found the Lawrence Community Shelter was started as a direct response to a visible unmet need. That need was understood as the shortage of shelter in Lawrence for homeless individuals, including people who drink or use drugs. The staff members I interviewed related personal beliefs about the causes of homelessness from the opposing discourses on homelessness. Some of those beliefs centered on an understanding that homelessness as the result of the current economic system. Others related to a belief that certain homeless people choose to live a homeless lifestyle.

## **The Shelter**

In December of 2003, the Summer Open Shelter moved into the same business complex as the Community Drop-In Center. This allowed the two organizations to merge in 2005 and form the Lawrence Community Shelter. While, they occupy the same building, the two units inhabit two different wings and do not share use space. The shelter facility maintains one common room with a bathroom and storage closet at the west end of the building. A kitchenette is located on the east end of the building. The common room houses 26 men and women. The drop-in center maintains one large common room with a shared bathroom. A service window and small room separate the common room from four small administrative offices. The drop-in center also has a finished basement used for storage, AA and NA meetings, and a space for the drop-in store. A covered front porch attached to the drop-in center was a favorite place for many clients of the shelter and drop-in center to congregate and socialize.

In 2006, the Lawrence Community Shelter employed several part-time and four full-time staff members. The day-to-day full-time administrative staff was composed of the executive director, Les, the lead case-worker, Todd, the lead administrative assistant, Terry, the operations manager, Josh, and the volunteer coordinator, Duke. Several part-time employees monitor the shelter during the evenings and overnight. In fall of 2006, there were four part-time employees. A board of directors made up of community members and shelter staff also act as a steering committee for the shelter.

When patrons arrive in the evening, they receive sheets, a blanket, a pillow, a mat, and an opportunity plus supplies to bathe. Members of the local community donate an

evening meal. The Lawrence Community Shelter does not maintain a food bank or in-house kitchen. They do not serve hot food in the morning, and patrons must leave by 8:00am. Outside of the front entrance of the building are a few chairs, a trashcan, and an ashtray. During my fieldwork, guests would bring chairs meant for inside the facility outside in order to sit in the shade or smoke cigarettes. It was common for people to linger in front of the facility during the day, talking and smoking.

At the Lawrence Community Shelter, there are no requirements for admission or continued services, and has no overt religious affiliation. The Lawrence Community Shelter does not keep an on-going personal file on each of its overnight patrons, nor do they employ video or audio surveillance equipment at the facility. The shelter does keep case histories on clients receiving aid through the shelter. The shelter also maintains guest lists, and lists of banned individuals. Overnight monitors stay in the primary sleeping area in order to police client activities and monitor client health.

The shelter's alcohol policy allows people who are inebriated to stay at the shelter. People cannot consume alcohol on the shelter's property. Clients can turn over alcoholic beverages to the evening shelter monitor, who will hold the items overnight, returning it the next day. Clients are not required to conduct an intake interview to qualify for shelter, but if they want to receive services at the Drop-in Center, they have to meet with a caseworker. Formal identification is not required to stay at the shelter, but people are asked to sign in when entering the building for the first time. Legal names are not required. Clients must vacate the shelter by 8am, and are discouraged from entering and exiting the shelter building between 10pm and 7am.

Les states the Lawrence Community Shelter policies are intended to help people

find a pathway out of homelessness. The policies center on personal interaction between staff and clients. Les explained this important principle to me after about a week of volunteer work. He pulled me aside and asked me how I was adjusting to the shelter environment. He mentioned that other monitors had spoken to him about me, describing my interactions with clients. He explained that Lawrence Community Shelter clients often just need someone to talk to, someone who is good at listening, and he felt that I was that kind of person. Les explained to me that he preferred to recruit people who he felt acted in this manner, and even thought it was important enough to describe in our initial interview a few days later. Here, he explained a little more about what he looks for in an overnight monitor:

The nighttime staff here is good at spending a length a time with the guests. A night monitor might sit there for hours with just one person, and really try to listen to what they are saying. Help them deal with their problem. That helps you to build the trust that you really need to get through to some people and really help them. You can talk to them about detox; you can do that sort of thing. You get that quiet, one on one time with a person that is nearly impossible [to get] here during the day.

Stan, an evening monitor at the Lawrence Community Shelter and a recovering alcoholic, also illustrated this point during an interview. He felt these important principles help define the Lawrence Community Shelter as a care-provider. We were discussing banning at the Lawrence Community Shelter, and he felt obliged to tell this story:

For me, people are banned for the little reasons. They come in, they get a mat, eat, and then split. Ok, that is fine, but the free meal just got you banned for a week. That one is the most common. Drinking on the property...I will see someone with a beer, and I will tell them that is not OK and to throw it out. Nevertheless, twenty minutes later there he is again, and I told him he has to get rid of it. Now, I will not ban people easy. I try to do all I can to fix it, but then

again sometimes they just do not care. There are a few that get banned for just acting out. They are somewhat chronic, and they get banned a lot. I will go out and talk to someone and say, “Hey, in a week you can come back.” Then the day before, dam it if they have not got themselves banned again. Sometimes it is just frustration. I think it gets the better side of them and anger results. One way you can be banned is verbal abuse. I do not think it is fair to just ban someone from some place they really need to be unless they know what it is that they have done wrong and recognize it, or at least understand the reasons behind it. I try to be understanding and compassionate.

Another of the ways the Lawrence Community Shelter homeless people build confidence and self-esteem is through their task system and the Drop-in Store. The task system was a tool for clients to contribute to the shelter. Certain tasks, such as cleaning around the shelter, removing the dining table before lights out, and emptying the cigarette ashtrays, were allotted to volunteers in return for certain perks like a late check-in time or the retention of a certain sleeping spot. Other tasks developed and monitored by the drop-in center provide opportunities for the clients to accumulate “drop-in dollars” for use in the in-house “store.” The task or job system is a tool for building self-esteem. Lawrence Community Shelter employees believe the system helps people gain a little structure in an open and self-paced manner. It also provides a simple way to award people who contribute to the shelter. This develops a sense of ownership, or companionship, between the client and the shelter.

The shelter’s task system is not reformative, but rather rehabilitative. This important distinction explains why there are not job training systems at LCS, but rather job coaching and self-esteem building. Patrons are assisted in building, or rebuilding, the self-esteem and social skills necessary to become housing ready. This is different from the Salvation Army’s job training classes, meant to reform negative habits or to teach

skills believed by the staff of the Army as necessary for homeless people who are either lacking them, or who intentionally regard such skills as unnecessary. Josh, the operations manager, described these two programs:

We run a little store with personal items, such as CD players and batteries. They do work around the shelter in exchange for a script that they can trade for items at the store. It is, basically, paying them for working here. We have a few chores that we allow people to do that puts them on the list for the next night, guarantees them a spot. They can show up before 10 o'clock, and they know they have a spot waiting for them.

### **Lawrence Community Shelter Policy and Mission Statements**

Les, the executive director for the Lawrence Community Shelter, also described to me the organizations' primary operating principles:

We are a place for emergency care and long-term assistance. That is a part of the issue that we are dealing with here, to change the psychology of the place from just a drop-in to an assistance center. That long-term environmental change is occurring slowly as people begin to understand that they can come here, are interviewed, fill out a form, and get help. I mean we do not have a lot of money. We cannot provide rental assistance, but we can do small things like bus passes, and networking. We are not only an emergency shelter, but also a place to help people get out of homelessness. The tag line for the Lawrence Community Shelter is "a pathway to a brighter future." This takes having the case managers and the agencies coming here. Having all these things here means that we can provide to help people out of homelessness.

The Lawrence Community Shelter's mission statement, posted on the organization's website, reads, "The mission of the Lawrence Community Shelter is to provide safe shelter and comprehensive support services and programs that provide a path

to a positive future for people experiencing homelessness and people who are at risk of homelessness” (Bracker 2007). This statement places emphasis on comprehensive rehabilitation and long-term commitment in the treatment of homeless people. Les explained, “I am simply motivated by a personal calling to serve the poor, as are other key Lawrence Community Shelter [staff].” In our interview, Les went on to explain “LCS was started simply as a response to a visible unmet need – the shortage of shelter in Lawrence for homeless people, including those who drink or use drugs; made obvious because people on the streets of our town.”

Les is an important figure in the shelter. His background and experience are intimately tied to the foundational ideology, operational principles, and mission statement of the shelter. Unlike the Salvation Army, the Lawrence Community Shelter does not have an organizational history to explain its underlying motivation. It developed to treat a specific need in the community, and evolved out of that need into a local institution. As a result, Les is intimately tied to the shelter, its policies, and its perception by the general public.

Les’s training and expertise come from experience. He has worked in shelters, soup kitchens, and “in general working with the homeless for almost forty years, starting in the mid 1960s.” He began his career in Washington D.C., working with a group called “the Community for Creative Non-violence.” He volunteered at a soup kitchen for about 14 years, and with a group of people out of the Community for Creative Non-violence. One of the accomplishments he was quite proud of was a project called the Mary house, which is for immigrant families, new immigrant families, which would be homeless otherwise. That project, which he is still on the board, owns eleven houses in Washington

D.C., and the Maryland suburbs.

Les started as a board member of the Lawrence Open Shelter starting in early 2003. In Jan of 2003, he became the coordinator for the Lawrence Open Shelter. In November of 2004, the Drop-In Center and the Shelter wanted to start the process to merge, and after the director of the drop-in center left, Les became the director of the combined operation in 2005. For several years, Les was the director of an organization called the Redeemers Social Services Center, which was not a shelter but an assistance center for low income and homeless people, food pantry and an assistance office and a clothing pantry. It was from this position Les retired in order to take on the executive director position at Lawrence Community Shelter.

Les's ideas, methods, and strengths permeate the shelter's operation, policy, and mission. What helps him frame the programs of the shelter is "an understanding that we are part of a continuum of poverty that will always exist and to not expect to solve that issue." He sees the goal of the shelter as an attempt to resolve issues in one person's life at a time rather than worry about the global problem of poverty and homelessness. This is very important in relation to the underlying ideological makeup of the shelter. Les understands and articulates beliefs about the systemic causes of homelessness. However, a greater truth is, the demands of working with homeless individuals day by day overpower any strong support of systemic discourses. While the Lawrence Community Shelter does participate in local and statewide groups to educate the public about homelessness in an attempt to make some structural changes, that is secondary to the immediate needs of the homeless.

Les believes the causes of homelessness result from releasing people from mental

hospitals without concomitant local care follow-up, doing away with substance abuse rehabilitation programs in favor of prison terms, limiting the amount of public housing, welfare reform, redefining "disability" not to cover alcoholism, etc. This clear articulation of the structural causes of homelessness permeated the causal narratives about homelessness provided by both shelter staff and board members during my fieldwork.

To summarize, the Lawrence Community Shelter maintains a set of rules detailing offences that can lead to banning. The shelter's requirements for a stay center on basic principles of respect toward the shelter staff and clients, and no consumption of alcohol in the shelter's property. It maintains surveillance by keeping a nighttime monitor in the sleeping room overnight, but does not keep video documentation. The Lawrence Community Shelter keeps personal files on long-term clients, and a nightly guest list to track banned individuals. Les and Duke screen potential shelter staff to find people who have real world experience with homelessness, or who are compassionate and understanding of addictions, mental illness, and homelessness.

This chapter has shown how both shelters in Lawrence follow particular systems of operation. My hypothesis states shelters that fit the conditions outlined by Williams' (2003) criteria will incorporate particular narratives about homelessness. Having outlined the operational structures and policies at the Lawrence Community Shelter and the Salvation Army emergency shelter, I have shown they are either restrictive or open and to varying degrees align with Williams' (2003) descriptions. Data presented in the following chapter will test my hypothesis regarding the presence of narratives associated with the two primary popular discourses on homelessness. It will do so by exploring staff and board members' narratives about the causes of homelessness. Chapter Seven will address

the overarching question of why particular causal narratives are present at each shelter.

## **Chapter Six: Interview Data Presentation**

In this chapter, I present interview data from the staff and board members of the

emergency shelters in Lawrence. I sorted data into two categories: The Salvation Army and the Lawrence Community Shelter. I sifted interview data looking for descriptions of the causes of homelessness. Portrayals of homelessness in American popular culture have more often stressed laziness, immorality, wanderlust, heavy drinking, and other character defects than any other explanation. Structural flaws such as high costs of living, low wages, flawed infrastructures, and inadequate programs to address biomedical conditions such as alcohol and mental illness have also seen moments of emphasis.

### **Staff and Board Members of the Salvation Army Emergency Shelter: Constructions of Homelessness.**

As noted in Chapter Five, the Salvation Army emergency shelter relies on detailed surveillance, does not provide open access to services, and maintains a strict rule system. Staff members related to me more narratives associated with the individual-based discourse than those at the Lawrence Community Shelter. The shelter director, Walter, at first was hesitant when asked to describe homelessness. He replied to the question, “At some point, whether it intended to or not, Lawrence put out the door mat and said ‘welcome’ to homeless people.” He substantiated his claim with a story about a service-provider in Nebraska who actually provided homeless people with bus tickets to Lawrence. This narrative describes a belief that people who choose to be homeless are drawn to the homeless services in Lawrence. Several informants at the Salvation Army provided this narrative.

When Walter began to describe homelessness, he spoke about a homeless lifestyle and its hindrance to people transitioning out of homelessness:

There are portions of homeless people in our community

that will be homeless no matter what we do, and there are elements, perhaps a small minority of people that really want out of that homeless lifestyle. Those are the people that we really want to try to reach out to and see if we can help them transition out of their homeless state and into something else, and it could be for many reasons that people are there.

In this instance, Walter described both a homeless lifestyle and the pervasive society that allows it to exist. When discussing the reasons why someone is homeless, he also isolated personal choice as primary:

They have learned how to survive a certain way, and having lived that way for a certain period of time they forget how to live within the social structure that exists in a community, and so we have to try to help them so they fit in again and become a functional member of society.

This narrative also discusses a homeless lifestyle and a particular type of social structure they need to be re-integrated into. In our interview, Walter sometimes appeared confused by the personal ineptitudes he saw in homeless people. He explained to me:

It shocks me when I have to sit down with someone and talk to them about how to fill out a job application, or how to present themselves, or what it is that they should say at a job interview.

In the prior quotes, treatment of homelessness revolves around reconditioning people into housing readiness. He feels, “Our purpose [when dealing with the homeless] is rehabilitative.” His views are even clearer in this quote:

I do some coaching of people, helping them to take the next step. Yes, they might fail. They might have the door slammed in their face. But, you pick them up and brush them off and say, “Here is where we need to polish you up a little bit more.” I just think that people can arrive at that place if given the proper kind of support and resources around them.

Walter describes homeless people as sometimes culpable in their homelessness, but

malleable enough to transform into housing ready individuals

Over-night monitor and part-time caseworker, Burt, also viewed social failings as contributing to a person's homelessness. He explained one of the main causes of homelessness was disconnection from a social network, in particular family and friends:

I take for granted that I have a family that cares about me, that I know people and that I have friends I can go to for help. Over time, I have met many people through my associations with school. I have a community that I can work with when I have a need. I have a support system that I can access. I feel that many of the people that are at the Salvation Army do not have that.

This narrative mirrors the disaffiliation explanation, arguing broken social networks lead people further into poverty and homelessness.

Community can also contribute to the problems homeless people deal with. Burt explained, "The thing with the homeless community is, they create their own support systems. A lot of the time, this is really counterproductive. Its mostly drinking, drugging, or whatever." Burt's narrative correlates with a homeless lifestyle where association with other homeless people perpetuates their homelessness.

That Burt viewed the causes of homelessness as centered on the personal choice is evident with this quote:

A lot of them have come out of prison, or have had some bad deal that happened to them. They got a little inheritance and lost it, their wife left them, the army screwed them, they are being sued...

He did not discuss wage, housing, or legal issues concerned with homelessness during our interview. Burt constructed homeless people as weak willed, socially inept, and culpable in their homelessness. For example, in this quote Burt examines one client's reasons for being homeless:

This one guy told me all about his childhood and what occurred with his father and stuff like that, regarding his father's drug use, and he attributes a lot of his own drug use and how he relates to society, as being linked to his childhood. I see that as a kind of cop-out, because he blamed too much on other people and society.

Staff member Marty was only one of two employees to present a more complex description of homelessness. His began with this explanation, "They are not always homeless because of the community. Rather, they come here to this community because they think they can get help here." This reflects a belief that homelessness is curable through treatment of the individual. Continuing on this theme, Marty also worried about the hedonistic elements of Lawrence and their effect on homelessness:

Lawrence is a hedonistic community. There is a lot of drinking going on, a lot of substance abuse. A lot of people come to Lawrence just to partake in the superficial liberal aspects of the community.

Marty elaborated on this concept later in the interview. He created a scenario that tied together his ideas about hedonism and community in Lawrence:

For example, if someone comes here with a severe alcohol problem and they want to live downtown and they want to be involved in the downtown community, and there is a lot of alcohol going around, it behooves us as a community to say "now, this probably is not a place you should be."

In this instance, Marty does place some blame on the community because of its many drinking establishments (a structural contributor to alcoholism). Marty was also the only staff member to include economically systemic causes contributing to homelessness in Lawrence. He talked about issues surrounding employment in Lawrence, arguing:

So far as people in Lawrence is concerned, and people who become or transition into or out of homelessness in Lawrence, employment seems to be a large factor. There is just not a lot of diversity in the job market in Lawrence.

There is not a lot of industry in Lawrence, and to a certain extent Lawrence is saturated right now.

Marty acknowledged structural-economic contributions to homelessness. He argues, “When you don’t have a college degree, it is hard to make ends meet on minimum wage.”

Marty also views homeless people as rational beings who make conscious decisions that influence his or her homelessness. He has interacted with “people here who have disabilities, who have work concerns that just cannot be met and they end up staying [at the Salvation Army] for years.” He went on to say, “We need to help them wake up. Now whether that is rehabilitating them or empowering them, I do not know.” Within this statement, Marty gives the homeless person power to make a personal choice to “wake up.” This also seems to place the impetus for rehabilitation on the person. This is inline with the Salvation Army’s ideas about homelessness. For Marty, some homeless people are also drunks and addicts, who are attracted to the “party” elements of the community, and others are trapped by structural forces keeping them homeless.

Turning to the over-night monitors, I found most emphasized personal choice.

Richard was quite straightforward about his views on homelessness. He explained:

I think that a lot of them just do not believe in government, do not believe in paying taxes. Some of them do not want to work. I think that maybe ten to twenty percent just believe they do not owe the government, and they do not want to pay taxes, and do not want to work. They believe that if it is free, then you better take it while you can. Some of them are like that, but the rest of them are just down on their luck, and trying to find a job.

For Richard, people are homeless because they want to be, are lazy, or are just anti-government. “They are all just a bunch of drunks, or druggies, and for most that is true, but not all.” Pathways out of homelessness are through rehabilitation, but he knows some

people resist:

When we get people in we try to have them do an intake with caseworkers. A lot of them want to skip and avoid it, just stay and do their own thing.

In following the view of personal social responsibility, Richard argues, "This place will help you if you want to help yourself." Richard was very inconsistent, saying first that ten to twenty percent of all homeless people are freeloaders and then that "most" are drunks and druggies. I believe these inconsistencies related directly to our interview being recorded. In private conversations, Richard often articulated a clear view of homeless people as using the Salvation Army shelter to support themselves when they did not really need to.

Murphy was very critical of the clients at Salvation Army. He felt homeless people didn't want to work and use poverty assistance programs to get by. He explained:

I would say it is a mix between two things, mental illness and down right laziness. There have been a few guys I have talked to, I used to be in case management, and they said, "Yea, I'm not going to get a [...] job." I would ask, "Why?" He said, "I do not need one." I thought, "What?" He said, "Because everything is taken care of for me, why should I get a job?" I thought damn, maybe we should be charging him...

In the following quote, Murphy includes the addiction narrative in addition to his ideas about laziness:

A lot of guys that get a paycheck, that work, but instead of saving it and getting an apartment or something, they go sleep at the shelter, get a bunch of drugs or alcohol and then end up losing their jobs...

Steve was the only employee of the Salvation Army who had experienced homelessness.

He was a barber for most of his adult life, but unspecified circumstances left him without

work. He explained:

It is a funny thing. I had a career. I was a hairdresser, a barber, for 35 years. Because of situations I put myself in and...things, I lost the barber's license.

Steve went on to describe homelessness, observing, "I did not have a homeless thought until I was suddenly there." He felt being homeless was a "great taxation of the spirit" and the "biggest waste of a man's life." He explained Lawrence was a good town to be homeless. The city "makes you feel ok, that you can succeed enough to get out of homelessness." He also knew while being homeless you have to "kind of fight the depression." He "knows guys who are not even 30 and they have given up." Steve acknowledges depression can be a result of homelessness. He insinuated homeless people, if they are free of depression and addiction, can succeed through the Salvation Army's programs.

Caroline and Marian are both social workers employed by the Salvation Army.

Caroline viewed personal events as catalysts into homelessness. She claimed:

What I hear a lot is loss of jobs, or illness from one spouse or another, even deaths of a spouse or family member, and that person is so devastated they just fall apart after that. The mental illness part of it...the ones that frequent us, I do not know that have ever really been housed successfully. I think that they have gone from our shelter and others in Topeka and KC and back. I see a pattern that is going between Lawrence and KC and Topeka a lot.

She focused on personal pathways into and out of homelessness. She believed that for some, the pathway involved alcohol or drugs, for others it was mental illness or poor decisions. In our interview, Caroline did not broach economic or social causes of homelessness.

Caroline also provided a laziness narrative. She explained:

Whereas the laziness, where people say that the homeless are just lazy, I see that as partly true. For some people, not all.

Marian described homelessness as the result of “mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, [and for some] they want out but do not know how to get out.” She does not believe “anyone really wants to stay here. It is a mat on a cold floor.” She argued the two main causes of homelessness are mental illness and addictions. She added:

Not necessarily because they are still addicted, but because of their past. They are having problems because they have felonies on their record, or because of their criminal pasts.

Marian was very timid in her responses to my interview questions, and did not elaborate in her answers, even when I prodded or asked follow up questions. In her descriptions of homeless people she feels they are addicted, former convicts, mentally ill, and ill-equipped to deal with life once they had succumbed to homelessness.

Dave Palkus was the only board member for the Salvation Army emergency shelter who agreed to an interview. We spent about thirty minutes talking about the shelter. He viewed the causes of homelessness as:

A combination of a lot of things, from alcohol abuse to drug addiction, to a lack in social skills, to bad employment histories, to generational poverty. Housing in Lawrence is expensive, but there is plenty of it, and plenty of programs that provide assistance to people, so I do not think it is a problem of housing in Lawrence. There is a problem of wages. As I said earlier, people can be working two jobs even and just barely get by. But that is a problem of the market, not of Lawrence.

This quote describes homeless people as drunks, addicts, socially inept, and economically challenged. It also challenges the effectiveness of social programs and the problem of affordable housing in Lawrence.

To summarize, staff and board members at the Salvation Army conveyed stories to me about homelessness that are discursively linked to the individualistic theories. Only one staff member stressed structural theories.

### **Staff and Board Members of the Lawrence Community Shelter: Constructions of Homelessness.**

Staff members of the Lawrence Community Shelter provided narratives related to both individualistic and systemic discourses during my interviews. The executive director, Les, explained how homelessness is the result of a “lack of a living wage and a lack of adequate housing.” He noted in the same interview how problems of the social system influence personal problems, “There are so many people here who are mentally unstable or alcoholic and they just can't get help.” The core of this statement identifies a flaw in the social system, namely the lack of a specialized care facility for mentally unstable and addicted people who cannot afford private care. While Les acknowledged many structural causes of homelessness in our interviews, the reality of homelessness necessitates treatment on a person-by-person basis. The shelter system is concerned with issues of economic rehabilitation and re-socialization. Les explained:

We have a job-coaching program that takes people who are in case management, and identified through the case management process, as being viable for job coaching programs. It takes the individual from resume skills through finding the job, and then goes onto the job with them. The number one job failure for homeless folks is socialization skills.

In this view, homeless people remain homeless because of a particular social flaw. The difference in explanation lies in the causes of such flaws. He explained that most

formally homeless people need assistance to maintain their housing. Here, transitional housing is necessary to take unstable homeless people and rehabilitate them to become secure housing users. In this quote, Les describes what transitional housing would do:

Transitional housing means people coming out of institutions, or needing the kind of limited institutional care. Follow up on medicines, for people with mental illness, follow up on "sticking with the program" for people who are in substance abuse or AA programs.

Here, Les combines the structural issue of housing with individual-based treatment programs to re-socialize homeless people, helping them to better function in the market-based economy. This complex view provides Les the freedom to argue that, whatever the systemic flaw, homeless people have various needs; they need someone to listen, to remind them they are relevant, they need rehabilitation. In short, they need to be assisted in their attempt to fit into the existing political economy well enough to obtain secure housing. His focus on the individual follows narratives identifying character and social flaws effecting people's ability to make the correct choices about housing, employment, etc. The causes of these flaws are varied, but they, as Les noted, are the "number one job failure for homeless folks."

Most other staff members at the Lawrence Community Shelter mirrored Les in their explanations of homelessness, merging systemic (specifically wages, housing, and social ineptitude) and individual (mainly character flaws such as addiction and laziness) causes. Staff member Todd, who was a night monitor and had been with the shelter for over two years at the time of my interviews, explained to me his ideas about the causes of homelessness:

Housing costs...the cost of housing in this city is extremely high. The Lawrence Journal World put out an article a few

weeks ago showing how much higher the housing costs are in Lawrence compared to other cities in the surrounding areas.

Todd acknowledged housing and rehabilitation programs are sometimes not enough. He told me, “You cannot take someone off the street and expect them to jump into the machine and come out perfect. They have to want it to get it right, you have to put some time into wanting to help them and they have to know that you are here to help them. Once they put in some effort, it will show and they will get the pay off.” This again implies ‘people on the street’ are somehow socially and culturally different from housed people. At the same time, Todd described homeless people as “human as anyone else and just as deserving a place to sleep when they have none.” He went on to explain:

I would say [there is] a lot of “brotherhood” between these people, but as with all families there are factions between people and people that do not like each other. Overall, there is a sense between them that they are all in it together.

This view borrows from a humanizing narrative about the homeless person within the systemic discourse, arguing homeless people are just like any other citizen, only they have been failed by the system in some way.

Terry, the day shelter manager discussed housing and cost of living narratives in Lawrence:

For this town specifically it is the rent. Lawrence is a high cost of living town. I have experienced it myself, struggling to come up with first month’s rent and deposit, and all the deposits that you have to come up with to establish utilities. Heaven forbid you have a past due bill with the gas or electric, because they will certainly make you poorer, and you have to do it. The wages are not where they should be. With as high as the cost of living is here, they should be higher.

Like Les, Terry finds the problem not only one of a person’s failings in the job market,

but rather the failure of employers to pay a living wage. Terry accepts homeless people as just people. She expressed some frustration with people who “do not realize that when you are living paycheck to paycheck, all it takes is two weeks in the hospital and you can lose your home.” Terry views guests of the shelter as people who “not only utilize the shelter, but also form friendships with other homeless people.” In this quote, she is constructing ‘the homeless’ in a way similar to Todd, seeing them as more than just users of the shelter. She argues, “Unless you have been homeless or around homeless people, you do not know what it is like [to be homeless]. To be turned down again and again and to know that you have been really trying is hard.” Here Terry touches on an important aspect explaining homelessness, the cultural and social trap of poverty.

Henry, an overnight monitor, also employed the wage/housing narrative in his interview. He believed homelessness was in part a result of “the lack of jobs with a living wage...the job situation is the main one, lack of jobs, lack of affordable housing... It is hard to have a minimum wage job and survive [in Lawrence].” Henry had been homeless and was in recovery from addiction. He felt the shelter, and the staff, provided more than just a bed. He explained:

I remember one time we had a guest that came in from out of town. He was a bit on the fragile side, just by his nature, and he was freaked out by just even being here and in his situation. I spent an hour or so just talking to him in private. Later he told me that it really helped. You know, I have nothing, I have no great advice (laughing)...but just being able to listen to people sometimes really helps.

This process of personalization, relating to an issue through talking with and learning from the stories of homeless people, allowed staff to understand the multiple dimensions of the homeless situation. It also gives a view into the social and cultural system of

homelessness, a system best understood from an internal viewpoint. It is for this reason Les seeks out compassionate ex-homeless people to serve as over-night monitors.

Henry also included a secondary cause of homelessness in the comment described above. He told me “substance abuse, in Lawrence specifically” as a primary cause of homelessness. This was a common inference by shelter employees at both institutions. It is an aspect of both the individualistic and systemic discourses, and is used as a descriptive cause of homelessness. Individualistic narratives describe a weak-willed person who allows addiction to control their lives. Systemic narratives describe a society that does not provide both education and rehabilitation systems despite knowledge of substance abuse. Such a viewpoint at the Lawrence Community Shelter certainly is related to its creation, function, and overall focus on individual homeless addicts.

Henry relates to homeless people as victims. He explained, “Homelessness can affect anyone and everyone. It is an equal opportunity un-employer.” He went on to talk about how it can happen:

It is easy to lose your job, and losing your job is very traumatic. It can cause you to freak out. You get into depression. The thing is, if you do not have a place to stay, then you cannot get a job. It is a vicious cycle. The idea that they can just go out and get a job is stupid.

Here, Henry constructs homeless people as victims. The economic system is overwhelmingly powerful, and the person is susceptible to trauma. Once hurt, the victim may have difficulty gaining access to health care or housing. This narrative corresponds with systemic discourses that construct the homeless person as subordinate to powerful social forces keeping them homeless (see Table 1.1).

Stan, another overnight monitor, also experienced homelessness and addiction.

Middle-aged, married, and the father of two children, he mainly talked about wage and housing issues as the causes of homelessness. He felt “it has a lot...to do with cost of living...not really the job market.” Here, Stan draws an interesting distinction.

Lawrence’s unemployment rate in May of 2007 was 3.6 percent, better than the federal rate of 4.5 percent in June (United States Department of Labor 2007). However, in comparison to the cost of living, he viewed wages as depressed. This narrative explains homelessness in economic terms from a systemic point of view. Due to failures in the labor market of Lawrence, wage depression can be a cause of homelessness. Stan explained in our interview how he has lived in Lawrence for over ten years, and in that time he has worked a number of jobs. However, even at his highest pay level of \$8.75 an hour, he struggled. With gallows humor he related to me, “What is really funny is that I do not even qualify for [governmental] assistance. I do not have enough money to pay rent and get food, and yet I cannot get assistance.” Not only is the labor market depressed, but also access systems to federal assistance are overly restrictive. The structural programs meant to address poverty and homelessness themselves are flawed.

Stan finished his discussion of the causes of homelessness in Lawrence by summing up, “I think that the rent and the cost of living [are the main conditions leading to homelessness in Lawrence]. This is because we are in a college town.” Stan placed the blame for the high cost of living in Lawrence at the feet of the University. Several respondents in my study used this argument. The narrative went like this: college students subsidize their income by taking low paying jobs, driving wages down. Parents often pay rent for them, and are more apt to pay higher rents. As a result, wages are depressed and rents are inflated. Henry also told me, “Students get their families or relatives to pay for

stuff, so it is hard to get by.” At its core, this narrative is relating the cost of housing to inflated rents resulting from renters offering to pay more than the market rate, which places further pressure on people from low socio-economic groups.

While at the shelter, Stan tries to “be there as a human being. I try to get to know everyone. Remember their names.” He works at the shelter because, “It is just the right thing to do, to help people out who are not doing as well.” He acknowledges structural pressures leading to poverty and homelessness, “I grew up thinking that those people had something wrong with them, but as I got older I began to see more. People become down and out. So many people just live on the fringe.” As an adult and as a survivor of poverty, Stan wants to help others who are suffering the same problems he did. He both personalizes his experience with homeless people, and views them as victims of a flawed social system.

Duke is the volunteer coordinator at the Lawrence Community Shelter. He coordinates volunteer recruitment and fundraising. He explained homelessness as the result of “addiction... [and] bad financial decisions.” Specifically, he noted that at Lawrence Community Shelter, “We tend to get a lot of folks who are deeply affected by addictions, and many who are very troubled with mental illness. I would argue that 50 percent are both. Depression and alcohol...” From his perspective, Duke told me that once some people are “destabilized enough that they cannot hold a job or a house, and then they are out there.” The cause of destabilization he described were varied, but often focused on the person who is addicted, who is mentally ill, etc.

When I asked why people become homeless, he answered, “It is not a result of failures in the market, rather of failures in social networks.” This explanation mirrors the

disaffiliation theory outlined clearly by social scientists in the 1970s. Such a theory was developed by a second Chicago School movement the 1970s. Members used a kind of symbolic interactionism –“Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things” (Herbert Blumer 1969)– combined with new methods of field research to create a new body of works addressing disaffiliation (Fine 1995). They argued homeless people suffer from broken bonds that once tied them to their support systems. This is different from other employees who saw failures of the market (for example, wage depression) as the primary cause of homelessness. On this topic, Duke commented, “I think the major myth is that homeless people are somehow sub-human. In reality we are all vulnerable.” Homeless people are victims, but are not blameless. He explained, “You can't adopt a homeless person. I tell my volunteers not to give money, because [homeless people] will ask but you cannot give enough.”

Josh was the operations manager at Lawrence Community Shelter while I volunteered there. He also called the shelter home, sleeping in the back room during the day and staying up all night with the clients when the shelter was open. The other employees considered him the “strongman” due to his past employment as a prison guard and over fifteen years in the US Army. Josh was a tall man, standing six foot four, but thin, weighing only around 160 pounds. In general, Josh kept the peace, often served the food, ran off people banned from the shelter, and was the shelter’s main representative to the police. He slept in the “kitchen,” a room in the back of the shelter behind the office that was more of a pantry than a food production area. Josh worked for the Lawrence Community Shelter for several months in various positions before taking the shelter operations position in January of 2004.

Josh saw the causes of homelessness in “substance abuse and mental illness...those are the two big ones. They cover eighty percent of our population.” He argued many people are “so goofed up that they do not remember or they never learned what normal behavior is.” Like Les, Josh seems to acknowledge a cultural or social link to homelessness. Flawed social skills are major contributors to homelessness. Here, he argues the treatment of social skills through voluntary programs is insufficient:

Serious substance abusers, those who are at the point that it is screwing up their lives, they cannot just go to an AA meeting and think that they can drop it. They need to go to a program where they are in a house and observed all the time [because] they have completely lost any ability to function in normal society.

Josh, like other staff members, sees some homeless people as having “lost all ability to function in society,” but he also acknowledges society’s failure to provide some path to recovery. This narrative of society’s failure to provide rehabilitative programs was prominent at the shelter as well, with four of the eight staff members using it in some form during our interviews.

Josh constructed homeless people as both victim and as complicit in his or her own homelessness. He explained to me:

We have some bums; we have hobos that come through. We have all the classic bottom of society stereotypes that actually come through here, but most of them are just people that are stuck here.

Henry, while describing the causes of homelessness in relation to wage and housing issues, similarly commented about mental health issues. He argued:

A lot of people get in into a negative cycle and they can’t find a job and they get depressed at the shelter. Since they are depressed they do not want to go out and find a job, so they just spiral downward.

Deidra commented on the mental state of homeless people, arguing it was a major factor. She felt it is often an issue of “no self worth. Not believing that they are good enough to have what other people have.” Like other examples from Lawrence Community Shelter, this narrative targets self-esteem as a cause of continued homelessness.

The employees of Lawrence Community Shelter share many views about homelessness. Each respondent expressed economic contributors to homelessness such as depressed wages. Three saw the causes of homelessness in purely structural frames such as inadequate low-cost housing. Four viewed character flaws such as alcoholism and poor financial management, as contributing to their condition. Two staff members were pragmatic in their views, giving nearly equal weight to the opposing discourses during our interviews.

The board members of the Lawrence Community Shelter used personal-choice narratives when discussing the causes of homelessness. Two board members included issues of housing costs as contributors to homelessness in Lawrence. One board member discussed wage depression.

Torri was the first board member I interviewed. Her views about the causes of homelessness clearly assigned responsibility to the individual for his or her condition.

One narrative she provided was:

People choose to drink, use drugs, live on the street. We are not going to end homelessness, even if we do offer people the best way out. There will still be some people who choose to live at the margins. We can only help those who want to be helped.

Two aspects of this narrative are part of the individualistic discourse. The first: people

choose to be homeless, and the second: people have to want to be helped. She felt “it comes down to someone wanting to do better *and then* people being there to help.”

Assistance systems should be responsive rather than preventative.

When describing homeless people, she felt they choose to be homeless, to drink their lives away. She provided me with this example:

We had one person who got out and was working as a custodian at a retirement facility here in town. He was a hard worker. However, when he got his first paycheck he went right to the bridge and drank it all away.

This is the narrative of the weak-willed addict dropping into alcoholism and ending up homeless. This narrative was common at both shelters. At the Lawrence Community Shelter, the narrative is straightforward. Many respondents described working with a client, watching them clean up and then, as both Stan and Deidra noted, “Three days later they come in stinking of booze and looking like they got ran over by a Mac truck!”

Lastly, Torri provided a narrative about shelter use:

Because we do see many people who may be in that situation from their own doing or from situations that are out of their control, they come to get assistance and then do not leave.

Here, Torri gives a little acknowledgement to the structural causes of homelessness.

There are some things outside of a person’s control. What those things are she did not specify. In general, she described how homeless people choose to be homeless, or are homeless because of their own actions.

Carrie explained that homelessness was “just a problem like drunken driving.” People choose to drive drunk, and people choose to be homeless. She explained how such a problem is only curable through legislation and education.

Carrie acknowledged a spectrum of homeless people:

There are all kinds of homeless people. I think [homelessness] is not as simple as drinking and drugging. It is certainly more...

Carrie described homeless people as drunks, druggies, and mentally ill homeless people, but there are also just regular Americans who become homeless. She commented, "Every day that I come to the shelter I think it would not take much for me to be here." Like Todd and Henry, Carrie is personalizing homelessness, acknowledging it can happen to anyone and not just drunks or crazies.

Marie believed the "two causes [of homelessness] are addiction and mental illness." She went on to say:

People choose to drink, use drugs, live on the street. Oh sure, we are not going to end homelessness with these [shelters]...even if we do offer people the best way out, there will still be some who choose to live at the margins. We can only help those who want to be helped.

Marie virtually mimicked Torri's explanations for the causes of homelessness here. The cause of homelessness lies not in a flawed social or economic system, but rather personal choice. Treatment for homeless people also centered on the person. Marie was quite clear on what she believed worked:

I think probably more than anything is to find them, to get down to the level that they are, to their needs. To not put them in a place where they will fail, but to devise, to be creative and devise a program at the shelter for them. To lead them towards their various potential.

In this narrative, while the homeless are like you, they are somehow removed from you. You must reach out to them, to help them find their way back into housing. However, for Marie this humanizing narrative only goes so far in her explanations. The homeless are

not completely victims. Marie viewed homeless people as culpable in their homelessness. They are often addicts and need help to become housing ready.

Thomas presented a narrative shared with Les and others. He told me:

There are a certain percentage of them that you may never get off the street because it becomes a way of life for them. The fear, a fear of failure that comes [over] them. They know they can succeed on the street. It is a lot of responsibility to have a house.

This narrative incorporates the idea of a homeless lifestyle with a socialization process in which people become acclimated to life on the streets. When describing treatment, Thomas provided this description of homeless people, “We try to treat them like people, rather than like animals.”

Sasha had been on the Lawrence Community Shelter board since its creation. She maintained that the causes of homelessness are, “Mental illness, and not just drinking but the availability of alcohol, I mean they are just giving it away.” In her interpretation, she included a systemic narrative relating the availability of alcohol to alcoholism. Several other informants in this study used this particular narrative. It is a part of the “blame the university” narrative I encountered involving wages and rent. In this narrative, the students drive the price of alcohol down, while at the same time increasing availability. I think my informants are arguing a supply and demand function. The large drinking age student body consumes great amounts of alcohol, to which the many bars in Lawrence attest. Competition drives down the price of alcohol. I have no solid data to support this conclusion, and in this instance, I am merely relating what I was told by my informants. I do agree though, with 75-cent pints of Budweiser and \$2.50 well drinks common in downtown Lawrence at the time of my fieldwork in 2005 and 2006. Those kinds of drink

specials are intended to pull customers from other competing bars, driving down the price of alcohol in Lawrence.

While Sasha did not address the problem of treatment in our discussion of the availability in Lawrence, she did talk about housing and wages during our interview:

The shortage of inexpensive housing, not affordable, but inexpensive housing, because affordable means a different thing. It is a shortage of jobs as well, and with the low paying jobs, it is really ridiculous.

Sasha was not explicit in any descriptions of homeless people themselves. Comments such as “we have a...few that really need a kick in the pants,” or “people who are poor for generations need to be re-socialized” seem to point toward a belief that homeless people are somehow inherently flawed and need to be fixed. This characterization fits with individualistic descriptions of homeless people as weak and degenerate.

To summarize, respondents at the Lawrence Community Shelter did tilt toward individual causes of homelessness. They also seemed to have a greater openness to systemic explanations than my informants did at the Salvation Army. When asked to describe homelessness, staff and board members often used individualistic narratives to do so. Conversely, when asked to describe the causes of homelessness, each participant in this study at the Lawrence Community Shelter used at least one narrative from the systemic discourse. When I compared the overall usage of the opposing discourses at the shelter, it was clear an individualist bent was present.

Clearly, specific narratives were prominent at each shelter. The discussion in Chapter Seven will center around which discourse is used more at which shelter, and why. Clients of the shelters were also aware of the narratives, and sometimes incorporated them into their descriptions of the shelters and/or shelter staff. Staff

members were versed in the two discourses, and participated in them when constructing homelessness. Having presented some of the interview data I gathered during my fieldwork, the next chapter will outline the conclusions I came to after analyzing this data. An analysis of the material from this chapter will allow a test of my hypothesis: emergency shelters using little or no surveillance, and that have open access to services and few exclusionary or punitive rules, will place more emphasis on structural causes for homelessness. The opposite should be present at shelters that assign causation to individual actions/flaws/character.

## **Chapter Seven: Analysis and Discussion**

This research began with an interest about shelter staff and board members' explanations concerning the causes of homelessness and how such explanations relate to

the operation of homeless shelters. As Chapters One and Two illustrated, opposing discourses on homelessness present in the United States over the last two hundred years are the individual-based and the systemic. Both discourses have grown to mainstream popularity and shrunk to virtual non-existence during various times in America's history (Kusmer 2002). At the time of this research, American governmental policy maintains an individual-based discourse focused on personal choice (Kingfisher 2007; Lyon-Callo 2004). I hypothesized shelters such as the Lawrence Community Shelter, which uses little or no surveillance, has open access to services, and few exclusionary or punitive rules, will place more emphasis on the structural causes for homelessness. The opposite discourse should be present at shelters such as the Salvation Army, which uses extensive surveillance and has strict rule structures.

Individual-based narratives were dominant at both shelters. The Salvation Army data I collected did support my hypothesis. The Lawrence Community Shelter data did not support my hypothesis. This is due to multiple factors. Primarily, both shelters are designed to serve individual clients, because they are the emphasis of their operations. When asked to describe homelessness and homeless people, care-providers did so from a perspective dominated by the day-to-day struggles of the shelter because at each shelter, personal interaction on a one-to-one basis was constant for most night monitors and caseworkers. As a result, the dominant discourse about homelessness repeatedly expressed to me continued to focus on individuals. Why this person was living on the street, why that person was kicked out of transitional housing. The personalized events leading people into homelessness were then linked by caseworkers to personalized treatment strategies created by the shelter staff. Well-defined steps were often identified

by staff to help this one individual out of homelessness. Larger programs designed to target specific structural forces contributing to homelessness, like job coaching or housing placement programs, were not as prevalent in the day-to-day life of the shelter staff at either operation.

This dominance of the individualist frame is also linked to policy. The two shelters are influenced by governmental policy at the local and federal level. Such policies often articulate choice as a primary factor causing long-term and chronic homelessness. These explanations are dominant at the level of popular discourses on homelessness in America, as illustrated in Chapters Two and Three.

As noted in Chapter Four, the dominant model for serving homeless people is the linear Continuum of Care. The Continuum of Care seeks to create a comprehensive, flexible, individual-based, culturally appropriate, and outcome-based system for persons who are chronically homeless by maximizing use of existing mainstream resources, improving coordination across service and housing delivery systems, and identifying new resources. The early stages in the continuum are designed to engage clients in psychiatric and/or substance abuse treatment, intended to prepare them for living independently. While both shelters participate in the Continuum of Care model, neither shelter maintains psychiatric and/or substance abuse programs. Employee respondents from both organizations articulated a drive by their shelters to help people overcome similar problems, and treat housing-readiness as a vital aspect of a stable recovery. In the Lawrence shelter system, treatment and housing services are inter-related, so advancing along the continuum to more independent forms of housing is contingent upon successful treatment.

Turning to the city government, the individual-based discourse is at the core of the city's Task Force on Homeless Services created by the Lawrence City Council in 2003. The Task Force's final report calls for the construction of a larger, permanent, twenty-four hour shelter as a treatment for the problem of homelessness locally. For example, the Task Force on Homeless Services final report argues Lawrence needs to:

Establish a permanent and suitable emergency shelter program with case management and support services, an individualized integrated program of training and treatment for the people who experience homelessness as well as training for service-providers to address this problem, and a plan for transitional and permanent housing [City of Lawrence 2005c: 2].

Ordinances passed by the city council in 2006 specifically target homeless people. These ordinances criminalized panhandling, sleeping/camping in city parks, and disrupting traffic on city sidewalks by loitering or begging. Each of these ordinances uses punitive means to manage the city's homeless population and suggests homeless people choose to live on the streets.

To summarize, emergency shelters themselves are inherently slanted toward treating the individual. As a result, people working within them will often appear to express an individualist explanation for the causes of homelessness. This is also the nature of sheltering homeless people in Lawrence. It is the result of the shelter system in place, a federal program designed to treat homelessness and is influenced by the strong individualistic narrative present in the popular discourses on homelessness in America. Taken together, I argue these factors contribute to an individualistic bent in the city government's response to homelessness, and in the current shelter system in Lawrence. Beneath these larger generalizations of the current shelter system in Lawrence, the

employees and board members at each shelter independently expressed a certain level of support for each opposing discourse, as detailed in the previous chapter. The following sections will analyze each shelter independently, detail the presence of each discourse, and explain its emphasis.

### **Salvation Army Emergency Shelter**

The Salvation Army emergency shelter is the longest continually operating shelter for homeless people in Lawrence, Kansas. The shelter's nearly one hundred and twenty years of contact with homelessness in Lawrence has resulted in a dearth of organizational experience with poverty. They represent a tradition in Lawrence grounded in a general belief by many of the organization's staff that assisting homeless people is not only a moral action, but also a spiritual one. The underlying ideology of the shelter appears to follow an overall philosophy regarding homelessness and poverty. This philosophy views the poor through a strong Methodist perspective, and is tempered by the long history of the Salvation Army movement.

Respondents from the Salvation Army shelter staff related to me more narratives linked to individual-based theories. A total of seven out of eight staff members provided more narratives borrowed from the personal choice framework within the individual-based discourses than any other did. The board member I interviewed also used personal choice narratives when describing homelessness. The following four quotes from employees at the Salvation Army emergency shelter all borrow narratives from within the individual-based discourse:

There are a lot of guys that get a paycheck, but instead of saving it and getting an apartment or something, they go sleep at the shelter, get a bunch of drugs or alcohol, and then end up losing their jobs and so on

Whereas the laziness, where people say that the homeless are just lazy, I see that as partly true

There are a portion of homeless people in our community that will be homeless no matter what we do

There is someone who was on the streets for 12 years, got the voucher and just panicked...because he was so afraid of not being able to camp out and losing the lifestyle

Seven of the nine Salvation Army shelter staff and board members I interviewed provided descriptions of “the homeless” as people who select homelessness as a lifestyle.

Operations director Walter noted:

They have learned how to survive a certain way and having lived that way for a certain period of time they kind of forget how to live within the social structure that exists in a community.

Within this narrative, the homeless person uses the shelter to support him or herself at the cost of the care-provider. This is a reflection of the current federal government's dominant narrative about chronic homelessness. Walter explained why he thinks people are willing to live in this way, “People have become accustomed to having their hands out to the government at whatever level.” This suggests society has created a permission social system that facilitates reliance on government assistance. Such a society has created a lazy, idle subculture that believes, as night monitor Richard noted, “You better take it while you can.” These narratives both share a cultural-slanted discourse, arguing homeless people live within a particular “underclass” and have become conditioned to rely on government handouts (Auletta 1982; Niskanen 1996).

Such narratives also touch on the discourse of the idle, morally deficient citizen who requires saving. This long-standing European narrative was carried over with the Salvation Army to the United States, and is present in American society's historical understanding of homelessness. This is especially important in the context of the Salvation Army. Since its inception, Salvationists have seen the successful rehabilitation of the idle, morally deficient citizen as a rallying point around which the Army can gather. One of the first publications of the Salvation Army in the United States detailed the treatment and reformation of a "drunken bum" encountered upside down in a barrel on the New York City docks (McKinley 1980).

Present day respondents from the Salvation Army also included narratives targeting alcoholism and mental illness as a primary cause for homelessness. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, these categories are difficult to compartmentalize. Each respondent mentioned alcoholism and mental illness as either a cause of homelessness, or a myth about homeless people, stating—*all homeless people are drunks*. Alcoholism was described as a cause of homelessness, but it was also understood as a disease. Mental illness was described by my respondents as both a cause and a result of living on the streets.

As detailed in Chapter Five, the Salvation Army requires a breathalyzer test for admission to their emergency shelter. They require case management for a patron to stay more than one night and rehabilitation classes for patrons who need to stay more than one week. The Salvation Army keeps video surveillance and maintains an overnight monitor. Personal files are kept on each client who stays more than one night. Given these factors, and following Williams' (2003) analysis of homeless shelters, my hypothesis argues the

Salvation Army should place more emphasis on the individual-based causes of homelessness. This proved to be the case in my analysis. Staff and board members at the Salvation Army emergency shelter used primarily individual-based theories to explain the causes of homelessness in Lawrence. Most individuals focused on personal choice and idleness narratives. The majority of the staff and the board member of the Salvation Army told me homeless people choose to be homeless, are living a homeless “lifestyle,” have mental illnesses that keep them from operating properly in society, are addicted, and are socially and economically challenged. One staff member incorporated humanistic narratives into his descriptions of homeless people stating—*homeless people are human too*.

To understand how members of the Salvation Army understood poverty and homelessness, I examined respondent interviews and three essential documents: *The Handbook of Doctrine, Orders and Regulation for Officers of the Salvation Army*, and *Position Statements of the Salvation Army*. These documents represent the Army's official stance on theological beliefs, organizational discipline, moral behavior, and social issues. For example, the Salvation Army’s position on poverty notes:

The Salvation Army recognizes that poverty is a complex problem and that we will always have the poor with us (Mark 14:7). We are compelled by our love for God to serve "the whole person" (spirit, soul and body)...Salvationists affirm that all people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families, and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.

This position statement expresses a belief that poverty is permanent—*it will always be a part of human society*. It details a core ideal that Salvationists are driven to care for both the spiritual and the mundane. It stresses that all people have a duty to work, provide for

their families, and contribute to society. Each of these ideas and beliefs can be seen in the charters and ideologies of the Lawrence Salvation Army emergency shelter.

The Salvation Army's foundational ideology springs from an evangelical tradition. McKinley (1980) points out that the Army established its corps as "churches with regular worship services from the beginning of its work in America." It provides a church for its members in which they worship, witness, and serve, but it does not force participation on its volunteers or clients. The Lawrence Salvation Army's current operations director also stressed this point. However, individuals who do partake of church services were offered both an additional meal, and access to the shelter's general-use area earlier than those who do not.

At the Lawrence institution, the Army's religious tradition seeks to bring the impoverished into the Church through outreach, rehabilitation, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Army focuses on personal salvation (a core evangelical belief) and individual effort to overcome the contingencies of life rather than on the reform of social and economic systems (Hazard 1998: 125). Within the ideology of the Army, the presence of a strong evangelical tradition of conversion, a focus on caring for the impoverished, and the belief that through work and rehabilitation the poor, the drunk, the sinner, can find physical comfort and salvation, is all reflective of an individualistic discourse.

Many employees of the Lawrence Salvation Army shelter, and perhaps most important among those the operations director Walter, share this conviction that the ministry they were called to serve requires as much attention to the physical and social conditions of needy people as to their habits of worship. Five of eight study respondents at the Salvation Army expressed deeply held religious beliefs, especially concerning the

mission of the Army to serve and convert their clients.

Of the three remaining respondents, two received a formal liberal arts education. Each was considered an expert in dealing with social issues (particularly homelessness), two were social workers, and one was the shelter director. The Army employs a professional staff (some of whom do not share its religious beliefs) to carry out its social services programs. While Salvationists and the denominations with which they are closely associated view the Salvation Army as a church with a vigorous social services component derived from the Army's religious beliefs, the general public sees the Army as a humanitarian and charitable organization with a religious component that motivates its social work (Hazzard 1998: 128). This appears to be the case in Lawrence as well.

Two elements of this discussion are pertinent to my analysis. Both the secular employees and those who shared with me their deeply held religious beliefs are aware of the Army's religious doctrines, the evangelical mission, and the founding ideals of William Booth and others. Those staff members with a strong religious affiliation to the beliefs and mission of the Salvation Army will be cognizant of the Army's ideas about the causes and solutions to poverty. As I have noted, those ideas are slanted toward the individualistic discourse. The second group of professional service providers may also be cognizant of individualistic narratives as a possible result of their participation in the federal Continuum of Care programs, Chronic Homeless Initiatives, and the local Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Elements of the systemic discourse that are evident within the narratives supplied from this group may be a result of their liberal arts education. Such an education stresses history, social education, and general knowledge while developing intellectual capacities. This may result in a greater understanding of the

structural contributions to homelessness.

In the book *The Most Effective Organization in the U.S.: Leadership Secrets of the Salvation Army* (Watson and Brown 2001), the authors note that the causes of homelessness and the Salvation Army's conceptualization of why they are successful addressing poverty:

Many of those who come to us are lost, desperate. They have tried everything to fill the holes in their lives, and while we are committed to helping them face and overcome their problems with alcohol and drugs or with broken relationships, the real secret of our success is getting them to accept responsibility for integrating their hearts, their minds, their souls with transcendent purpose.

This statement, along with *The Handbook of Doctrine and Position Statements of the Salvation Army*, helped my understanding of the charter of the institution. The Army acknowledges the presence of the poor and its role in serving them. It expresses a desire to evangelize, convert, and bring into the Church poor people in any community where it works. Taken together with Walter's expression of the mission of the Salvation Army, and a model of their charter emerges that is focused on targeting personal actions to address both economic and spiritual poverty.

### **Lawrence Community Shelter**

The Lawrence Community Shelter is much less ideologically grounded than the Salvation Army, and is a very young organization. The shelter, in its present organization, opened on December 8, 2003. Since that time, it has had only one executive director, Les, and a relatively stable employee base. As noted in Chapter Five, its

founding was the direct result of an impromptu response to a perceived and immediate need in Lawrence. While the shelter's founders, executive director, board members, and the staff members vocalized more narratives associated with the systemic discourses than those from the Salvation Army, my data show such narratives are overpowered by the daily needs of the shelter's clients. The demands of working with homeless people tended to push Lawrence Community Shelter staff, despite their ideological leanings, to be more equivocal about the causes of homelessness.

As detailed in Chapter Five, the Lawrence Community Shelter maintains a set of rules detailing offences that can lead to banning. It does not have any requirements for granting shelter beyond not allowing consumption of alcohol and/or drugs on the premises, and basic issues of respect toward the shelter staff and clients. It maintains physical surveillance by keeping a nighttime monitor in the sleeping room, but does not utilize video surveillance. The Lawrence Community Shelter keeps personal files on long-term clients, but many clients often provide nicknames or pseudonyms. Given these factors, and following Williams (2003) analysis of homeless shelters, my hypothesis argues the staff and board members of the Lawrence Community Shelter should place more emphasis on the structural causes of homelessness. My data show this is not the case. Overall, there were more individual than systemic narratives used by staff and board members when describing homelessness in Lawrence. Seven respondents used predominantly individual-based narratives. Two of those respondents used narratives from only the individualistic discourse. In contrast to the Salvation Army, more staff and board members at Lawrence Community Shelter provided narratives from multiple discourses.

Lawrence Community Shelter respondents all consistently used narratives such as personal choice, personal action/inaction, and lifestyle to describe homelessness:

We have some people that do not want to be helped, they want to keep doing what they are doing and those are the problem folks

Because we do see many people who may be in that situation from their own doing or from situations that are out of their control, they come to get assistance and then do not leave

There are the street people, the vagrants, and the campers; there are a number of camps along the Kaw, people who choose not to sleep indoors

People come through and notice that we have a nice shelter and they want to stay

Lawrence Community Shelter staff members used more narratives like the one above than those that isolated structural problems.

Four quotes from different employees at the Lawrence Community Shelter all borrow from an “economic” aspect of the popular American discourses on homelessness:

The wages are not where they should be, because as high as the cost of living is here, [wages] should be higher

Lack of a living wage...lack of adequate housing, lack of adequate transitional housing

I think a lot of it has to do with cost of living. It is not the job market

Housing costs, the cost of housing in this city is extremely high

Economic narratives, arguing wages and rent are the primary causes of homelessness, were a common theme used by staff at Lawrence Community Shelter. A total of seven of the eight staff members, and four of the five board members, each incorporated at least

one structural and/or economic narrative into their description of the causes of homelessness in Lawrence, stating—*for this town specifically it is the rent; it is a high cost of living town, or —people may or may not like to work, but the wages here are just bad.*

Economic narratives focusing on wages and housing costs were not prominent at the Salvation Army shelter, but rather only emerged in a minority of interviews.

The following four quotes from different employees at the Lawrence Community Shelter all borrow from "cultural" aspects of the popular American discourses on homelessness:

We have people who are third generation homeless, that have never had a home, nor have their parents, so they just think that this is the way you live

There are so many different populations within the homeless community and some of them it is a culture, and those people do not really utilize our services here

It is a heritable thing; people who are poor for generations need to be re-socialized

Then there are a certain percentage of them that you may never get off the street, because it becomes a way of life for them

Lawrence Community Shelter staff/board members described a situation where homeless people are trapped in a cycle of poverty explaining—*they just think that this is the way you live.* Homeless people were often described as socially challenged and marginalized.

Why did respondents at the Lawrence Community Shelter use individualistic and systemic explanations for the causes of homelessness and what deeper explanation can be provided for such narratives? It is important to note again that my perception of individualistic narratives at the shelter was slanted by the very nature of homeless shelters. As noted in previous sections, shelters are inherently focused on treating

individuals. The employees of shelters will stress issues about homeless people themselves, and the day-to-day events that lead people into homelessness.

The Lawrence Community Shelter emerged from a perceived need to take in people whom the Salvation Army refused and who, in a few cases, died on the streets of Lawrence (Mathis 2001). The emphasis at the Lawrence Community Shelter is an open environment to shelter people who are not being assisted in that regard by other service providers in the local community. More specifically, the Lawrence Community Shelter is dedicated to assisting alcoholic/addicted people who are living on the streets. This emphasis can only operate on a person-to-person basis. The staff members at the Lawrence Community Shelter can hold endless discussions about the reality of housing in Lawrence, but at the end of the day, they can only affect one homeless person at a time. This came out clearly in my research, with my respondents articulating individual-based narratives predominantly, despite their acknowledgement of systemic influences on the causes of homelessness in American society. They may have identified with their status as an open shelter, but they also recognized the various ways an individual can enter homelessness.

What predicates the discussion of systemic causes of homelessness at the Lawrence Community Shelter that is lacking at the Salvation Army? My research showed the executive director Les's personal beliefs about the causes of homelessness contributed to the ideology of the staff employed by the shelter during my fieldwork. He detailed his beliefs here:

The causes of homelessness result from releasing people from mental hospitals without concomitant local care follow-up, doing away with substance abuse rehabilitation programs in favor of prison terms, limiting the amount of

public housing, welfare reform, redefining "disability" not to cover alcoholism, and other structural issues.

This systemic explanation targets policy, programs, and institutions, or the lack there of, that treat homelessness, mental illness, and addiction. Les actively cultivated an understanding of systemic causes for homelessness. During my fieldwork, I observed Les supporting such positions at board meetings and during discussions among shelter staff and shelter clients. Les's long history of working with homelessness and poverty, his particular beliefs about the causes of homelessness, and his hands on approach to managing the shelter, all contribute to both the current charter of the shelter and its foundational ideology.

Les described to me the people who started the Lawrence Community Shelter (both the Drop-In Center, the Lawrence Open Shelter, and later the Lawrence Community Shelter) as a mix of Catholic, Quaker, Methodist, secular and "probably some other" (Personal Communication 2007). Many Catholic denominations have a clear commitment to serving the poor going back in time to Medieval Europe (Mollat 1986). The combination of serious stewardship and personal concern for the plight of the poor is a hallmark of the Methodist movement. Les's personal religious identification is Quaker. He explained the Quakers are guided by faith "as each of us sees it." Les explained to me Quakers ask themselves about what is the most appropriate way to address poverty and homelessness. As I noted in Chapter Five, the primary one is an idea concerning social responsibility. Les described this as, "Working to overcome social, legal, economic, and political injustices, locally and in the wider world." While the Lawrence Community Shelter does not have an official religious affiliation, religious ideologies are tied into its founders, its staff, and its board members.

During my research, interviewees often stressed the shelter's service charter as an "open" shelter serving individual intoxicated homeless people. They expressed an understanding that addiction and mental illness were the result of structural issues such as the lack of detoxification and mental illness in-patient services in Lawrence, and a culture of homelessness where alcoholism acts to pull groups together. Some of the strongest ties among homeless men who used the Lawrence Community Shelter revolved around drinking. Shelter monitor Stan used this description, "The camaraderie around drinking is also interesting, how they get together to get a half gallon, it is a trip how they do it." Clients of the shelter were also aware of how alcoholism affects the individual, as Stan explained, "They will say so and so has been on the streets for 50 years, he is a drunk and he will die a drunk."

Staff members at the Lawrence Community Shelter described homeless people as largely mentally ill and alcoholic. My respondents isolated the causes of alcoholism among homeless as prompted by its availability, the lack of social programs addressing alcoholism, and multi-generational addiction or addictive behavior. The causes of mental illness fell along similar lines. Interviewees argued the problems of mental health, when considering modern homelessness, are the result of deinstitutionalization and a lack of social programs. Such problems are aggravated by the nature of homelessness itself. Lawrence Community Shelter board member Sasha described this best:

Now, someone on the board disagreed with me here, but if you live on the street long enough, you are going to be mentally ill just from the trauma. Sure, some people are just alcoholics. At some point that also begins to effect the mind, and so they will qualify as mentally ill. I think that mental illness brings many people into homelessness, but being homeless adds a layer of these kinds of problems.

As I noted in Chapter Two, mental illness and alcoholism are not easily situated to one of the two opposing discourses on homelessness. Both can side with a particular causal structure, for example homeless people may choose to be drunks, to not accept help or seek treatment, or be the result of generational alcoholism. A similar tone explains mental illness as a treatable condition irritated by the individual's choice to not seek the help of family members, or discontinue drug use, or resist federal classification of a mental disability in order to receive benefits. Systemic narratives explain alcoholism as the result of alcohol delivery systems and mental illness as the result of poor health care programs.

I asked Les to describe his interpretation of why particular narratives are present at the Lawrence Community Shelter. He explained it as being twofold. First, he believes the presence of employees, volunteers, and board members who are in recovery and strongly identify with issues many of the guests have is a primary method of getting through to homeless people. Second, he strongly admonished his staff to not give up on any guest. During my fieldwork, Les actively sought out employees who shared his views, and who shared a compassionate view of homelessness. He noted in our initial interview why it is important to have staff members who can connect to Lawrence Community Shelter patrons. Building trust and empowering people experiencing homelessness to believe they can get off the streets, out of the shelter, and into stable housing, is integral to the shelter's motto "a pathway to a brighter future." Les explained:

The nighttime staff is really good at spending a length of time with the guests. A night monitor might sit there for hours with just one person, and really try to listen to what they are saying. Help them deal with their problem. That helps you to build that trust that you really need to get through to some people and really help them. You can talk

to them about detoxification, and that sort of thing. You get that quiet, one on one time with a person that is nearly impossible [at LCS] during the day.

Night monitor Stan also expressed this idea during our interview. He explained, “What it is, is that addicts talk to other addicts, and addicts talk well to each other.” A focus on personal interaction with people who share an understanding of homelessness also reflects a certain understanding about the homeless. It asserts homeless people are a social group who relate better with other homeless people, rather than shelter staff. This distinction ties into Les and other staff /board members' comments about socialization and homelessness noted in Chapter Six. Many used narratives discussing how homeless people have to be re-socialized into housed culture. Both of these conclusions speak of a subculture of ‘the homeless’ that holds people back from succeeding. This narrative’s inclusion in Les’s conceptualization of the causes of homelessness, and how to address curing homelessness, speak of its importance to him. Its use by many of his employees is reflective of its importance at the shelter.

The second part of his explanation ties into the first; Les believes in a strong commitment on the part of all staff to not give up on any guest. Guests may be banned at some point, but he explained, “When they are, they are allowed back in, they are allowed to start all over again” (Personal Communication 2007). This is a position in which homeless people are not permanently flawed, rather they are people who can be rehabilitated into housing readiness. While these variables both speak through systemic narratives about the causes of homelessness, and the construction of the homeless person, they are also focused on treating the individual. This is similar to the nature of homeless shelters in Lawrence where a greater understanding of the structural causes of

homelessness are constrained by the reality of supplying homeless people with shelter.

In summary, the combination of Les's beliefs about the causes of homelessness, the particulars of the foundation of the shelter, the shelter's charter targeting a particular population, and the presence of staff members who have experienced homelessness, have constructed a particular environment where both individual-based and systemic narratives are present. However, the reality of homelessness in Lawrence, the day-to-day interactions between homeless people and staff, the current local and federal discussions about the causes of homelessness, and the current system of treating individual homeless people through a continuum of services targeting individuals, influenced my respondents' use of individualist narratives at the Lawrence Community Shelter.

At the Salvation Army, the institution's foundational ideology is based on an evangelical tradition that stresses personal salvation and conversion, and emphasizes personal choice as an explanation for poverty and homelessness. The *Position Statement on Poverty* also stresses personal action as a pathway out of homelessness. People must want to be housed, they must want to work, and they must want to be saved. Narratives built around the individualist discourses result from the very nature of the shelter itself, with its focus on treating homeless people rather than structural issues such as housing and wages. They also result from the general ideology of the Salvation Army, its evangelical mission, and the general beliefs about the causes of homelessness held by its employees. Finally, as I noted in the previous section, local and federal programs meant to treat homelessness influence the shelter's staff and its operational principles. Such programs are dominated by an individualistic discourse.

## Final Comments

The ethnographic work presented in the previous chapters includes discussions about the causes of homelessness. “The homeless” were revealed to me as more than just people without a home. Public and private research has shown homeless people in Lawrence are mentally ill, alcoholic, lack certain social skills, are trapped in generational poverty, and their conditions exacerbated by various structural deficits in the community. The reality of homelessness in Lawrence as I comprehend it reflects the federal understanding of poverty. It is focused on treatment of the individual and offers homeless people the Continuum of Care model, of which the Lawrence shelter system is a part. Staff at both shelters identified with individualistic narratives. While my initial hypothesis was not proven, I found a complex emergency shelter system deeply involved with homelessness in Lawrence. Addressing the problem, however, is fraught with difficulties:

The Task Force would like to emphasize that while their efforts focus on services and response for those currently experiencing homelessness in Lawrence, prevention is also a critical element of a community plan to reduce homelessness and it is not adequately addressed in this plan. The scope of the Task Force work did not include extensive discussion of homelessness prevention, or programmatic discussion of how to stop homelessness before it starts. [City of Lawrence 2005c].

The authors note here attention must be paid to prevention of homelessness, as well as addressing its current reality in Lawrence (i.e. the need for a larger year-around full treatment facility). Prevention presumably involves addressing root causes of homelessness, but the report says very little about what those root causes are. This

omission is salient, and speaks volumes about the current discursive environment surrounding homelessness in Lawrence. Like much of the report, the quote here can be read either as a conclusion of the necessity to address structural causes of homelessness, or as supporting a call to help individuals become more responsible for their conditions. However, as noted in Chapter Four, officials and official policies in Lawrence tend toward the federal policy and dominant popular discourse about homelessness. The official city policy adopting the Continuum of Care and a 10-year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness emphasize various aspects of the individualistic narrative. They are also reflected in the city government's actions, the task force report, the city's approval of the Salvation Army's newer and larger facility, and the passing of city ordinances specifically targeting homeless people. I conclude, as a result of my research, that the Lawrence shelter system, and all of its constituent parts, has an individualistic slant. Like the quote above, this slant is obfuscated and directly tied to the day-to-day operation of the shelters. I personally believe that as long as the Lawrence government understands homelessness as partially the result of personal choice, a possibility of resistance to the structural forces influencing homelessness will continue to be framed within an individualistic narrative. This is partially a result of the nature of emergency shelters themselves, as noted earlier in this chapter, and partially the result of the federal policy, local policy, and the mission of the shelters themselves. If we are going to deal successfully with homelessness and poverty, we need to pay a lot more attention to the structural causes. Such causes are very real and very important but, in general, are insufficiently appreciated. Professional staff who are dependant on local and federal funding will continue relating homelessness to the dominant popular discourses

explaining its causes. Official policies such as the one outlined by the Lawrence Task Force on Homeless Services will continue to engage more in self-help strategies than in prevention. Systemic problems will remain unchallenged, thought of as unalterable, and regular citizens will continue to ignore the reality that homelessness is a social process intimately tied to the normal functioning of neo-liberal capitalism. Only through understanding those links, challenging the dominant notions about the root causes of homelessness, and recognizing the social process leading to homelessness, will there be able to be any lasting impact on homelessness in Lawrence, Kansas.

## **Chapter Eight: Contributions and Future Research**

This research contributes to the growing ethnographic description of homelessness and emergency shelters. I sought to understanding the link between how

service-providers think about homelessness and the way shelters are organized. The conceptualization of homelessness uncovered by this thesis provided me with a view into the structure of homeless shelters, the construction of policy regarding homelessness in a mid-sized Mid-American city, and the discursive construction of homeless people. The anthropological study of homelessness needs a deepening understanding of how those who interact with homeless people view the causes of homelessness. My research aids this understanding. It uncovers how pervasive the individual-based discourse is in constructing policy regarding homelessness, and how personal theories about the causes of homelessness influences personal understandings of homeless people. My research adds to the anthropological understanding of homelessness in a mid-sized, mid-western American city. It aids the understanding of how people conceptualize the causes of homelessness, how they describe homeless people, and how homeless shelters are organized. It adds to the scholarly investigation of discourse, will aid in breaking apart stereotypes about homeless shelters and assist in understanding what influences the construction of policy regarding homelessness.

My work highlighted several questions for further research. The most important is a long-term ethnographic study of shelter clients with an emphasis on how different shelter policies produce clients would go a long way toward helping evaluate the shelter industry. Do clients of the Lawrence Community Shelter find a pathway toward a brighter future after their stay? Do clients of the Salvation Army become more self-reliant and disciplined? Are nurturing or punitive systems more effective? Are there alternative shelter systems?

The Salvation Army recently proposed a large, comprehensive shelter near 19th

Street and Haskell Avenue. This idea of a “wrap-around” shelter with all necessary services in house is not new, but has been given life again by the Final Recommendations of the Task Force on Homeless Services. The Community Commission on Homelessness also supports the Task Force in these recommendations. A key to the plan is “recognizing that the system can help only those who want to be helped” (Lawhorn 2007b). The Community Commission envisioned a single shelter in Lawrence that would allow people who have been drinking to enter the shelter and stay in a separated area, but it would not serve people who are habitually intoxicated and they would not receive treatment for their drinking. The operations director of The Salvation Army’s Lawrence operations noted in late 2007 his organization now was reviewing its options to see whether the plans they have developed for a new shelter should be changed to better fit in with the vision being proposed by the homeless commission. If this new shelter is built, a long-term, committed, multi-discipline research project focused on its development, implementation, and effectiveness would offer an opportunity to expand the ideas raised by my research.

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## **Appendix One**

### **Informal Interview Guide: Service Providers**

What is your name?

What is your position at [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

What is your education/training/expertise for this position?

How long have you worked with homeless people at [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

What services does the shelter provide?

What requirements does the shelter have to receive them?

Is there a set of principles driving the homeless shelter you are associated with? If so, what are they?

Beyond immediate need, what do you see as the fundamental reason(s) for the operation of the shelter you are associated with? What is its primary purpose? Does it achieve that purpose? Are there any inadequacies?

How do the services you provide differ from [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

How do your operating procedures differ from [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

**In a few words, how would you describe homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, what are the primary myths/stereotypes about homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to meet the needs of homeless people?**

**In your opinion, and in your experience, what are the main causes and/or conditions that lead to homelessness in Lawrence?**

**Is there anything else you would like to say to me in relation to this project?**

### **Informal Interview Guide: Board Members**

What is your name?

What is your education/training/expertise for this position?

How long have you served on this committee/board/etc?

Describe what your position on the board/committee is.

Describe your committees/boards involvement in providing for homeless people.

Is there a set of principles driving the homeless shelter you are associated with? If so, what are they?

Beyond immediate need, what do you see as the fundamental reason(s) for the operation of the shelter you are associated with? What is its primary purpose? Does it achieve that purpose? Are there any inadequacies?

In your experience, what is the primary method of community assistance you see at the shelter?

How do the services you provide differ from [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

How do your operating procedures differ from [The Lawrence Community Shelter]/[Salvation Army]?

**In a few words, how would you describe homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, what are the primary myths/stereotypes about homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to meet the needs of homeless people?**

**In your opinion, in your experience, what are the main causes and/or conditions that lead to homelessness in Lawrence?**

**Is there anything else you would like to say to me in relation to this project?**

### **Interview Guide: Shelter Clients**

What is your name?

Do you consider yourself homeless? If so, why/how

How long have you been homeless?

Where were you living before Lawrence?  
How long did you live there?  
Why did you move to Lawrence?

Tell me the history of your homelessness.

Where do you sleep most of the time?

If you used a shelter, which ones? Any Preference?

Describe your overall experience at [LCS, Sallys]  
Describe your overall perspective of [LCS, Sallys]

If you did not use a shelter, why

**In a few words, how would you describe homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, what are the primary myths/stereotypes about homelessness in Lawrence?**

**In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to meet the needs of homeless people?**

**In your opinion, in your experience, what are the main causes and/or conditions that lead to homelessness in Lawrence?**

**Is there anything else you would like to say to me in relation to this project?**

## **Appendix Two**

**Consent Form**

**Project Title: Finding Shelter on the Kaw**

**Primary Researcher: Quincy D. McCrary**

- I have read the information sheet and the nature and purpose of this project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand that while information gained from this project may be published, I will not be identified and my personal statements will remain confidential.
- I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time, and this will not affect me now or in the future.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during this interview.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

**Participant Name (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have explained the study to the participant and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

**Research Assistant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_