SHELTER AS SANCTUARY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

School of Social Work in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2008

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

School of Social Work

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June 4, 2007

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What is the meaning of homelessness and how does it translate into a better understanding of what the experience of homelessness represents? Exploring the experiences of those who are homeless and the meaning of those experiences is essential when attempting to gain insight and improve service response to those who are homeless. Narrative inquiry is used in this dissertation to tell a story of homelessness from social and personal perspectives. Ultimately, my own understanding of the social and personal dictate the story of homelessness presented in this narrative. It provides an opportunity to better understand what it means to be homeless, why individuals seek shelter, and what can happen when individuals living a homeless experience are called upon to experience their lives in their own words.

What is revealed through the personal stories suggest a need for sanctuary. Sanctuary in this narrative represents respite, security, a place to decide next steps, and ultimately, for a few, a place for transition. An emergency shelter program for the homeless comes to represent sanctuary for the twenty participants in this study. It is during this experience of sanctuary that participants come to "confirm, resist, and eventually maintain or transform the accepted norm" (Richardson, 2001, p. 37) of what it means to live in a homeless circumstance. The internalized cultural self (Swandt, 1999) emerges as the dominant influence in telling the story of homelessness, both on the part of study participants and that of the author.

Sanctuary emerges as a key theme from the personal stories, but the act of self-reflection when telling one's story becomes the catalyst for a new thinking about how participants view their homeless circumstance and their life experiences. That self-reflection proves to be an unexpected invitation to the reconstruction of one's personal story of homelessness, and an invitation for me to consider a different kind of service response. It is in this narrative, the beginning of an alternative model for emergency shelter services, where opportunties for sanctuary or respite are discussed as key needs for participants of this study. In addition, a proposed sanctuary model of service intervention is presented, where traditional emergency services are available, but with a caveat of service support that elicits the personal stories of those who are willing to reconstruct their life experiences and begin the process of narrating a different experience that holds transitional implications for their current homeless circumstance.

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It is with much humility and thankfulness that I offer sincerest acknowledgment to all of those who supported through this undertaking. To my dissertation chair and co-chair, Esther Sales and Maria Piantinida, thank you so much for your guidance, patience, endurance, tenacity, and commitment in helping me see my way through the murky waters of this dissertation while pulling me through to a clear and balanced final product. Your support, encouragement, and dedication are invaluable and shall last a lifetime through the accomplishments I achieve in the future.

To friends who are too many to name, and family, especially Mom, William and Angie, my sincerest appreciation for reminding me of the light that kept me moving when it was so easy to stop. You are the sun and water I love so much.

Finally, to my study participants and anyone who has lived the experience of being homeless, your stories have so much to teach us about our own experiences with life, and will do so much to challenge how society chooses to engage this experience. It may seem weird to say, but thank you for your homeless experience. It has moved my life into something way beyond the power I could have imagined for myself. It will change the life of others who dare to hear your story and see themselves in it. Be strong and let your story re-author the story of homelessness. It has long been taken for granted but you have the power to grant a taking of something different.

PROLOGUE

About fifteen years ago, I was walking on the beach when I encountered a man in a wheelchair. He was panhandling, so I pulled out seventy-five cents and dropped it into his cup. Although I made no eye contact with him, he said, "Thank you. I can get a cup of coffee at McDonalds with this." Intrigued, I wondered, "Why does he need to panhandle to get money for coffee. Aren't there places he can go to get it for free? Why isn't he at a shelter?"

Curious, and wanting to verify that he was homeless, I asked if he stayed in the community's Salvation Army Shelter, where surely he could have a place to stay and be fed. As a young and inexperienced social worker, I was all too ready to direct him to the shelter. To my surprise, however, the man told me he was living under the boardwalk and the shelter was no place for him. He said he did not need to go inside. Living on the beach was freedom for him. "I don't mind sleeping on the beach," he said. "I can clean up at the Vista kitchen. So, I'm good. Shelters are for when you want a different kind of freedom that takes you inside, or when you want a break from my kind of freedom, but just for the night." I asked him what he meant by this. He simply explained that when you're homeless, "you either go inside because you don't have a choice, you want a change or you just want a break. Either way, at some point everyone has to go inside; but before they do, they think about why they need to go inside in the first place. Me, I'm just one of those guys who needs a break from time to time from my situation. My situation is I'm homeless."

"I'm just one of those guys who needs a break" is a statement that has puzzled me since that encounter. What is it about this issue of being homeless that intrigues me so? What does it really mean to be homeless? And is it the same for everyone or are there different takes on the experience? After that conversation, I would look for others, just to see how they were living. How did they become homeless? I could not understand why someone would choose to live on the streets or whether or not going into a shelter for any length of time would make a difference. Could we really learn something about this experience of being homeless that was not already understood? I knew very little as a fresh new social worker, but time would give me the opportunity to learn much more and challenge my own value system and belief about who the homeless were and what this experience meant to them.

Wanting to know more, I volunteered with Vista, which provides meals, clothing, places to bathe, and some employment assistance to persons who are homeless. Throughout my time with VISTA, I continued to wonder what happened to "those people" after they left the program. Did they just come "inside" to take a break? Did they have no other choice at that time but to come "inside", or were they looking for some kind of change in their lives? What was it about the shelter that made people want to go "inside" besides the obvious of wanting to get off of the streets? I remained intrigued.

These questions continued to haunt me, even as I moved from VISTA into a professional position where I worked in service programs for the homeless. Over the years, I gained a great deal of experience with people who are homeless and wanted to know more about their stories. One lasting impression from my years of social work with this group are the comments of homeless women and men when I would ask them about the difficulties of living on the streets. "You just don't get it," they would say. "You ask us everything except what this is really like

for us." "This" always referred to being homeless and living at the different shelter programs. Most would say, "You really just don't understand what this is like." In hindsight, I really didn't understand what this experience meant to them, but I had a clear opinion of how I saw the experience and what it meant to me. It just seemed desperate, disparaging and hard to make sense of.

I realized that I did not have a complete story to draw from with all of its complexities, to truly begin a process of improving my own understanding of what it means to be homeless. I relied on the cultural or rather social story and the familiar interactions I would witness when individuals who were homeless approached "regular citizens." I relied on the familiar assumptions, expectations and interpretations of who is homeless and why in deciding how I might react when encountering a person who is homeless. The common look of disdain and the need to flee someone who is homeless suggested that this group was not like everyone else, and thus was undeserving of any effort to understand who they are and what their lives must be like. I think they, like the "regular citizen", felt a similar disdain for the homeless experience, but for different reasons. They had an understanding of how the rest of society saw them, and invariably held similar expectations of needing to flee the experience because being seen as "skid row Joe" is inescapable once society places you in the homeless category. Of course I was just as naïve and culturally influenced about who the homeless were and how the experience influenced stories told about it, but I remained intrigued enough to further inquire about this experience of homelessness.

My professional self wanted to know more. My moral self wanted to challenge the disdain and consider the judgment and value of a group of people I certainly did not really understand. I had only the cultural story to draw from in thinking about this experience. I used

that cultural story to frame my personal interactions with the homeless. I wondered if the individuals living the homeless experience really understood and could tell a story about the experience that could help me better understand. After all, they said I just didn't get it. I just didn't understand. Did they really understand? Could they help me to better understand?

This is where the journey of this narrative begins. My need to understand better, and the challenge from past clients to listen to them tell their stories in hopes that by hearing their stories, improved understanding would come to pass.

I am not sure if either my clients or I really wanted to deal with the heart of these questions. After all, my job was just to provide tangible services, psychoeducational and psychosocial support, and ultimately, assistance in obtaining stable housing. Talking about what it means to be homeless may have been too frightening both for me and the persons living the experience. Telling their story would mean reliving the experiences that ultimately led to homelessness. Would this be too painful? Would it be too great an intrusion into their private lives? Would my questions be too insensitive? Would the recounting of one's life help to make sense of it and render some meaning that improves understanding of the lived experience?

I had no answers to these questions while in professional practice, but as with many qualitative researchers, saw the opportunity to explore some of these issues through my doctoral education. Through this narrative dissertation research, I had finally come to a place where I could consider a way to better understand this experience from the perspective of those who live it and that of society which shapes how those who live this experience come to understand it; consider the relationship between the cultural story and a personal experience. Researchers using narrative inquiry suggest its underlying premise as "the belief that individuals make sense of their world most effectively by telling stories" (Baily & Tilley, 2002, p. 575; Bruner, 1990, p.

13). This dissertation research allows me to engage narrative inquiry as a means to help me make sense of the world of homelessness by hearing the stories of those living the experience, and draw on socio-historical understandings about the experience to interpret the meanings of the cultural story and its influence in the personal stories.

So why would I be qualified to conduct research in this way? As a doctoral student, I designed and conducted a small research project to explore the general wellbeing and coping behaviors of persons who were obtaining services at shelters for the homeless. In an effort to engender some trust between study participants and myself, I spent two days at my study sites interacting with shelter residents while trying to recruit participants. Upon completing the surveys, several participants approached me and asked why I had not simply talked with them about what it really is like to be homeless and living in a shelter. They told me I would learn so much more if I just sat and talked with them. How could I ignore this observation from individuals who are so often misunderstood and marginalized by the very services and policies that are designed to help meet their needs and improve their situation (Solomon, 1999)? This earlier research effort was the preparation needed to embark on this current journey of inquiry. The experience of that study culminated in this narrative dissertation study narrated in the following pages.

The narrative in the following pages is one with various social, political and personal perspectives. These perspectives give way to my personal resistance to understanding, and lead me on a journey of re-discovery regarding the experience of homelessness and its impact on my sense of familiarity as dictated by understanding of the cultural story. I find myself moved not only to take action in cooperation with persons living this experience by hearing and retelling their stories, but to do what Richardson (2001) explains as "get personal with the experience" (p.

34) and "standing up for myself" (p. 36) as a practitioner and person with the potential to influence practice, policy and research. In doing this, I, along with participants, had to struggle with the influence of the cultural story, and ultimately reconnect to the experience of homelessness in a way that not only tells the story, but challenges my thinking of how the story is told, understood and what, if anything, can be done to better improve service response in a way that responds to both the cultural and personal experience of homelessness.

I started this journey of understanding with tunnel vision that focused solely on the experience of homelessness. I ended this journey by finding the courage of my moral and professional self to tell a version of this experience I believe to have merit and give some insight about this experience that seems obvious, yet has been overshadowed through time because we are not challenged to look beyond our cultural selves and get personal.

It is not my intent in this narrative to provide a different version of what is real about the experience of homelessness. It is my intent, however, to construct a version of the story of homelessness that speaks to the known truths of what we understand this experience to be, and transform those truths, such as they are, to rediscover the influence of the cultural story of homelessness and how hearing and listening through the lens of our cultural selves (this includes individuals who have a homeless experience) can empower individuals in a homeless circumstance, service providers, and yes, even researchers interested in learning more about the experience of homelessness.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   SITUATING THE NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The starting point for any story can be defined by different moments in time. The small story recounted in this dissertation is embedded within a much larger and longer story of society's struggle to deal with the "poor who are always with us."   Throughout the history of the United States, beliefs about those who are homeless have shaped social policy. Despite a variety of approaches and efforts, and although some progress is being made, understanding the problem of homelessness and instituting lasting solutions remain a challenge with which social work research and practice continue to struggle (First, Roth & Awrea, 1988). Certainly I have no pretensions of offering such a solution as a result of this narrative inquiry into the lives of men and women who, at the time they spoke with me, were living in an emergency shelter. Rather, my hope is to construct a story that offers deeper insight into what it is like to live the homeless experience, and, further, how that understanding might shape social work responses to clients who are homeless.

As indicated in the Prologue, I brought to this narrative study a long standing interest in hearing from homeless individuals what this experience means to them.   In addition to this interest, I brought 12 years of experience as a social worker providing services to homeless populations in several metropolitan areas. This professional experience was further expanded by a study I conducted to examine control perceptions and general wellbeing in individuals experiencing chronic or multiple homeless episodes. These experiences have contributed to my

understanding of what it means to be homeless, but from the perspective of an outsider. This outsider perspective has been further shaped by the socio-cultural context in which I have grown up. The pervasiveness of the assumptions assimilated from this context came as an unsettling surprise as I constructed the narrative account that comprises this dissertation.

Social psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) suggests that the structure of narrative (at least Western European narrative) is that of a journey. As he explains:

> Narrative deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience along that course, and to locate the experience in time and place (p. 13). . The experience reveals a strong rhetorical strand, as if to justify why it was necessary (not causally, but morally, socially, psychologically) that life had gone a   particular way and landed the person at a particular place in the present. (p. 121)

As the narrator of this inquiry, I am recounting what has brought me to my present place of understanding the experience of homelessness. This journey toward deeper understanding challenged me both to recognize and question what Kerdeman (1998) refers to as my "preunderstandings." As Kerdeman explains, this challenge entails a willingness to move out   of the familiar and to encounter "the strange." Schwandt (1999) argues that:

> . . . understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding. To be in a dialogue requires that we listen to the Other and simultaneously risk confusion and uncertainty both about ourselves and the other person we seek to understand. (p. 459)

Thus, rather than assuming that I know either the causes of homelessness or a "remedy" for it, I wanted to attend as openly and carefully as possible to the stories that homeless individuals recounted about their lives that had gone a particular way and had brought them to a place of emergency shelter, homeless.

1.2   INTENT OF THE STUDY AND GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the preceding considerations, the intent of this narrative inquiry is first to understand more deeply the experience of being homeless and the meanings that persons living in an emergency shelter make of this experience. The second intent is to draw from these personal accounts, implications for homeless policy and social work intervention strategies. The following questions provide a conceptual framework for guiding this narrative inquiry:

1. What "cultural narrative" of homelessness and shelter can be constructed from selected social science and social work literature?

2. What is the rationale for engaging in a narrative study of homelessness within the context of emergency shelter housing, and what procedures are used to construct the narrative meanings of this inquiry?

3. What biographical vignettes can I construct from the lived stories of homelessness and shelter shared by participants in the study?

4. What implications for shelter practice and homeless policy can be drawn from the biographical vignettes?

1.3   ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Each of the preceding questions is addressed in a subsequent chapter of the dissertation. In Chapter 2, I draw from formal social science and social work discourses to portray a cultural story of homelessness as it relates primarily to the single adult homeless population. My intent in doing this review was not to derive an operational definition of homelessness, but rather to portray the nuanced meanings associated with this issue. Underlying these various connotations are societal assumptions about the poor, poverty,   homelessness,   and   shelters   as   a   social

response to those living without a "home." The assumptions comprise the "cultural narrative" of homelessness.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the procedures I followed to gather first person accounts of what it means to be homeless. Using a framework for narrative analysis proposed by Kohler-Reissman (1993), I also explain how I moved from verbatim transcripts of the interviews to the construction of selected narrative vignettes that illustrate the major emerging theme of this narrative, "sanctuary."

In Chapter 4 I present the narrative vignettes along with an interpretive commentary in which I call attention to key issues that merit consideration by the social work profession. In Chapter 5, I draw these issues together to discuss their implications for homeless policy and social work practice. This includes a new model of "sanctuary" for emergency service intervention. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue in which I offer some final reflections on what this journey to understand homelessness has meant to me.

2.0 A CULTURAL NARRATIVE OF HOMELESSNESS

2.1 CHAPTER PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This chapter addresses the first guiding question, **"**What 'cultural narrative' of homelessness and shelter can be constructed from selected social science and social work literature?" This chapter takes the reader on a socio-historical journey of the cultural understandings of homelessness to include assumptions, expectations, arguments and experience. The chapter is organized into three sections, beginning with an account of the history of homelessness in the United States through the Depression era. This is followed by a discussion of the move to examine the antecedents, characterizations, key legislation and social arguments about homelessness. General statistics demonstrating who is homeless and why are also discussed. Finally, shelter programs and their impact on the social discourse of homelessness are discussed. The chapter concludes by discussing the importance of the cultural story in understanding the experience of homelessness, and further how we as a society have participated in the social discourse of homelessness.

2.2 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HOMELESS: FROM TRAMP ARMIES TO SKID ROW

A common social perception of homelessness is that it is a marginal situation that can be overcome if individuals would just get a job and assume the responsibility of a permanent residence. This prevailing attitude has been a part of the social fabric of the United States for years. Some in social science research have challenged the noted argument that homelessness is not beyond the control of the individual, and further that homelessness affects a small number of "social undesirables" content with panhandling and living on the streets (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992; Daly, 1996). While this social perception has existed since the homeless have been with us, homelessness remains one of America's most complicated and important social issues.

When defining homelessness, Kyle (2005) describes it as the state of being without a home, and as such suggests a condition of passivity rather than of activity or doing. According to the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2004), the term homelessness first came into use in the early nineteenth century. Prior to this, as early as 1615, the term homeless was used to identify people who literally did not have a home of their own to live in. Home represented a physical domain connected to family and the agrarian livelihood. It was a clear way to demonstrate socially acceptable work assignments for men and women. Women did work in the home, and men were expected to work outside of the home. One's housing status during this era represented not only the physical representation of livable space, but socially defined role assignments for both men and women. To be without housing meant conflict with what

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society expected of the individual, and conflict with what was expected in the context of family. To some extent, being housed holds similar meaning even in the present.

Kyle (2005) traces the introduction of other terms used to identify the social category of people without a home, including beggar (1225), vagabond (426), vagrant (1444), pauper (1493), sturdy beggar (1538), rogue (1570) and tramp (1664). The term tramp emerged as a favorite in identifying the homeless. It was used to represent a social phenomenon of street people who came on the scene at a time when Americans saw the image of home as a productive, family-centered unit and ultimate fulfillment of social membership (Schneider, 2006). Terms like tramp came to represent a specific category of social undesirables living on the streets and with little sense of personal and social responsibility to be housed.

People who are homeless have always been an indelible part of this society. Individualism, work, and a strong work ethic are idealized in American culture, such that those physically capable of work are expected to provide for their own support (Goetz & Schiege, 1996; Wagner and Menke, 1994). In early colonial America, the homeless often were viewed as the poor or destitute in need of shelter. The simplest way to address the problem was for families of displaced or destitute individuals to provide housing for them. Those adults who needed housing assistance or who had no family to provide housing support were placed in workhouses or labor colonies (Baumohl, 1996; Goetz & Schiege, 1996; Katz, 1989). The workhouses and labor colonies were designed to be punitive and reflective of the vagrancy laws, which presupposed that the antecedent of homelessness was some personal flaw within the individual (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992).

It was not until the late 1800s that homelessness began to command the attention of many Americans. Bassuk and Franklin (1992) note that as Americans moved from an agrarian

to a more industrialized society, more people found themselves displaced and without adequate housing because they could no longer meet their needs through agricultural means. As this society became more industrialized, the home no longer represented the social contribution of production as society had known it to be. Men were expected to participate in the new industrialized economy and subsequently had to leave the home for work. This new productive work had taken the male out of the home and placed him in urban environments that were not always able to meet his housing needs.

As more and more men left their families to seek industrialized work, the visibility of vagrants, vagabonds or tramps and hobos, as they were most often called, became a significant feature of this country's social landscape. These men were living on the streets or in lodging houses (today we call them overnight shelters) and came to represent the idea of homelessness as a romanticized effort to escape family and/or social responsibility. Society viewed these men as unworthy of charitable assistance, and their homeless circumstances were seen as their own doing. After all, they were capable of work and could provide for themselves. While society acknowledged that the hobos, vagrants or tramps were most often victims of economic instability, because these were men in fairly good physical health, it was assumed these individuals could find jobs and secure housing if they chose to do so.

It was during this era, the late 1800s to mid 1900s, that society began to solidify the social category of the homeless as one of exclusion, with few expectations of social membership. Society recognized homelessness as a problem of the individual and not a major social problem that required social intervention other than lodging houses.

This began to change as the depression set in with high levels of unemployment. Women were becoming homeless. Families were becoming homeless. Even the men who

wanted to work found themselves homeless. These men were often unskilled, seasonally employed and the first to lose their jobs during struggling economic periods, particularly between 1870 and 1940 (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992).

Towards the end of the depression, society began to view homelessness not only as a matter of personal choice where work, family and residential instability were the norm for some, but also a circumstance beyond the control of the individual for others. It was now a social problem that required solutions for those considered to be deserving of help, as well as those considered undeserving. The idea of creating stable and permanent housing for individuals who found themselves homeless in the new urban environment became a key challenge of government and charitable societies in dealing with the issue of homelessness.

The problem now called for a discussion of housing reform with no easy solutions. While securing a supply of adequate, affordable housing was the goal of such reform, it did not consider the diverse needs of the new homeless population. This included things such as a need for stable employment and social support for women who had been widowed (Baumohl, 1996; Daly, 1996). Furthermore, by the mid-1900s, housing production in U.S. cities was significantly less than what had been projected. Many of the vulnerable and unemployed found themselves moving from one temporary housing circumstance to another (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992). In addition, the huge trend to move from rural areas to urban centers further increased the likelihood of homelessness. Cities could not meet the housing needs of individuals moving from rural communities. Because of the depression, housing costs soared and the availability of affordable housing was almost nonexistent. It became nearly impossible for individuals to identify affordable housing and the lodging houses, that now were called shelters for the homeless, were overwhelmed with the number of people needing such housing.

The Federal Housing Administration, created in 1934, was designed in part to deal with the desperate housing needs of many American families. Again, the homeless, who at the time were primarily single male adults, were not a target group to be assisted. Only families (namely female headed) where the primary breadwinner was unemployed and unable to provide housing were considered "worthy" or "deserving" of housing support. Even charitable organizations focused their efforts towards homeless families rather than individuals because many of these families were headed by females who were unemployed and with no male support. It was thought that the single homeless adult (mostly men) was more difficult to stabilize, and further did not want to work or could not secure stable employment to sustain their housing even if they found housing (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992; Kyle, 2005). In addition, it was felt that programs designed to help the single adult homeless population would be too costly and encourage further reliance on society (such as more lodging houses or shelters) to meet their housing needs (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992; Shlay & Rossi, 1992).

This reliance on society meant being placed in a social category of being homeless that bound the individual, namely men, to an experience of social isolation, social rejection, and a social identity of unworthiness. Normal living was not a part of who they were as understood by society. They were no longer the tramps or hobos, but rather the people of "skid row." This changed with urban renewal after the depression, however. Skid row living began to disappear and the work of charitable societies had seen a conquering of the problem of women and children living on the streets. Some skid row housing remained, but by the 1950s, it was thought that America had conquered its homeless problem. Only a few in the homeless category could be seen on the streets, and it was believed that this was by choice. Had America conquered its homeless problem? The next half of the 20th century will told a different story.

2.2.1 What It Means to be Homeless: beyond Skid Row and into the Present

Notable among recent forecasting failures were the claims in the 1950s and 1960s that homelessness in America was about to disappear (Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Rather than disappearing, homelessness remaieds an indelible part of the fabric of this society.

In the early 80s, a convergence of several social changes brought the issue of homelessness back into the public eye. Against the backdrop of the de-institutionalization of patients with mental health problems in the sixties, the "war on poverty" in the seventies, and the failure of many public housing programs in the early eighties, shelter programs became a central focus in meeting the needs of the homeless (Dickey, 2000; Grumberg, 1998; Hurly, 2002; Jencks, 1994: Katz, 1989). Not only were there more homeless people than during the early 1900s through the Depression and Skid Row decades of the 40s and 50s, but now these individuals were more visible throughout urban centers (Burt, 1996; Burt, Laudan, Lee, & Valente, 2001; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Skid row housing was no longer a viable social response, and the need for more short-term and long-term housing support such as shelters and permanent housing programs was the new challenge of the day.

During the late 70s and throughout the 80s and 90s, the homeless population changed considerably to include a growing number of women, children and families. This population once again was referred to as the new homeless. The growing problems of drugs, street living, domestic violence and family dysfunction contributed to the homeless problem and challenged a response from the government to rethink and redefine what it means to be homeless and how to respond (Horowitz, 1990; Katz, 1989). Increased numbers, increased visibility, and increased public expenditures required a response that not only recognized the structural causes of homelessness, but seriously considered individual circumstances and characteristics that

contributed to the problem (Kyle, 2005). More appropriate social responses became the key focus in dealing with the problem of homelessness.

In 1983, Congress appropriated $100 million dollars to the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) for food and shelter programs across the country. Unfortunately, by the end of the eighties a trickle down effect known as "Reaganomics," found the U.S. economy struggling and having lasting implications for the poor. The poor were and remain among the most vulnerable to becoming homeless. Research suggests that economic circumstances can be an antecedent to becoming homeless (Hambrick & Johnson, 1998; Katz, 1989; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2004).

Although there was one piece of key legislation, The Homeless Housing Act of 1986 (PL, 99-500) which established the Emergency Shelter Grant program and a transitional housing demonstration project, The McKinney Act of 1987 was the first comprehensive government response to the issue of homelessness. The McKinney Act came along to serve as a broad response to the homeless crisis and included the establishment and/or extension of over 20 different programs and initiatives under the supervision of several different government agencies. Homelessness in this study is defined in accordance with the McKinney Act (2002), which states that individuals are considered homeless if they "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; and has a primary night-time residency that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations" (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq. 725).

The newly created Interagency Council of the Homeless was a major part of the McKinney Act to deal with the need for emergency shelter and transitional housing. Although the Interagency Council has seen significant funding decreases since the1990s, the intent of the

McKinney Act to (1) establish such a council; (2) use public resources and programs in a more coordinated manner to meet the critically urgent needs of the homeless; and (3) to provide funds for programs to assist the homeless, particularly special populations such as the disabled, veterans and families with children remains the same.

The McKinney Act was different than past government responses to homelessness because it focused on securing housing assistance through shelter, transitional housing and permanent housing programs. In addition, the McKinney Act considered the biopsychosocial needs of individuals who were homeless. The provision of healthcare (including mental health) programs for the homeless, more emergency shelter and transitional housing support with longer stays, food programs, day programs, domestic violence shelters, and programs for homeless people with AIDS are key components of the McKinney Act. Reauthorized in 2002 as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, funding of programs and services to deal with the complex issues impacting a homeless circumstance, such as stable housing, psychological and physical wellbeing, poverty, and family dysfunction are top priorities of the re-authorized Act.

While this Act has improved available services for homeless persons, it still has considerable work to do in dealing with the structural causes of homelessness and furthering the individual's capacities to deal with life events connected to the homeless circumstance. In looking deeper into the cultural lens of homelessness, the McKinney Act, much like preceding efforts to deal with homelessness, serves the political will to address homelessness, but does not necessarily deal with the social constructions that link this experience to historical ties of social membership, identity, exclusion, and worthiness. The next few paragraphs consider some of the social assumptions and arguments embedded in these historical ties, and provides a discussion of

the McKiney Act in relation to the current picture of who is homeless and why in today's society.

Research shows that the population of persons who are homeless is diverse, although most are single and young to middle-aged adults. Many have severe chronic problems including mental illness, alcoholism, substance abuse, housing instability, physical disabilities and poor health (Burt et al., 2001; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). In addition, many have criminal histories, foster care histories, unstable employment histories, and are members of veteran groups (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2004). Women and children have histories of domestic violence or physical abuse (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2004).

The recent widening gap between the rich and the poor, some homeless experts suggest, is further complicated by the ending of welfare and by enforced work minimums to qualify for housing support (Hurley, 2002). Often, housing affordability is cited as a primary reason for homelessness for many, and remains a central issue in addition to the lack of personal and community resources among certain homeless populations (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Snow & Anderson, 1993). Cushing Dolbeare (1996), a veteran homeless advocate, cites the problems of housing affordability and poverty as pervasive as it relates to homelessness in this country. In many instances, incomes are so low in homeless families that they cannot afford fair market rent, and subsequently cannot afford the cost of utilities, food, and other essentials required for daily living (Burt et al., 2001; Hurley, 2002). These issues of housing, economics, abuse, alcoholism, substance abuse and so on, are embedded in the current story of homelessness.

Research shows that countless numbers of men, women, children and families are homeless each night in the U.S. (Burt et. al, 2001; Hambrick & Johnson, 1998; National Alliance to end homelessness, 2004). In 2002, estimates suggest that as many as 3.1 million people found

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themselves homeless in the U.S. (National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness, 2004). Since 1980, the number of persons experiencing homelessness has increased about 10% (Burt, 1996; HUD, 2002). As many as 650,000 to 800,000 people are homeless on any given night, and at least 66% of that number utilize emergency shelter housing programs (Dickey, 2000; HUD, 2004; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2004). Many in this number find themselves in a cycle of homelessness, having numerous homeless episodes before becoming housed on a permanent basis. In fact, homeless men are twice as likely as homeless women and children to experience multiple episodes of homelessness, and are less able to maintain permanent housing (Allgood & Warren 2003; Burt et al., 2001; May, 2000).

Housing and Urban Development or HUD (2004) and the National Coalition for the Homeless (2003) both indicate that children represent the fastest growing homeless population. Men continue to be disproportionately represented, and African Americans account for more than half of the homeless population in this country (HUD, 2004; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003). They are less likely to feel that they have control over what happens to them in their homeless experience, including obtaining stable housing (Burt et al., 2001; Letiecq, Anderson, & Koblinsky, 1996, 1998).

Homelessness as a visible form of dispossession has challenged health and social policy makers to focus on the antecedents and characterizations of homelessness. This has encouraged mostly descriptive research of persons who are homeless (Elias & Inui, 1993). Antecedents of homelessness in the U.S. have been examined most often through quantitative investigations of the problem. Those investigations focus on the relationship of homelessness and such antecedents as substance abuse, mental illness, lack of social support, unemployment, lack of adequate, affordable housing, poverty, and so on (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Bogard, 2003; Geotz

& Schmiege, 1996; Miller, 1987; Seltser & Miller, 1993; Snow & Anderson, 1993). Focusing only on the antecedents creates a response where legislations like the McKinney Act can easily be overwhelmed. Issues like employment, poverty and affordable housing have structural roots that this society has battled for centuries. Antecedents of homelessness help us to better understand the various life paths that can lead to such a circumstance, but that understanding is just the beginning of the homeless story. There are many chapters to consider in the homeless experience. As such, social response must be broader to include not only the antecedents that shape our current understanding of the homeless experience, but also the meanings the cultural story give us to improve to shape future responses.

There is some controversy among scholars and advocates concerning the characteristic make-up of those without homes, and how society should respond to these individuals and to the problem itself (Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Again, much of the debate focuses on questions of whether or not psychosocial characteristics such as mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, or cognitive deficits are reasonable foci for government and/or service delivery programs when trying to identify and implement viable solutions under the McKinney Act. It is assumed that characteristics such as having a mental illness, drinking problem, or being disabled in some way renders individuals vulnerable to becoming homeless. These characteristics have been associated with the individuals who find themselves homeless (Burt et al., 2001; Shinn, Baumol & Hopper, 2001), and can create a vulnerability to becoming homeless, but they are by no means specific to people who are homeless. These are characteristics that can be found throughout the general population. The question then is to consider what delineates the individual who becomes homeless from those with the same characteristics who do not become homeless. There are no simple answers, but hearing the personal stories of individuals living the homeless experience

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may provide some insight into what has led to their homeless circumstance. This study presents personal stories of homelessness in Chapter 4.

As we consider homeless antecedents and characteristics, a discussion of the general conversations about this problem is needed. Snow et al. (1996) reported that the discussion of homelessness prior to the passage of the McKinney Act centered on two key issues: the number of homeless and the characteristics of the homeless. In the late 80s and throughout the 90s however, the debate over homelessness held two general views: a) whether or not homeless individuals are responsible for their predicament, and b) whether or not the government is responsible for helping them. Some proponents of aid argued that a large number of homeless individuals, if not most, were not personally responsible for their situation. Instead, such advocates argued that much of contemporary homelessness was driven by social, cultural, and economic forces beyond the control of persons who were homeless (Daley, 1996; Kyle, 2005). Because of these forces, it was argued that it was the responsibility of the government to implement legislation like the McKinney Act to respond to the social problem of homelessness (Daly, 1996).

Recently, Kyle (2005) suggests homeless arguments are aligned along three main ideologies. There is the argument that it is the government's responsibility to provide for the needs of the homeless regardless as to how a person becomes homeless. Secondly, there is the argument that most persons who are homeless are ignorant, unskilled or "de-skilled" due to changes in the economy and/or they are not mentally or physically able to adequately provide for themselves. Society has a responsibility to rehabilitate, reform, and/or educate persons who are homeless so they may overcome their individual failings and escape their predicament. Finally, there is the group that argues that persons who are homeless fall into two groups, the deserving

and undeserving. They believe that most persons who are homeless are undeserving because they are willful agents who chose to be homeless rather than to work for a living. The homeless are seen as deviants, and therefore undeserving of any government or societal intervention. This view holds that if their homelessness is willful, the only appropriate response is to make their lives more difficult and criminalize their behavior when it becomes offensive. Panhandling as a misdemeanor is a good example of criminalizing homelessness.

Each of these arguments has some merit. The question then becomes, which argument will be used to frame our response to the problem of homelessness. Hambrick and Johnson (1998) state that society in and of itself is flawed when it comes to responses to the human condition. One should expect that individuals in society will not only be subjected to societal flaws, but also contribute to them. In the case of homelessness, it is the structural, social and even personal flaws that we are challenged to deal with in order to identify solutions that make sense. This requires a fundamental change not only in how we define and construct the meaning of homelessness, but also how we use past and present meanings to improve our understanding and response to the problem of homelessness.

Thus far, we have considered the homeless experience in the context of its social beginnings of productive work where residing in a home was strongly connected to gender roles of work and family. In addition, we have considered the role of social forces and personal attributes that can render and individual homeless. We have considered behaviors, characteristics and sociological and political debates about who is homeless and why. These debates have helped to shape our understanding by unpacking the cultural or societal views of homelessness as constructed by political conversations, social understandings, and individual participation or lack thereof in the homeless discourse.

We have now come to a crossroads in discussing the issue of homelessness. The following discussion offers a more detailed view of the idea of shelter and what it means in the context of being homeless. It continues the journey of the cultural story of homelessness through the social discourse of what it means to have shelter.

2.3   WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HOMELESS: EMERGENCY SHELTER AS A FIRST AND LASTING RESPONSE

In the 80s, efforts to address the needs of the homeless emerged as a substantial public policy issue where shelter programs became a central focus in meeting the needs of the homeless. The number of persons accessing emergency shelter programs to temporarily deal with their homeless circumstance has continued to grow each decade since that time (National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness, 2004). Emergency shelter programs have seen a significant increase in residents and, as recently as 2004 in a national survey report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, homeless service programs have seen an average of an additional 240,000 new contacts each year with people seeking emergency shelter support since 2002.

Current funding for emergency shelter programs continues to increase, and an unprecedented 1.33 billion dollars was recently appropriated for homeless programs and services under the HUD Continuum of Care and Emergency Shelter Grant program (HUD, 2005). Research suggests that for many adults who find themselves homeless, the experience is a life altering, and potentially life-long journey if nothing intercedes to change their circumstances and experiences while homeless (Bottomly Bissonette, & Snelvik, 2001; Henry, 1987; Shinn, Baumol & Hopper, 2001). The longer an adult is in a shelter, the longer it takes him/her to

leave, and the longer it takes him/her to achieve permanent housing and a sense of human connectedness and purpose (Bottomly et al., 2001). One cannot consider the homeless experience without considering how the use of shelter programs impacts one's homeless circumstance.

Daly (1996) and others assert that those who are without any housing, particularly single adults, are often seen as "sleeping rough" (Bahr, 1986; DePastino, 2005; Larsen, Poortinga, & Hurdle, 2004; May, 2000). They are sleeping on the streets but will eventually go into emergency shelter. Daly suggests that emergency shelters represent an end or beginning point for the continuation of the homeless experience. Individuals without adequate intervention at the point of shelter entry are most often destined to remain invisible in society, with few opportunities for their experiences to be heard in the social discourse of homelessness. Daly asserts that these are the individuals for whom homelessness is about not just having a roof over one's head, but indeed being homeless is a state of being. It becomes who you are in the world and a constant reminder of how the rest of society sees your experience and tells your story. Shelter programs become of that cultural story.

Kyle (2005) suggests that a ubiquitous feature of the urban landscape is the emergency shelter. Emergency shelters have been a part of American cities since the early nineteenth century. During that time, they were connected to religious sentiments of moral obligations to the indigent, who were most often provided shelter in the context of a religion-supported dwelling with services deemed appropriate as a moral response to lost souls (Daly, 1996). As we moved into the twenty-first century, the idea of emergency shelters has emerged as a very prominent need in light of the war on poverty, de-institutionalization and its social effects, and the gradual decline in available affordable housing and housing subsidies.

Shelter programs in recent years have sprung up across the country, most typically in large, formerly vacant buildings, such as warehouses and former gymnasiums. Although some have been disreputable barracks where "social undesirables" (Bassuk & Franklin, 1992, p. 41) are housed, many shelters serve an important emergency function in providing temporary housing while connecting individuals to much needed psychosocial and housing supports that aid in becoming housed (Kyle, 2005).

Kyle (2005) and Daly (1996) discuss the dilemma of shelter programs as posing a temporary expedient called emergency shelter. In short, emergency shelter programs are seen as a permanent fixture in urban society. There have been few efforts since the 90s to seriously re-evaluate emergency shelters' role, function and ability to engage persons who are homeless in a way that deals appropriately and adequately with the individual who enters emergency shelter (Kyle, 2005). It is assumed that people enter shelters simply to have a roof over their heads and a place to sleep. Shelter is seen as one of the primary needs of human beings. The assurance of adequate housing is one of the fundamental responsibilities of a society (Elias & Inui, 1993). Calmore (1989, p. 7) cites Achtenberg and Marcuse (1986) who point out that "housing, after all, is much more than shelter. It provides social status, access to jobs, education, and other services, a framework for the conduct of household work, and a way of structuring economic, social, and political relationships." Because homeless shelters are often one of the first points of service entry for adults who find themselves homeless (Burt et al., 2001; Kyle, 2005), shelter programs might do well to consider what other concerns outside of the need for physical shelter and psychosocial support are not being met, but which are just as important in dealing with the issue of homelessness other than the obvious need for a roof over one's head.

While the McKinney Act provides for a social response to homelessness in the form of emergency shelter programs (overnight shelters limited to 45- to 60-day temporary stays); transitional or bridge housing (government provided housing from 90 days to 18 months, which is designed to provide case management and other needed services that promote personal, social and economic stability in order to sustain stable and permanent housing); and government subsidized permanent supportive housing (housing that is income-based in the form of single residence occupancy designed to promote long-term stable and permanent housing), many persons with a homeless experience still find that they are out on the fringes of social discourse regarding their homeless circumstance (Goodfellow, 1999; HUD, 2004; Jenks, 1994). This includes the meaning of homelessness and the cultural and individual framework that meaning draws from.

One of the first sociological studies on homelessness and the shelter experience was conducted more than 71 years ago in the city of Chicago by Charles Roseman (1935). The study considered public administrative response to an isolated group labeled "shelter bums." The goal was to examine shelter care in wake of the Great Depression, and to observe the impact of shelter living on shelter residents. As I discussed earlier, shelters during that time were seen as lodging houses for men who could not or would not maintain consistent employment. The shelter was a temporary means that hopefully would discourage long-term reliance on society to meet one's housing needs.

It was anticipated that the study in Chicago would reveal a group of men whose main problem was finding work in the wake of the nation's poor economic circumstance. What was not anticipated was an interesting and relevant finding of the importance of shelter residents' morale and its impact on the residents' feelings about themselves, feelings of security, ability to

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become stable, and individual and social characterizations of the homeless experience that ultimately impact longterm homeless circumstances (Roseman, 1935). Homeless characterizations proved to shape the shelter and social response of public relief programs. This at a time when public relief was primarily for widowed women and children who found themselves in a homeless circumstance.

Over half a century later, Peter Rossi's (1989) *Down and Out in America* looked at homelessness in Chicago in much the same way, but the landscape and faces had changed. A large portion of the shelter residents were now women, children, victims of poverty, and people with substance abuse and mental health problems. The homeless were no longer men unable or unwilling to work to secure stable housing. Service needs had changed from food and shelter to that of drug treatment, mental health care, employment and financial assistance, community re-integration for those de-institutionalized, supportive temporary housing, and access to affordable, permanent housing.

The McKinney Act made it possible for many persons living in emergency shelter programs to be able to access services designed to support stable housing. For example, case management, employment assistance, transitional housing, job training, etc. are routine in many programs (Feins & Fosburg, 1998) and designed to address the antecedents and characterizations of homelessness. There is some research however, that suggests that services are still not focusing on primary human needs like connectedness, motivation for change and stability, and improving one's ability to secure positive relationships during a shelter stay (Bottomly et al., 2001; Hicks-Coolick, Eaton, & Peters, 2003). There have been studies that consider the impact of shelter living in the context of individual dignity, identity, empowerment and personal control (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2001; Bottomley et al, , 2001; M; Racine & Sevigny, 2001;

Snow & Anderson, 1993). They show that issues like dignity, identity and control are very pressing in the lives of persons living a homeless experience, and are further complicated when they enter a shelter program. The programs represent a social identity of the homeless, a sense of lacking personal control because of shelter rules, and an experience of having one's sense of dignity disregarded in degrading ways by shelter staff (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2001;; Racine & Sevigny, 2001; Warnes & Crane, 2006).

Other research found the homeless shelter experience to be one of acclimation, dislocation, social alienation and restriction (Morrell-Bellai, Goering, & Boydell, 2000; Stark, 1994). Residents in shelter programs either became acclimated to shelter living and constantly cycled through such programs (Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000), or found the experience of shelter living to be alienating in the sense that staff, as shelter residents and society in general rejected them because of their homeless status (Stark, 1994). Still others found shelter rules to be very restrictive and often difficult for shelter residents to accommodate (Stark, 1994). Whatever the shelter experience, it is clear that the idea of having a physical place means more than a physical dwelling. It can also come to mean a place where an individual's sense of being in the world is defined by that shelter experience.

Elias and Inui (1993) suggest that some individuals who are homeless see the shelter experience as a "temporary sanctuary" (p. 399) from stresses in the social environment and from their own personal demons. It is temporary because eventually residents have to leave, or are forced to leave during the day to look for a job and other housing options. The "phenomenon of shelter" (p. 397) as Elias and Inui refer to it, is constructed as a way to literally shelter oneself from life stressors or overwhelming emotional events that become to difficult for the individual to deal with. In chapter 4, the personal narratives reveal a similar finding. Elias and Inui discuss

the "phenomenon of shelter" in their research that is not found in other contemporary research on homelessness. Their work provides a foundation for the importance of a discussion of shelter programs in this study, and play an integral part in Chapter four's discussion of "sanctuary" and what it means to shelter the self from life experiences.

Shelter programs are very much a large part of the homeless experience and demonstrate a key role in the social discourse of homelessness. How we view the need for such programs, provide for such programs and consider alternative lasting solutions to the problem of homelessness brings us into the 21st century in taking seriously the idea of significantly reducing the number of people who enter a homeless experience, and the number of people who are considered chronically homeless. This means augmenting existing emergency shelter programs to include long-term solutions such as affordable housing, ongoing social support upon exiting sheltering programs and changes in how we deal with individuals entering a shelter program (Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Emergency shelter can add to the complexities of the homeless experience and, as demonstrated by this discussion, can be a starting point of redefining the human condition or a continuation of homeless understandings that have hindered a lasting social response to the homeless experience or circumstance.

2.4   CONCLUDING THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE: UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SOCIAL DISCOURSE

As I narrate my understanding of the homeless experience through a cultural lens, I am given the freedom to engage the social discourses surrounding homelessness, and consider how we use these discourses to make sense of the homeless experience. My telling of the cultural story suggests an understanding dictated by how society engages both the issue of homelessness and

the individuals dealing with the experience. The cultural story gives evidence to the assertion that society defines the social parameters and moral terms by which the lived experience of homelessness is to be understood and responded. We are challenged with a social category that marginalizes, be it intentional or not. We are confronted with a social problem that is not going away any time in the near future. Finally, we are forced to consider the complexities of the lived experience and decide how to deal with those complexities.

Molina (2000) states that homeless individuals live in a complex social environment, and the meaning they give to the experience of homelessness can determine whether or not they remain in the experience, how long they remain in the experience, and whether they will enter the experience at some other point in their lives. To date, we have limited understanding of how individuals who are homeless engage their homeless circumstance, the meaning they make of their circumstance, and the connection between life events and the current lived experience (Casslyn & Roades, 1994; Lindsey, 1997; Molina, 2000). Although life circumstances add to the complexity of how an individual becomes homeless, the story of homelessness as told in this narrative, suggests that life experiences can indeed be further complicated by the cultural discourse and structural failings that set the parameters for understanding and responding to the homeless circumstance. These parameters provide for a social category that determines worthiness, social response, and hints of familiar truths regarding how we come to know and understand what it means to be homeless. Thus, the cultural story of this narrative represents the anchoring point of our understanding the homeless experience and our response to it.

What is it that we understand about the experience of homelessness? What is it that we could understand better about the homeless experience? This chapter provides some insight in response to the first question. The next section of this narrative will provide a framework for the

narrative process used in this study. The reader will have a general view of who the study participants are, collection of interviews, analysis of interview content, and themes that emerge.

3.0   RESEARCH PROCEDURES FOR GATHERING BIOGRAPHICAL STORIES

3.1   CHAPTER PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This chapter describes research procedures including a description of the research site, study participants, recruitment procedures and analysis of interview transcripts to identify emerging themes and key issues relevant to the homeless experience. The goal of this chapter is to provide a description of how I gathered the personal stories and the process of analysis of the stories gathered.

3.2   RECRUITMENT SITE

I chose to recruit participants for this study at an urban shelter which offers both emergency and long term housing to homeless men and women. Emergency shelter is offered on a first come, first serve basis, and although some enter the shelter directly "from the street," most are referred by other community service providers that prescreen potential residents. Criteria for admission to the emergency shelter include:

- no temporary or permanent housing—i.e., being homeless;
- 18 years of age or older;
- willingness to cooperate with shelter staff; and
- ability to access available resources to obtain stable housing upon leaving the shelter.

Upon admission to the shelter, each resident is assigned a case manager who can provide referrals to income and housing assistance programs, community day programs, and jobs or job training programs. Residents are expected to meet with their case manager on a weekly basis and to provide some evidence of their activities to secure house and, if needed, employment. The length of an emergency stay at the shelter ranges from 45 to 60 days depending on the extent to which the resident works with the case manager and makes progress toward a more stable living situation.

The goal of helping shelter residents move from homelessness toward permanent housing is supported by additional services provided by the shelter. These include meals for a small fee, employment assistance, medical assistance, mental health assistance, and transition to one of the shelter's 80 subsidized long-term housing units for those who qualify.

The shelter—one of more than twenty recognized emergency, bridge, and/or permanent housing programs for single adults in the Pittsburgh area—was established in 1986. It is able to provide emergency shelter support to 40 individuals at a time. Latest data available from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (2005) suggest that 1500 single homeless adults are living in area shelters on any given day. Thus, the shelter chosen as the recruitment site is consistently fully occupied. This, along with the shelter's longstanding commitment to supporting research on homelessness, made the site a fruitful venue for the recruitment of study participants.

3.3   RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

I used convenience sampling to identify study participants. I went to a local emergency shelter program for four weeks and invited individuals living in the shelter to participate in tape-recorded interviews about the experience of homelessness. Recruitment efforts at the emergency shelter occurred over a four week period during which I provided information about my study by:

- attending weekly shelter meetings;
- posting flyers in the general common area; and
- talking informally with residents I encountered in the common area.

In addition, I asked the shelter case manager for assistance in identifying potential participants and telling them about my study. Through these avenues, I let residents know of my interest in interviewing individuals between the age of 25 and 60 as well as the fact that participants would receive $30 in appreciation for their willingness to be in the study. Interested residents were advised to speak with me while I was on site, contact me at the telephone number listed on the flyer, or approach the shelter case manager who would give them a sealed envelope containing a letter explaining the research project and a demographic survey that participants were asked to complete. When giving an envelope to interested individuals, the case manager asked them to identify a preferred date and time for the interview. This information was recorded on a form along with a number corresponding to a number on the envelope that the resident had received. I contacted the case manager daily to determine if anyone had signed up for an interview and then arranged to meet with the individual per their designated time. (Appendix A contains the demographic survey form that was provided as part of the recruitment process.)

3.4   STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Through this recruitment process outlined above, a total of 20 individuals volunteered to be interviewed and comprised the participants in the study. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2002), the average age for homeless adults is 37. Further, research suggests that emergency shelter residents age 62 and older have age-related vulnerabilities (e.g., chronic health problems, poor access to social supports, inability to obtain sufficient income, multiple losses) that younger residents may be better able to overcome (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002). With these considerations in mind, I set an age criterion of 25 – 60 for prospective participants. The 20 shelter residents who volunteered for the study ranged in age from 25 – 59. The average age was 38, with most participants being male, graduated high school, and some history of substance abuse or mental health problems. General characteristics of the participants are summarized in Tables 1-4.

Table 1: Participants by Gender and Race

	Male	Female
Black	12	2
White	4	2
Total	16	4

Table 2: Participants by Gender and Education

	Male	Female
Less than 12th grade	2	1
High school diploma or equivalent	14	3
Some college	5	0
College degree-Bachelor	3	0
Beyond a Bachelor degree	1	0

Table 3: Complicating Life Issues

History of unemployment or unstable work	50%
History of substance abuse	60%
History of mental health distress	25%
Previous incarceration	40%
Previous homeless episode	60%

Table 4: Participants by Number of Homeless Episodes

	# of Previous Homeless Episodes		
Gender	One	Two	More than Two
Male	5	3	8
Female	1	2	1

Although individuals self-selected to volunteer for the study, the demographic profile of the participants as a group mirrors that of single homeless adults as reported by the National Coalition for the Homeless (2002). The participant group also mirrors the client population of

the emergency shelter that served as the recruitment site—i.e., residents generally are African American, male, an average age of 38, and a history of challenging life problems (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2005).

Despite the similarities between the study participants and the profile of typical single, adult homeless individuals, the group does not constitute a random, statistical sample of either the shelter residents or the homeless population within the metropolitan area where the study was conducted. Rather than serving as a basis for identifying common factors that are causative or predictive of a homeless condition, the participants in this study were meant to offer insights into the individual meanings they ascribed to the experience of being homeless. To elicit these meanings, conversational interviews were conducted as outlined in the next two sections.

3.5   INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

3.5.1   Interview Logistics

One-time interviews lasting from 30-90 minutes were conducted in a private office at the emergency shelter. I began each interview by identifying myself as a graduate student who was completing a dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh. I then reviewed the purpose of the study as explained in the letter that had been included in the participant envelope; eligibility requirements including age and shelter residence; the fact that the interview would be tape recorded, and monetary incentive for participation. Participants were advised of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity and assured that no identifying information would be collected,

that shelter staff would have no access to the interviews, and that participation in the study would in no way affect their receipt of services at the shelter.

With the participant's agreement, a digital audio device was used to record the interview. The recordings were labeled according to the interviewee number and saved as a file on a computer to which only I had access. No one other than I and the individual hired to transcribe the recordings had access either to the digital recordings or the transcribed files which were kept in a separate file in a locked office

At the end of each interview, demographic data were collected via a written questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaires were coded with the interviewee's assigned number and stored along with the transcripts in a secured office.

Approval by the University's Institutional Review Board was obtained for the study two months prior to the start of any interviews. Compliance with all IRB guidelines ensured that no harm was done as a result of the interviews. (see Appendix B for the IRB approval letter)

3.5.2   Interview Process

Interviews were conducted using a conversational style (Richardson, 1990) in which open-ended questions were used as prompts to elicit the individual's experience of becoming homeless, his or her experience of homelessness before and during shelter residency, and future plans after leaving the shelter program. Participants were encouraged to talk in their own words about anything they chose as long as it related to their experience of homelessness and living at the shelter.

As Kohler-Reissman (1993) suggests, certain types of open-ended questions are more likely than others to encourage narrative conversations in which participants are able to construct

responses in ways that are meaningful to them. With this in mind, I used the following questions

and prompts to guide the overall flow of the interviews:

1. I want to know about your experience as a person who is experiencing homelessness. Before we begin, I know some people do not like to be called "homeless." How should I refer to your experience with homelessness during this interview? as a person who is homeless, a person who is displaced or temporarily homeless, or some other descriptor. Can you tell me how you became homeless? Is this your first time to be homeless?

2. What was your life like before becoming homeless? Are there events in your life that you would say has contributed to your being homeless now or in the past? Please tell me more about this.

3. What is your life like as a person who is considered homeless? What does it mean to you to be homeless? To live in a shelter?

4. How did you end up here at the shelter? Why did you leave where you were to come here? Have you stayed here or in other shelters before? with friends or family because you did not have a place to stay? What does being in a shelter mean to you?

5. What is shelter life like for you? a normal day while living in a shelter? What do you think about the people who are living here with you? the staff? Do you identify with any of them?

6. What do you do to deal with living in a shelter? Does living in a shelter affect how you feel about yourself? how you feel about being homeless?

Conversational interviewing within a narrative tradition affords the researcher with

flexibility to pursue lines of questioning that surface through the interviews (Lindolf, 1995).

This may occur within an individual interview as unanticipated information emerges and calls

for further exploration. It may also occur across interviews as evocative concepts and language

from one participant seem worthwhile to pursue with subsequent participants. For example,

during the initial six interviews, more than one participant described a "darkness" that rendered

them depressed and emotionally unable to deal with the stress of living on the streets or living

with family with whom that constantly fought. For them, the shelter represented an escape from

this "darkness." This image was sufficiently compelling to me that I incorporated a question about the experience of darkness in subsequent interviews.

Another example related to issues of race and gender inequity. Several participants expressed the view that most homeless individuals are expected to be Black and male, because there are so many social support programs available to women as well as faculty and community support for Whites. I began to ask other interviewees for their views on this issue. While others agreed that society as well as members of the homeless community assume that the homeless population is mostly Black and male, they did not all agreed that this led to differential treatment within the shelter. They also varied in the belief about the availability of services to men and women, often attributing homelessness to individual personality rather than race and/or gender.

I offer these two examples of issues that emerged from the interviews to illustrate the inductive nature of conversational, narrative interviewing. Unlike highly scripted interview protocols that call for standardization of questions, interviewing within a narrative tradition afforded me the flexibility to follow the pathways of thinking that were expressed by the participants in my study.

3.5.3   Transcript Analysis

In deciding how to approach the analysis of the interview transcripts, I found Kohler-Reissman's (1993) five levels of narrative analysis—attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, reading—to be useful. Attending actually occurs during the interview itself as the researcher listens carefully for ideas related to the purpose of the study. Attending closely to each interviewee's story of his or her experience of homelessness helped me to identify questions, responses, prompts, and/or cues to guide the interview and probe for additional information.

Telling entails listening repeatedly to the audio recordings of the participants' stories before deciding which interviews and which portions of specific interview are most likely to yield important insights into the questions under study. As I engaged in this form of listening, I took notes on key words, sentence strands, and paragraphs. This was a more extensive and detailed process of note taking than I was able to do during the actual interviews. As Kohler-Reissman (1993) cautions, note taking during the interview can interrupt the flow of conversation, engender anxiety in participants, and inhibit the flow of ideas. Listening to the audio recordings affords the luxury of time to concentrate on issues and themes embedded in the participants' accounts of being homeless.

Kohler-Reissman describes transcribing, not as the mechanics of creating a verbatim text of the audio recording, but rather as an interpretive process. Written transcripts are studied to unpack the language used by participants in order to decode meanings embedded within the participants' stories. To mine the transcripts for the meanings of the homeless experience, I read the transcripts myself, enlisted the help of a second reader, and consulted with members of a study group in which I participated. Through the readings and conversations, I pushed to clarify ideas that were surfacing as I reviewed the transcripts and consulted my notes. Through the process of transcribing, I ultimately constructed summaries for each interview by excerpting key paragraphs that resonated with the themes I was beginning to see across the twenty interviews.

Once transcribing is underway, analyzing can begin. The two processes inform each other as the researcher moves back and forth between the details of individual stories and the overarching narrative of the inquiry. Analysis entails making decisions about what is important to incorporate into the overall research story and what details are tangential to the theoretical narrative being constructed by the researcher. Through the interplay of transcribing and

analyzing, the researcher gradually crafts a narrative portrayal which can be shared with others. This sets the stage for the final process described by Kohler-Reissman—i.e., reading.

Reading refers to the response others have to the story as narrated by the researcher. Hopefully, I, as the researcher-narrator, have created a story that invites readers into a virtual world portraying the experience of homelessness. By seeing this world through my eyes, the reader may vicariously understand something of what it has meant to the participants to be homeless. However, if my narrative recounts only the participants' stories, I may leave readers with fragmented glimpses into a life on the streets. For social work practitioners, such glimpses may not be very informative. By drawing from formal discourses, I can interweave theoretic interpretations with the idiosyncratic accounts of homelessness. Done persuasively, these theoretic interpretations may prove useful in guiding social work policy and practice (Miles & Huberman, 2001).

The narrative laid out in the next two chapters is the result of my efforts to convey to readers the experiences of homelessness recounted by my participants as well as my theoretic interpretation of those experiences. The narrative in Chapter 4 is structured around five narrative vignettes which serve to illustrate the theme of "sanctuary" and emerging motivations for seeking shelter I identified in the participants' stories. The general theme of "sanctuary" is presented in various vignettes, and a theoretical commentary provided to demonstrate connections and interpretations of what it means to achieve "sanctuary" in a homeless circumstance. The chapter then considers the emerging motivational patterns identified when seeking shelter. Vignettes are presented with additional theoretical commentary that offers insights on identified shelter seeking motivations. In Chapter 5, I reconsider the influence of the cultural story and its shaping of the vignettes used to tell the personal story of homelessness. An

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alternative model for emergency shelter service response that supports the need for respect, self-reflection, and ultimately preparation for transition is emphasized.

4.0   PRESENTING BIOGRAPHICAL VIGNETTES:A PORTRAYAL OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES OF THE HOMELESS EXPERIENCE

4.1   CHAPTER PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This chapter provides a snapshot of the homeless experience through biographical vignettes that deal with the individual complexities connected to the homeless experience of participants in this study. Those complexities provide a framework for the discussion of a key emerging theme, sheltering to achieve sanctuary.

The concept of sanctuary and its relationship to sheltering in the context of homelessness emerges as central to dealing with the experience of homelessness at various stages across the homeless experience. Particularly for participants in this study who seek emergency shelter in an effort to have some measure of sanctuary, or rather respite, the use of emergency shelter makes it possible to achieve an escape from or sheltering of oneself from the problems related to the individual homeless experience. This escape offers respite in an environment not designed for such, but inadvertently comes to represent sanctuary in its most simple terms, respite, refuge, realizations, and reverence for a life lived despite past and present problems.

This chapter is the phase of this narrative inquiry where the cultural story becomes personal, and the story of homelessness is told from the perspective of one aspect of the experience, seeking emergency shelter. Although the author did not anticipate stories that spoke to this one aspect, it is what was naturally revealed through the conversational interviews with

study participants. The following discussion offers my interpretations of the stories they told and the unexpected self revelations of study participants after the audio-recorded conversations stopped. These reflections are probably the most revealing about their life experience in its totality and not just homelessness. There is some discussion of the reflective process at the close of this chapter, but it is not the primary focus.

The idea of being reflective will be used to assert a proposed emergency shelter model in chapter five. It is introduced in this chapter as a means for connecting to the unrealized experience of study participants that ultimately influence how they tell their story. This yet to be realized experience comes only after the participants do something completely unexpected that somehow suggests the key to unlocking this idea of "understanding better the experience of others" is not as simple as telling one's story, but a realization after the telling is over.

4.2   SHELTERING AS A WAY TO ACHIEVE SANCTUARY

Consider the following short vignette:

Lisa is a 33 year old White female who sought shelter to escape an abusive relationship. This is her second time being homeless. She has no real support system, has been in several abusive relationships over the past 10 years, and always returns to the abuser after leaving for a few days. The longest she has stayed away from an abusive relationship is three months. She says she really has no one else to turn to for help, and that as bad as the situation is, she will probably go back to her current abuser at some point. She has come to the shelter because she needs a break from the abuse and has no other place to go.

My life has been nothing more than one bad abusive relationship after another. I was abused by all of the men in my life. I have been punched, kicked, burned, talked about, called terrible names and treated like crap. It all builds up over time. I just can't take it anymore. I knew I had to leave my last boyfriend. I had no place to go, but the shelter is always a place of last resort right? No one bothers me here. I don't have to fight. I don't have to think about being beat up. I don't have to think about my problems. No one here really wants to know about your problems. They have their own problems. I just need a place to get a break from the abuse; the pain of my life. It's too much. For the next 40 days I don't really have to think about anything except finding another place to stay. So I have a place to eat. I have a place to rest. I have a place where I don't have to be afraid of being hit or losing my mind. Being abused can make you lose your mind you know. I want a place to stay, but right now, I just need to get away from everything. There are days when you just need to shut it all away. When those days come, I shut myself up in my room. I can do that here.

Lisa's story, much like that told in the cultural story, particularly for women, is one of abuse where seeking emergency shelter means escaping from an abusive circumstance in order to have safety. Lisa is seeking shelter to achieve a measure of sanctuary that offers safety.

Now consider this next vignette:

Marvin is a 52 year old African American male with a history of substance abuse and ongoing homeless history. He has been homeless several times over the past 15 years and says he is used to being without a place to stay. He has family, but they are no longer willing to take him in because of his drug problem. He works day labor and says he comes to the shelter because he just needs to take a break from the street life and his drug use. "In drug rehab programs, you have to follow a bunch of rules and go to meetings. You don't have to do this in emergency shelter. You can just take a break and deal with your life on your own terms".

When I get tired of being on the streets, I come to the shelter. I've been using drugs since I was a teenager. I just can't seem to handle life so I escape my problems with drugs. I've gone to the rehab places but they make you go to classes, talk about your problems, have all sorts of rules and just have too much stuff you have to do. I don't want to do all of that. I just need a break from the drugs and that life from time to time. Your body and your mind need a rest ever so often. So, I come to the shelter because I'm just looking to take a break from

my crazy life. I just need to get away from it all, including getting off of the streets. Now of course I can still get the drugs if I need to even while I'm in the shelter, but most of the time when I go inside, that's what they call going to the shelter, going inside, I'm looking for a break from the drugs, the street life. Everyone has demons. When you need a quiet place from it all, this kind of place is where you go. You can lock yourself up in your room and just catch some rest. Sometimes, I just need a place to rest, sleep, lay my head and just get away from it all. So I come here, to this shelter. It's my place to escape. You learn where to go, which shelter to go to when you really just need a break.

From what we know about individuals in a homeless circumstance, again through the cultural story, Marvin fits the profile. His substance use has significantly contributed to his homeless circumstance. He, like Lisa is looking for some escape from the problem, even if temporary. Emergency shelter comes to represent a sanctuary where escape from drug use is possible, even if momentary. It is a place for rest; a place to get a break from his current circumstance of drug use.

Now give consideration to this final vignette:

Emile is a 26 year old African American male who is homeless for the first time. He became homeless after his parents lost their home and could no longer financially support him. His parents won the lottery a few years ago and lived quite extravagantly with their winnings. So did Emile. The parents found themselves in trouble with the Internal Revenue Service and subsequently lost everything. The parents now live with an older sibling. Emile has never worked a job consistently and says his siblings are having trouble taking care of their families. They cannot afford to take in yet another person and be responsible for him. Emile has very limited skills, a 9th grade education, and no idea what he is going to do next. He has come to the shelter to escape the streets. He has been sleeping in the park but is being harassed by other individuals sleeping there. He has worked odd jobs, and says he just wants to get a stable place

to stay and job as soon as possible . He is hopeful that something will change for him while at the shelter. He does not want to be seen as homeless.

> Somebody on the streets told me that I was looking bad and cracking up. They said the streets were getting to me. I have never been homeless and don't ever want to be homeless again. It really wears on your mental you know, it makes you feel like crap; like you are worthless. People look down on you and after a while, the family gets tired of helping. I always had my parents to fall back on if I lost my job or didn't have a place to stay. After they lost their home they moved in with my sister. She ain't taking no freeloaders as she calls it so I couldn't stay there. I was out on the streets. My life was pretty good before I became homeless. Now it is crap. It's hard to think about. When you are on the streets, that's all you think about. That dude was right. You can crack up out there. I had to find a place to stay and fast, or else I would be looking like those people you see talking to themselves and just looking crazy. I'm too young for this life. I can't see myself like those people. I know it sounds crazy but being in the shelter is like an escape from the streets. You can rest and forget about all of that for a little while. Really, it's like an escape from being homeless, because even though you don't have a permanent place to stay, you are inside. You have a place to stay even if it's temporary. I can't take being on the streets. I don't feel so homeless here. My mind can get settled and I can regroup. For now, I can forget about that life outside on the streets and hope I find a place to go before my time is up. If you are outside long enough, people are going to say you are homeless. As long as no one sees me coming out of here, I don't have to be called that. I'm just a man you know. Forget about being homeless; just be a man. That means a lot when you think about it. That means a lot to me.

Emile struggles not only with never having an experience of homeless, but also being seen as homeless by others and what that means to him. He is not ready to take ownership of a homeless identity, and at this stage of the experience, is ready to do whatever it takes to escape it. For now that is going to emergency shelter. It is his place of sanctuary; where he can work on transitioning to a more stable circumstance. He can use his time at the shelter to contemplate his next move, while also getting a place of refuge from the streets. The shelter for him is a place to regroup and figure out how to start over.

The short narrative vignettes presented here suggest individuals resolve to achieve some measure of sanctuary even if it takes on different meaning depending on the experience of the

individual seeking shelter. Individuals can have multiple homeless experiences, or find themselves homeless for the first time. The common element is the need to escape, find refuge and have a measure of rest either from life's problems or the homeless experience itself. These study participants represent emergency shelter as providing refuge from the external conditions like abuse, violence and significant losses that can be harsh and difficult to overcome. As illustrated in these short narrative vignettes, shelter offers both physical and psychological safety. It is their sanctuary where rest, refuge, and an escape from life's problems is a welcome relief. It is the individual's chance to be in whatever state of being he or she chooses while figuring out what to do next. Emergency shelter is their sanctuary.

4.3   NARRATOR'S COMMENTARY: SEEKING SHELTER AS A WAY TO ACHIEVE SANCTUARY

When you consider the idea of sanctuary, what comes to mind? Respite perhaps; a place to take a journey of self-discovery; or maybe a place to experience comfort, safety and perhaps temporary escape from general life problems. Recall in Chapter 2, Elias and Inui's (1993) assertion that some individuals who are homeless see the shelter experience as a "temporary sanctuary" (p. 399) from stresses in the social environment and from their own personal demons. It is temporary because eventually residents have to leave, or are forced to leave during the day to look for a job and other housing options. So, being able to experience a measure of sanctuary is temporary but none the less provides some relief from the day to day burdens of life.

As told by study participants, this is a central need when deciding to go to an emergency shelter. They are looking for sanctuary to help ease the burden of day to day problems they are consistently confronted with. The shelter is their escape. It represents a place where sanctuary

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can be achieved. Elias and Inui refer to this as a "phenomenon of sheltering" (p. 397). It is constructed as a way to literally shelter oneself from life stressors or overwhelming emotional events that become to difficult for the individual to deal with. It is this idea of seeking shelter to achieve a measure of sanctuary that provides a foundation for the presentation of various biographical vignettes presented throughout this chapter. The vignettes are used to retell the experience of homeless from one aspect of the experience, seeking emergency shelter.

Participants indicated that emergency shelter represented a place of safekeeping; a place to escape and get away; a sanctuary if you will, where the individual can shelter themselves and have temporary respite. Similar to the known cultural story of homelessness, issues of substance abuse, significant personal losses, and poor mental health were burdens of life where some escape was essential for study participants. Emergency shelter represented that escape.

You may, at this point, find yourself asking how is it possible to have sanctuary in a place where lives are conceivably desperate, disparaging, and with limited options on next steps once the temporary safekeeping concludes. In this study, that temporary safekeeping of going to emergency shelter emerges as a key component to the wellbeing of study participants. They discuss the decision of deciding to go to emergency shelter as one driven by the need to find a safe place to retreat from personal demons while trying to reconnect to the human experience at some level. It is almost like a cover that can be lifted at any point along the homeless-shelter continuum depending on how the person in the homeless experience deals with problematic issues in their lives. This includes being homeless. Is it seen as a way to have some measure of freedom from personal demons; a way to hide from the responsibility of making decisions, taking action, and ultimately, painful life experiences that have contributed to the homeless circumstance.

The decision to seek shelter to have some sort of respite not only provides reprieve, but for a few, can challenge the individual to come to terms with how they see themselves in their past and present lived experience, and the potential for a reevaluation of one's life in order to reconnect to a sense of social memebership. This aspect of seeking shelter is presented in greater detail in different biographical vignettes that follow this commentary. Participants talk poignantly about the allure of sheltering themselves from their problems. In this sheltering act, for a brief moment, the problems do not exist. The problems do not have to be dealt with. The emotion and pain connected to these problems can be avoided at least momentarily. Seeking shelter at an emergency shelter program then comes to represent not only a physical space to escape from individual issues like prostitution, domestic violence or drugs. It becomes a means by which emotional and psychological respite is possible; a place where thoughts, emotions and behaviors that have contributed to the homeless circumstance can be put on hold, at least temporarily in order to give the individual a chance to regroup, and decide on next steps once their shelter stay is over.

4.4   EMERGENCY SHELTER AS SANCTUARY: FROM RELIGIOUS BEGINNINGS TO THE PRESENT

Modern scholars in studying the history of sancturies consistently make assumptions about what it means to have sanctuary and how that impacts to some degree what an individual will make of the security and protection a place of sanctuary offers (Evans, 2002). Participants in this narrative study reveal a meaning of sanctuary that is rooted in their need to shelter themselves from past and present life events. This includes the experience of being homeless. Being homeless and other life events are deeply connected to the individual's sense of what it means to

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be in the world and live a complicated and sometimes chaotic life with little insight on how to change it. This complicated and sometimes chaotic life drives the decision to seek and enter a shelter program. It also drives the need to shelter oneself from such complexities. The act of seeking shelter assures individuals access to their own sense of personal sanctuary. That sanctuary solidifies the need for sheltering as an intended and realized outcome. It is, for participants in this study, the respite so badly needed at a time when escaping the harsh realities of life and being homeless are too overwhelming.

In the tradition of religious sanctuaries, emergency shelter lasting 45 days or longer can be a place where individuals are able to obtain respite, meet personal needs such as food and shelter, confirm or reject imposed social identities and prepare oneself for moments of transition, epiphany and/or self-reflection. Religious sanctuaries can offer momentary respite from personal and social responsibility and delay the experience of psychological and emotional distress by providing basic human needs such as food and shelter, and challenging the indivudal to seek quiet moments with God to strengthen their resolve for change. The focus is not necessarily on life's problems in the beginning, but rather taking a moment to have respite and start the process of seeking deeper connections to one's sense of self and a relationship with a higher power. The complexities of life are gradually introduced as part of the process of getting a better sense of self and connecting to a higher power. Ultimately the individual is challenged to begin to come to terms with one's life and take the necessary steps to chart a different course once the individual dares to step outside of the emergency shelter or "sanctuary".

This is similar to the experience this study's participants where emergency shelter comes to represent a place of sanctuary. The shelter represents a place where the individual can have those quiet moments and gradually consider the issues impacting the individual's life.

In children's literature, sanctuary is often portrayed as a place of refuge, adventure and transformation; a place where the innocent can retreat from the adult world and live a life where all is forgiven (Cowley, 2004). This is one of the motivations for seeking sanctuary, escaping the real responsibility of the lived experience. Safety from a physical, social or psychological threat is the attraction, and the "essence of the human nightmare" (p. 436) that is snatched up from the lived experience if only for a moment (Urgo, 1983). This is another motivation for seeeking sanctuary and sheltering oneself from the harsh realities of life; escaping the emotional burdens that make for distress.

In order to receive the full benefit of this childhood sanctuary, one must be protected both physically and mentally from the bad things in life in order to engage in a promised state of security and respite, even if that sense of security and respite is temporary (Cowley, 2004). Study participants talk about needing a sense of security; protection from the physical and mental harshness of their lives. They want to have respite while feeling safe. "I know I won't be hurt here. I can relax, get a good night's sleep and feel good that no one will hurt me here. I know I am safe, at least for the moment." This participant echoes this idea of childhood sanctuary where refuge from responsibility and and security from the bad things in life are needed. We will see this in the featured vignettes of Gary, Gina, and Shaun presented later in this chapter. Similar experiences of other student participants are integrated into these featured vignettes.

A small number of this study's participants took up the challenge of reevaluating their lives by participating in activities that could ultimately change the course of their lives. Most others, however talked about achieving initial sanctuary but with no real plan beyond their stay at the shelter. This was true for study participants Lisa and Marvin. Getting housing was what they hoped to achieve, but real strategies to achieve this were often abstract and loosely formulated in

terms of specific actions to take to ensure stable housing. For them, it appeared that it was enough to have that initial focus of respite, food, shelter and a place to have quiet moments. Marvin states, "I just need a place to take a break, rest my mind and body, and not have to think about my life and my problems. I just want to spend my time here doing the basics, eating, sleeping, bathing and staying off of the streets. Thinking about my issues and dealing with my life, well there is plenty of time for that."

But, for others like Emile, going beyond the initial need for sanctuary was key to moving their lives to a stably housed situation. He had hope that things would get better, and that his actions as well as his strong faith in God would get him into a more stable housing cirumstance. "I have faith that things will get better. I know I can make something happen for me. The shelter is a place to start and figure out what to do next. I believe I will find a job and a place to stay before leaving here."

The next section of the study explores various motivations that emerged when talking with participants about the decision to seek shelter. These patterns of motivation include escape from personal responsibility and life choices; respite from distressing life events; and being pre-emptive in escaping the burden of a homeless identity label. In addition, the idea of the possibility of transition while in emergency shelter is introduced. In this study, all of the twenty study participants were seeking emergency shelter to achieve some measure of respite, or rather sanctuary. As you will see in the next set of vignettes, sanctuary means most often escaping life's problems. Four study participants' stories are presented as vignettes that speak to this need. Their stories were selected because they resonated with the sentiments of the majority of study participants. In addition to the four stories that speak to a need to escape as a way to have sanctuary, unique ways of looking at transition are presented in two of the stories presented.

One point to note is that six of the study participants (out of twenty) indicated using the shelter as a place not only for respite or sanctuary, but also a place to transition into something more stable. Of these six participants, two were homeless for the first time. All of the other study participants hoping for transition had more than one experience of homelessness at some point in their lives. One vignette from a participant with multiple homeless episodes and one vignette from a participant with a first time homeless experience are presented to highlight the idea of transition from different homeless experience perspectives. Those transitional experiences include escaping the social label of homelessness and taking action to facilitate change. As with earlier vignette presentations, a narrator's commentary follows each vignette presentation.

The vignettes featured are presented to highlight the theme of sheltering for sanctuary. The commentaries that follow provide a theoretical framework for the discussion of these components and issues portrayed in the selected vignettes. In addition, the commentary engages the idea of sanctuary from the narrator's perspective which calls attention to how we as a society view sanctuary and its impact in the lives of study participants.

Miles and Huberman (1994, 2002) suggests that a discussion of the different components of an experience can allow for the description of elements as they occur within a particular experience and indicate how each element affects and is related to other elements in the process. It allows the researcher to show how the structure of these elements cohere into a complete portrayal of the lived experience. In this study, this achieved through the portrayal of participant vignettes and the narrator's commentary that follows.

While selected participant stories represents a key component of seeking sheltering (selected because their narratives resonate with the majority of the narratives told in this study

but with greater detail) to achieve sanctuary, excerpts from other participant narratives are woven into the narrator's commentary to give emphasis and credibility to the portrayed vignettes.

4.5   MOTIVATIONS FOR SEEKING SHELTER AND PERSONAL SANCTUARY PART I: FREEDOM FROM PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LIFE CHOICES

When I consider what personal responsibility means, it generally conjures up taking care of one's needs and doing what is necessary to engage society in a successful, functional manner. Individual choices are part of that responsibility. Society in general prides itself on personal responsibility and individual choice that seeks the benefit of the person and society at large. It is part of what gives an individual social membership. When talking with persons with a homeless experience, most would agree that personal responsibility and choices are a valued part of the human experience. However, the willingness and/or ability to be responsible for oneself and make choices that render personal benefit can create internal conflict for some.

The following vignette portrays this internal conflict. It is a portrayal of Gary's narrative of what it means to be homeless and in need of respite and to shelter oneself from life experiences. Selected paragraphs and sentences have been used to reconstruct Gary's perspective on personal responsibility and life choices. It is what he expresses he needs to shelter himself from. Gary is a 47 year-old African American male who has been homeless four times in his lifetime. He has a history of unstable living situations and substance abuse. Gary has been using drugs and living with different family members, friends or on the streets since he was a teenager. He works day labor, and is not necessarily interested in transitioning. He just

wants respite during his shelter stay. Transition is a consideration, but respite and sheltering for

this moment is the goal.

4.5.1 Gary's Story

So you want to talk about being homeless. Well I tell you, for me it goes all the way back to my childhood. I got treated like shit. My father was never around and my mother beat the hell out of me. She was always mad about something. I used drugs since I was 14. It numbs the pain you know. I guess you can say I've been angry most of my life. Girl I'm angry about all the way back when I started using drugs. All the way back to losing my license to drive; all the way back to malfunctioning, and then, all the way back to smoking a cigarette because no one would give me one today. I'm angry about the decisions I've made and making them as a child, making them as a teenager, a child, you know what I'm saying? I never had a chance to make a good decision because I never was taught as far as an adult, the way to think as an adult. It's just like I don't like it to be my fault, but it is, you know what I'm saying, and I'm angry about that. And I couldn't make a better decision than pick another cigarette. I couldn't make a better decision than to stop going to school. You know, I couldn't make better decisions than that and now I'm 47 and still making awful decisions. You know what I'm saying.

But coming here to the shelter means I don't have to deal with any of it. I'm getting some freedom for at least 60 days. I can do what I want and don't have to worry about where I'm going to sleep, eat or take a bath. I've never really been too stable you know. So the shelter is just another choice in keeping that cycle going. It's like a bear hibernating from the cold. They go inside buying time because they know eventually they have to come out. Eventually I'll have to leave the shelter, but for now this is where I take my winter naps. Ha. Ha.

It just seems like it could never end because you're hardly ever stable. And immune, I'm not immune, it's habitual. I seem to make these bad choices all of the time. I know it's like so bad, you couldn't even change your mind to do something different. It's been too long, you know. I'm overwhelmed with my ignorance. It's killing me, you know, and really I'm angry about it because I'd rather not be in it at all. Now I'm back to working for minimum wage and starting all over again as an adult. It's like a kid with a new job you know. At 47 you're back to starting like you should be at 16, at the bottom. I can't take responsibility for being 16 again, at the bottom. Who wants to admit that you did this to yourself? I don't have to be here at the shelter. Any choices I make in the next 45 days are mine, with or without thought for responsibility. You have 45 days to make different choices and be responsible for yourself. At 47, I don't think I'll be any different at

the end of the 45 days, but I know I have to do something different if I want to get out of this place. My first fifteen days are up. We'll see if anything changes between now and day 60. If you don't want to be responsible or answer to your choices, the shelter is not so bad. And that's what really gives me freedom you know; losing myself and not really caring about getting me back. Sometimes I feel like a failure you know, but on those days I just tell myself what does it really matter. Be happy and enjoy this temporary freedom. It's a lot of work for me and the situation is just one of many that have ended me up here. It's all connected to my past experiences, but what person's life isn't.

I don't like going out unless I got money in my pocket. To get that I got to go to work and stuff to be responsible, but it's hard. You're just not motivated most of the time. You wish you could go away so you contemplate suicide but not in that aspect, just not have the life that you have. You just wish you could get sick and die, real easy like. So you won't have to deal with this life. Your choices don't really matter when you're dead. Who cares about the work you do if it's minimum wage. That's all I could ever get and who cares. You just add all this work up now that you're 47, you're tired, you're sick, and you still got to do things society expects you should have done a long time ago. I mean, it's like ten-fold now, my life and the failures. So I go for the freedom of a shelter. They may judge you, but we're all the same here so what is judgment. I just want a break.

If life didn't require things it would be great, you know what I mean? If the shelter wouldn't require you doing stuff, you know, once you hit 45 days you have to go or ask for a 15 day extension. You have these things on your plate coming up, and you have to start worrying about doing this and doing that. Damn, now what am I going to do, you know. If they'd just leave you alone you'd be alright. Not really alright, but you wouldn't have to face your choices and could rely on the shelter to protect you from that. It's kind of like having your own sanctuary because you can just rest and not have to deal. That may not be what being homeless means to others, but for me it is not having to deal. If you're homeless and don't want to deal, the shelter is the next best step. Like I said, who really cares? It's all freedom to me; freedom from all of the ills of life and freedom to take a break and rest, at least for today.

4.5.1.1 Narrator's Commentary

The idea of personal responsibility and individual choices, and the disappointment with being in the situation of homelessness is highlighted as part of the experience of homelessness as told by Gary. Bowen (1978) would conclude that the idea of personal responsibility is functional in the context of lived experience. Ill-functioning choices or behaviors that inhibit one's ability to care

for themselves and be responsible can be problematic. This can, however, be eliminated when the individual is able to replace such choices with more responsible patterns of behavior. Gary believes that at his age, it would be too difficult to do this. In addition, the shelter experience has afforded him a personal sanctuary where he can shelter himself from his choices and life responsibilities. He has created for himself a semi-autonomous life with all of the protection, respite and safety a sanctuary requires. His shelter stay has evoked the "phenomenon of sheltering" (Elias and Inui, 1999, pg. 397) where he is given the chance to escape his current experience of living on the streets and doing drugs and to begin the process of evaluating his current situation of being homeless. Can he regroup and make different choices? How responsible can he be when it comes to decision making and choosing to deal with his drug problem? Gary talks about not being ready to or desiring to do anything other than what he is already doing. That is, doing drugs, staying on the streets, going into shelter, getting respite, going back to the streets, doing more drugs, going into shelter and so on. He is using the shelter solely for the purpose of sheltering himself from life responsibilities and getting respite from drugs and homelessness. In his words:

> The responsibility is too great; the fear of having to come to terms with my choices in life to hard. I could never handle it I don't think. That's why I am here. I don't have to handle it. I can just rest and let the real world do what it does without me. Who really cares if you are a drugee? Who really cares if you are homeless? I care, but I don't know to do anything than what I am doing, drugs and the streets. They are my escape. And when I need an escape from the drugs and the streets, there's always the shelter. I can shelter myself in the shelter.

Stark (1994) refers to this idea of sheltering yourself in the safety of emergency shelter as shelterization. She explains that it is a mentality that is almost institutional, where the individual has the tendency to immerse him/herself in the security of the marginal benefits of shelter living. The individual is too afraid of the responsibilities of the outside or life, and becomes content

with staying inside the protection of the sanctuary. In Gary's case, the protection of his personal shelter sanctuary protects him from taking responsible actions on his own behalf. This inability to take responsibility for oneself and exert responsible actions invariably contributes to becoming homeless, and can often impact negatively on the homeless experience (Warnes & Crane, 2006). This sentiment is further emphasized in the following excerpt from another participant that we will call Mara. She states:

> I'm homeless because of the choices I've made. Being homeless means mostly making bad choices in my life. I wish I had made different choices, but I didn't. I'm an addict. I've been living this homeless lifestyle for a while. I guess you could say that I am choosing to be homeless because I'm not doing much to not be homeless. It's too much responsibility to deal with my problems and try to keep a place to stay. It's hard you know, but it's my choice. Being homeless is bad, but it's my choice.

This unwillingness or inability to take responsibility for the choices made in life or take some responsibility for meeting your needs eventually keeps the individual tied to the homeless-shelter continuum. The homeless experience gets wound up in the sanctuary of sheltering and leaves the rest of society to wonder why it should be concerned when it is clear that the individual is less concerned about responsibility for self and more concerned about "having a place to take a break when needed." Sheltering for both Mara and Gary renders the person like an island unto him/herself, able to engage the social environment at their will. Responsibility and personal choices are personified by their action to use the shelter to meet their need at that moment. They are taking responsibility for their need for respite and refuge, but not much else. In my opinion, this is what the experience of being homeless and a need for sanctuary comes to mean for these participants.

A concerned citizen in the October 14, 2005 edition of *USA Today* struggles to understand how people end up in a homeless circumstance. He challenges the country to "look

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deeper" at people who are homeless and put the responsibility where it lies; at the doorstep of the

homeless person. This kind of social response is nothing new. However, if we are to get a

handle on the homeless-shelter continuum, perhaps this admonishment by the concerned citizen

to "look deeper" should not go unnoticed. The portrayal of Gary's story is an effort to "look

deeper" at the meaning of homelessness and consider what shelter living brings to that meaning.

We learn that in Gary's and Mara's case, being homeless involves complex issues such as

addiction, an ongoing homeless experience, and the need to escape their problems through the

act of "sheltering."

Shaun, a 37 year old White male who is experiencing his third episode of homelessness,

says taking a reprieve from personal responsibility and life choices is his primary need.

> Life is a bitch. Being homeless is a bitch. Being in a shelter, well it is what you
> want it to be. For me, it's my time to just chill for a minute; you know to get away
> from my shitty life and not be bothered. I just need a place to take a break for a
> minute. I've been down this road before. I've been homeless a few times, and I
> know where to go when I need a break from life. Other people come because they
> can't deal with their situation on the streets. They may be doing drugs, living with
> people who beat the shit out of them, selling their body or laying down with a
> man or woman just to have a place to stay. They get tired and want something
> different than the hell they have to deal with on the streets or with a live-in. They
> know if they come here to the shelter, they can get some kind of housing and you
> don't have to deal with anything or anyone if you don't want to. In the end, we all
> are just trying to get away from our lives. Being homeless is hell, but coming here
> (to the shelter) puts a little ice on it, even if it's just for 60 days. You know you
> are still in hell, but the shelter is a way to get out of it. You get to go inside in a
> building and within yourself if you want to. You know you are homeless because
> of where you have to sleep, but at least you can sleep, you know what I mean. At
> least you can close your eyes and just sleep, rest. I just need to get away from it
> all and just rest for a while. The shelter lets me do this.

Shaun's story suggests that he too has a need to escape the responsibilities of life, and

sees the experience of homelessness as something that can be dealt with through the act of

sheltering. This act of sheltering lends itself to his sense of personal sanctuary. It is how he will

achieve respite. This is the story of several of the study's participants, and most probably the story of many other individuals living the homeless experience for the third, fourth, or fifth time. It is part of the homeless cycle that the individual personal sanctuary is not prepared to address. It is this lack of personal responsibility and poor decision making that helps to motivate the act of sheltering.

4.6   MOTIVATIONS FOR SEEKING SHELTER AND PERSONAL SANCTUARY PART II: ESCAPING PAST AND PRESENT DISTRESS

The experience of homelessness is viewed in this study as a situation that manifest through life experiences that can render an individual, in the words of one research participant, "at the bottom of the barrel." It is seen both as a result of bad things happening to persons along their life's journey, and a result of bad decisions and choices based on previous bad experiences which lead to other bad events that the person is eventually challenged to deal with.

Distress is derived both from past life experiences and current situations. For some, the desire to seek refuge from past experiences so as to avoid dealing with the thought and emotion that is part of the undesired experience becomes paramount. In this study, that experience is centered in the context of homelessness. If housing has been unstable and family and friends are no longer available for support, living the experience of homelessness takes on new meaning, because the person has no support when they are challenged to deal with or not deal with their distress. The next vignette portrays a study participant's experience with homelessness and situation that led to this experience.

4.6.1 Gina's Story

The following is a portrayal of Gina's story of distress connected to her homeless experience focused on domestic violence and loss. Gina is a 27 year old African American female who has a life history of family dysfunction, domestic abuse, loss, substance abuse and poor mental health, although she reports not being given a psychiatric diagnosis. She says she is stressed out and just needs to check out mentally because her life "is really starting to cause problems that I can't handle right now." This is Gina's story.

> You want to know what I think about being homeless; what it means to me. Well, say for instance I know a lot of people who come from broken homes or in a home with domestic violence. And now they are homeless. You know domestic violence can make you stressed out, even as a kid. That's how you turn out; messed up in the head and always stressed out. It takes a different attitude. You lose someone close to you or you get abused, beaten up. That stresses you out too. It's a lot to deal with you know. It's your childhood, your adulthood and all the shit that happens in between that stresses you out. You just can't deal because you are so stressed out.
>
> A lot of people don't understand. My life was messed up, so I turned to drugs and alcohol. Now I'm here at the shelter because I just can't handle it. And then my twin brother got shot 2 years ago minding his own business. They thought he was someone else and shot him in cold blood. My brother and I were everything to each other. How am I supposed to deal with this shit you know what I mean? You lose your twin and everything is supposed to be okay. I don't think so, at least not for me. Everyone thought I would crack up, but I haven't yet, although I'm pretty damn close. The drugs, the alcohol and the men, they keep my pockets full you know. They keep me from going over the edge. So I came to the shelter to take the edge off of my stress and to get a much needed break from the drugs, the alcohol and the men. I could go to rehab, but they want you to talk about your stuff. I'm not ready for that yet so the shelter it is. You don't have to deal with that stuff if you don't want to. For me, my being homeless is a situation. It's something I got myself into for a lot of different reasons. But it's just one situation in my life. God knows, I've had many that are just as bad. I'm homeless right now, but eventually that can be changed.
>
> People here ask assume that you came from an abused family. They assume that you are on drugs and stuff like that. They think it's hereditary. If your family was messed up, it's no surprise that you ended up here at the shelter. It's the environment, the home and society that creates all of the problems. I learned that

in the last rehab I went to. Anyway, I just want to get away from my problems. I need to escape for a minute. It's too painful. I lost my brother two years ago and I don't think I will ever get over it. We were real close. People say I need to talk about it, but I can't right now. Maybe I will in my own time. It's just too hard.

Yeah, I'm depressed, but really I'm just stressed out. I left a boyfriend who was beating up on me and I couldn't take it anymore. It was hell, physically and mentally. You feel like shit most days. It's a hard life. It's just another bad situation for me. You probably hear that a lot, but for some of us it is true. Being homeless is hard, but dealing with your life is even harder. Lots of bad situations. I guess being homeless is a part of your life, but I don't deal with that either. I mean not really.

The shelter puts a roof over your head so technically you're not homeless, right. I can't deal with the thought of being like those people I see on the streets, so I come to the shelter to get away from it all. It's all just too depressing. The shelter isn't that much better, but if you're going to be homeless, better homeless in a shelter than homeless on the streets. You can at least catch a break and have some peace for a moment. No one really cares anyway when you're here, so you don't have to worry about your peace being interrupted. I just go to my room and I find quiet. I need this.

Talk about being stressed out. Being on the streets, now that's a kind of stress you don't want any part of. I mean that is hell. Going in to a shelter is kind of like the lake that sits on top of hell. If you don't want to fall in, I mean surrender completely to your life issues; you go to the shelter so you can take a break, regroup and decide what if anything you are going to do to deal with your pain. You're always dealing with the fact that you don't have a place to stay for more than a couple of months. It's really depressing.

I'm trying to adapt to being here at the shelter, but it's hard. I just want to meditate, do my thing and not have to think about how shitty my life is. I just need to rest or get some relief from my life and my issues. My brother died. He would curse me out if he saw me homeless. I don't want to live in a shelter, but sometimes when you need a break from your life, the shelter is the best place. You don't have to worry about folks bothering you here, and for 45 to 60 days, you can just chill. It's left up to you to do something different with your life while here. Me, I just want to turn out the lights for a minute and go to my own safe place in my mind. I need rest you know to chase away the demons. The shelter lets me do this.

4.6.1.1 Narrator's Commentary

Gina's vignette is a reconstruction of her narrative and highlights the distress that many in the homeless experience are faced with at some point in the homeless experience. Gina's vignette also highlights the need for "sheltering" and the use of shelter as a place of sanctuary in when needing to escape, "catch a break and meditate on life's issues". Gina sees her experience of homelessness as just another bad life event. Her story demonstrates the intersection of past life experiences or events and the current situation of homelessness. Her reconstructed story is an abbreviated version of how she views her life's journey in its totality. Gina views and articulates her life's journey as a plethora of traumatic experiences that have culminated into her current homeless situation.

In reconstructing Gina's story, I have attended to specifics that create a portrayal of distress and the need for sanctuary in an effort to interpret the meaning of the homeless experience both at the front and back door of Gina's journey of homelessness. Gina's distress is narrativized as reconstructed facts that shape my interpretation of how Gina locates "sheltering." It becomes a place of personal sanctuary that is used to cope with distressing events and the current homeless situation.

Research suggests that a large number of persons in a homeless experience have some type of psychological distress occurring at the time they are homeless (Kamineniecki, 2001; Finn, 1985; Jones & Crook, 2001; Kelly, 2001; Menke, 2000; Nyamathi, Stein, & Bayley, 2000; Roll, Tara, & Ortola, 1999; Wong, 2002), and that that distress can decrease after the individual becomes acclimated to their homeless experience (Snow & Anderson, 1993; Wong, 2002). Gina's vignette is an example of sheltering where her personal sanctuary is not dealing with her distress. She uses the shelter to help decrease the distress or at least gain some respite from the

distress she is experiencing as a result of life events. Her story presents situational factors that have resulted in the need to shelter herself and achieve some form of personal sanctuary as a way to escape distressing life events that require psychological and emotional respite in the present.

Gina's vignette, like most research on mental distress and homelessness (Goodman, Dutton, & Harris, 1995; Nyamathi et al, 2000; Roll et al., 1999; Wong, 2002) underscores the role distress plays in understanding the homeless experience, and the meaning made of the experience when distress is a significant component in how the individual has become and responds to being homeless. The act of "sheltering" and seeking personal sanctuary becomes the way to deal with the distressing experience. In Gina's case, several distressing experiences and a current distressing situation of abuse serves to protect her from the distress in the short-term, but may have negative, lasting impact if that distress if not addressed at some point in the homeless-shelter continuum. This is evidenced by research that suggest that individuals with substantiated mental distress or a history of poor mental health often experience consistent episodes of homelessness (Belcher, 1989; Belcher, Scholler-Jazuish, 1991; Bottomly et al., 2001; Shinn, Baumol & Hopper, 2001; Wong, 2002).

Study participant Mary, a 42 year old African American female, talks about losing her son more than 10 years ago, and not being able to keep a job or sustain housing for herself for any length of time since her son died. She says she is too distressed to deal with life and can't really function because of the pain of losing her son. She has no other children, and is disconnected from family members. Mary, like Gina has found distressing life events to be a compass for how she views and experiences being homeless. She contends that her current circumstance is a situation as a result of previous bad life events. All of these have culminated to this new experience of homelessness. Sheltering appears to be the logical response until she can

handle the thoughts and emotions associated with the distressing events such as the death of her son.

Gina is in the midst of her second episode of homelessness in the past 2 years. She has been sheltering to deal with her distress while trying to achieve personal sanctuary. Her adaptive strategies are complex and her framing of her homeless experience as a way to gain respite, "to take a break for a minute," is indicative of what personal sanctuary can provide for her. Respite and refuge is her goal. Mary uses sheltering to achieve the same goal.

Research suggests the factors indicated in Gina and Mary's homeless experience or situation are not uncommon among persons who have a homeless experience. In this study the need to escape from the distressing events in the present can be key for some when deciding to enter shelter programs. Challenging life's complexity is not an option at this point. I suspect that Gina's framing of the lived experience of being homeless (as well as for others interviewed) is contingent upon how the lived experience of distress and the need for sheltering impacts her life at this moment. In telling her story, Gina is called upon to retell past life events, experience being homeless in the present, and tell her story in a way that attempts to connect meaning of experience with the act of sheltering in a way that allows for some sense of personal sanctuary.

As Gina's story is reconstructed, I am challenged to identify, label and locate the meaning of Gina's experience such that sheltering in the midst of distress is represented and relatable. Gina's narrative vignette is my effort to make the idea of sheltering both personal while connected to the anticipated cultural experience of homelessness as understood by Gina and society. Gina's story is a tale of many yet untold stories that require a beginning reflection that can extract narratives like hers to make sense of the life events that facilitate the homeless experience, and be used to change the experience through this idea of sanctuary in the short term.

4.7   MOTIVATIONS FOR SEEKING SHELTER AND PERSONAL SANCTUARY PART III: TRANSITION AS A MOTIVATOR FOR ACCEPTING OR REJECTING THE HOMELESS LABEL

How one frames the individual experience plays a significant role in whether or not social labels are accepted or denounced when addressing a particular experience. While some persons experiencing homelessness readily accept the label of "homeless" and what that label suggest about who a "homeless person" is, others reject the label and social expectations associated with being called "homeless" (Eyrich, Pollio, & North, 2003; Feldman, 2004) This section considers sheltering in the context of homeless identity and the rejection or acceptance of such identity. The tension created in the personal and cultural story of a homeless identity is presented in the following vignette of Marco. It is further discussed in the narrator's commentary where other stories of social labels in the context of a homeless identity can create tension but resonate with individuals like Marco who is experiencing homelessness for the first time. The following vignette is Marco's effort at creating his own social construction of what it means to be homeless.

4.7.1   Marco's Story

Marco is a 27 year-old Caucasian male who is experiencing being homeless for the first time. He has had instances of unstable housing in the past where he has moved from a girlfriend's to his family. He has been homeless for the past 3 months and has stayed at an overnight shelter (which provides residents a bed for the night, but is closed between the hours of 7:00 am and 4:00 pm) several days prior to coming to the 45-60 day emergency shelter program. He has a history of substance abuse and poor intimate relationships with family and girlfriends.

His refusal of the social identity label of homelessness highlights the individual and social tension that he experiences as a result of the social categorization of his situation and experiences related to that situation. This is his story:

I'm homeless but not really. Even though being homeless is a constant reminder that you have failed in life, and been rejected by life, you still are a little part of this world and that is a 'big thing'. That 'big thing' is what allows you to get up each day and not really be homeless. That's when being at the shelter means having a place to stay and not being homeless; when you need to see yourself as still being a little part of this world. Otherwise, the shelter means being nothing more than the real reality, hmmmm, I'm homeless. I can't take that reality, so I hold onto that little bit that says you are still a part of this world.

Living in the shelter means you are at the bottom of the barrel. Homelessness is in your face all day everyday when you are at the shelter. You can avoid it on the streets because you don't really have to look at those people. You tell yourself you are better than them because they are on the streets. At least you have a place to stay, until you realize those same people on the streets are staying where you are. Then it's like, oh yeah, I'm homeless alright. You watch these folks and see yourself at the same time. It's like they let you know just how far you have fallen. Any little thing you do different from them sets you a part and you can tell yourself you are not like them. I'm not homeless like them. I get up everyday and look for a job. But at the end of the day, we are end up in the same place, job or not; at a homeless shelter.

And who do you think lives at a homeless shelter? So I guess I am like them, but not really. That's what you tell yourself to get through the day. I'm not really like these folks. They'll never call me homeless. I'm better than that. Homeless is your attitude, your mentality and actions about the situation. So I'm here in this shelter which suggests that I am homeless. But I don't have to identify with the label because I don't have their problems or mentality. I just had some bad luck, but I will get out of here. I just need to regroup, figure out what happened and get the hell out of here.

Think about it, being homeless in America is the most degradating experience that you can ever face. Um, there are several levels of it, you know, for being homeless and the degradation that follows it. You get characterize as being a lazy individual you know that I can't stand. I have a master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh. I'm looking for work everyday. I think from my experiences, my brief experiences, homelessness in America is a joke and being homeless is the punch line. So the attitude is to keep you in this situation because what do you deserve better. You are a homeless person for crying out loud. I guess it's the attitude that came along with the whole concept of being homeless in America.

People are seen as being shiftless, lazy, or they don't want to do anything but rob, steal and kill. That's a lot of garbage because people are killing people all over this city and homeless people are not involved. But still that stigma is attached. That's why I dress up, clean myself up and try not to let people see me leaving here looking like the rest of them. They know you are homeless in here, but on the outside you don't have to be. You're only homeless if someone else knows about it on the outside, right? Otherwise, you can look just like everyone else.

You see, you have to understand that some people have been in the system for years. They have 5, 10, 15 years of being homeless. So the system has learned to deal with them in a certain way. They treat them like you expect homeless people to be treated, badly. These people act like you expect homeless people to act. They have no self-respect or desire to do for themselves. They don't have a problem with being called homeless. I do because I know what it means to the rest of the world and I see what it looks like in here. I don't look like that and I won't be like that.

I understand that people have problems. I know what's it like to go inside of yourself, but at some point you have to come out and stop running from whatever brought you here. If you don't you are what society sees you as; just another homeless person. So much for any chance of redemption. Well, that ain't me. I'm in a shelter, but I refuse to be homeless in every sense of the word. It is my attitude you see that sets me apart. My attitude tells me I don't have to accept that label of homeless, even if society says I am that label because I'm staying here in the shelter.

4.7.1.1 Narrator's Commentary

Marco's experience with being seen as homeless and seeing himself as different from those he is

sharing this experience with demonstrate the individual attempt to not be caught between social

expectations and individual appraisal of the situation. In reconstructing Marco's story as a

vignette, I present Marco's effort to deal with the social or cultural story of homelessness by

appraising it from his own perspective; his own sense of self. He reassigns the social expectation

such that there is a clear distinction between how he sees himself versus how he believes society

sees others in the same situation. Malloy and colleagues (1990) suggest that for some in a

homeless experience, theoretically, they feel that they could be considered "homeless", but

because they do not identify with aspects of homelessness such as being street bums, drug

addicts or simply lazy, they construct their own identity of the experience and disaffiliate from the social identity label of "homeless." Marco's story demonstrates his effort to move toward a disaffiliation of the "homeless" identity label and position himself in environments that reinforce personal characteristics that suggest he is "different" from others in the homeless circumstance. He has a different attitude that will benefit him in a way that others who accept the "homeless" label have yet to access (Hyde, 2005).

It may seem counterintuitive, but this disaffiliation can occur while living in a shelter. Because the shelter provides the illusion of housing, individuals may tell themselves that they are not really homeless because they are not living on the streets (Malloy, Crist, & Hohloch, 1990). Several of the persons interviewed had no problem with the social label of homeless and in fact identify with the label. Gina and Gary are good examples of such. They clearly identify themselves as homeless and have no problem with the homeless label. Both have had multiple homeless episodes and come to embrace the label as a socially accepted description of who they are in the present.

Marco's story, as well as others interviewed, suggests that for some, being able to disaffiliate from the homeless label requires framing the experience as different from others in the experience. There is something about them that is different. Their attitude and drive to get out of the experience, even while living in a shelter sets them apart. The goal of transition, where change is iminent takes hold. In addition, if you do not look like the social expectation of "homeless" you don't have to acknowledge that you are, nor accept the "homeless" label. It is somewhat of a protective layer that personal sanctuary can provide because it protects the individual from negative outside perceptions, and gives the individual a place to escape from obvious indications of being homeless.

While Marco and a few others reject the social label of homeless, Gary as well as several others interviewed who have had a few episodes of homelessness readily identify with this social label and see it as no more than what it is; a label given to people who have no place to go accept the streets or a shelter. Gary proclaims:

> Yeah I'm homeless. If you ask me how I see myself I will tell you I'm homeless. That's who I am and who I have been for a while now. What's the point in avoiding it? You gotta be real with yourself. People on the street see you as homeless. Society treats you like you are a bum and looking to get something for nothing. That's what everyone thinks being homeless is about. Well I ain't looking to get something for nothing, but I don't have a place to go accept the streets and the shelter. By most people's standards, that means you are homeless. So, yeah, I'm homeless. Who here in this shelter isn't? right?

Dealing with the social label of homeless is demonstrated by study participants as either an act of acceptance or an act of rejection and self-determination. Regardless of whether or not the person accepts or rejects the social label, sheltering invariably becomes part of the characterization of the experience such that homelessness is genuinely connected to this characterization.

Marco's rejection of the homeless label speaks to his first experience with being homeless. For him, shelter living makes it difficult to maintain a sense of identity that is not affiliated with the homeless label, particularly after the individual enters the shelter (Osborne, 2002). Research suggest that the longer a person stays in a shelter program, or the more homeless episodes the persons experiences, the more difficult it becomes to disaffiliate from the "homeless" label (Christian & Abrams, 2003; Osborne, 2002; Hanks & Swithinbank, 1997) and be motivated to change the situation. Marco, in living his first homeless experience, seem motivated to change his situation. He appears to be ready for transition where he can exert change and personal agency over his homeless circumstance.

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Disaffiliating from the homeless experience appears to encourage acts towards transition for Marco, but can have a very different resolve for others. The tendency to exert less personal agency to change the homeless circumstance can serve to have negative outcomes for those who disaffiliate from the homeless label without taking some effort to become stably housed. They increase their likelihood of remaining homeless because they come to embrace the homeless label and live their lives accordingly. The attitude is, "if you see me as homeless, why do anything to change it."

Sanctuary again is desirable, but sheltering becomes essential because the individual can elude societal ridicule by retreating to a shelter experience. Some participants feel as if others see them as Marco puts it, "those fucked up people who deserve to be on the streets." Some even suggest that they see some of the shelter residents as deserving of living on the streets because of their drug use. They have bought into the cultural story of who is homeless and why. If they do not have the problems of addiction, they are somehow better than persons who do have this problem. It is one thing to be seen as homeless, but something quite different and more negative to be seen as homeless and an addict; or homeless with a mental health problem. Everyone is homeless in the shelter, but the stigmatizing label of addict, ex-con or mentally ill expands the level of societal rejection and disdain a person who is homeless might find themselves experiencing.

Persons interviewed in this study are dealing with antecedents like addiction, unemployment and unstable work histories, previous incarceration, poor relationship patterns, past foster care experiences and family dysfunction. Some are veterans, disabled physically and mentally, have a mental illness history, are dealing with depression and grief and loss issues; have experiences of abuse and neglect; and have learned poor coping behaviors that will keep

them trapped in their homeless circumstance. The participants of this study personify in many ways the cultural or societal negative views of people who are homeless. They in essence help to make the various arguments of the cultural story of homelessness as discussed in chapter 2. It is their stories that help us as a society to construct a meaning of homelessness and define what the homeless label means. This includes the shaping of a homeless identity for those living the homeless experience.

The social and personal understandings of a homeless identity are emphasized to highlight the huge impact a homeless label can have on shaping the homeless experience and the individual and social response to it. Being called homeless is a social label that is equivalent to a scarlet letter. It clearly delineates a social category where invisibility, isolation and in many instances rejection are par for the course.

The next vignette presented will offer additional insight on the connection between seeking shelter as a means for transition. Where a person is emotionally and cognitively in the homeless experience can determine how he or she views the social label of homelessness and whether or not the acceptance or rejection of such labeling fosters a need not only for respite, but also transition.

4.8 MOTIVATIONS FOR SEEKING SHELTER AND PERSONAL SANCTUARY PART IV: TRANSITION AS A MOTIVATOR FOR CHANGE

This next section deals with the idea of transition while sheltering, and the possibility of rethinking what it means to be homeless and have a place of sanctuary. Homeless programs, including social workers working for such programs, must consider that when individuals enter the shelter, they may be entering not only with the intent to have a place of respite but, for a few,

a place to exert and achieve change that results in stable housing in the short and long-term. That change is motivated by a need to achieve "home" and no longer live in the homeless experience. It is a different kind of space of homelessness where the person is an active agent in changing her or his circumstance and motivated by the idea of "having my own space where I am the boss and no one can tell me when to come and go, wake up or control what I do." This is clearly stated by one study participant.

The final vignette in this study is Tom's story. Tom sees his homeless experience as a situation that has survived his act of seeking shelter to achieve momentary sanctuary. Seeking shelter is at this point and action that moves him closer towards transition and change. He is looking to reconnect socially and act with self-determination in changing his current situation. He represents just a few that enter the shelter with the intent of transition. His story, like the other vignetts presented, however is compelling enough to be explicated here.

Tom, like a few other participants, engages the homeless experience as a temporary situation requiring some act of change through a personal regrouping and re-evaluation of one's life such that he is able to achieve stable housing in the short and long-term.

Tom's story emphasizes sheltering as a desire for reconnection, re-evaluation of personal choices and actions, change and empowering oneself to achieve change. It is in this instance that deliberate acts to promote opportunities for change move the homeless experience from one of safety and respite to one of uncertainty of the world outside, but with possibilities for change. The individual is able to consider the ideas of transition and personal agency (Krishnan, et al, 2004). It is time to regain control of one's life. The following vignette presents Tom's story of transition and the desire to become empowered to change his situation.

4.8.1 Tom's Story

Tom is a 39 African American male who is experiencing being homeless for the first time. He has had several losses including the loss of his home in a fire, a divorce, the loss of his children who now live out of state, and the loss of his job of the past 5 years. He is not concerned so much with what he has experienced as a part of being homeless or even what he makes of the experience. His goal is to focus on what he can do to change his situation in the short and long term over the remaining 21 days he has left at the shelter. In Tom's case, the act of sheltering to achieve sanctuary is temporary. He sees the shelter as a place to regroup and become more ready to transition into something more permanent. He responds to his current circumstance of being homeless with deliberate acts to change his situation.

> Being homeless for the first time in my life is a difficult place to be, but I will not let this take my life away from me. I can do something about this. I've been homeless for 2 months and I hate it, but I'm doing what the case manager tells me to get myself out of this situation. It is temporary and I will have my own place in another month. It's like I'm at a different place with all of this, being homeless and living here at the shelter. You don't really think about how messed up your life is until you are ready to do something about it. You think about where you have come from, and you think, damn, I have really fucked up. All of a sudden, your choices and your life are real. It's like you come face to face with your demons. You don't want to talk about it, but being homeless is real. Is this all my life is? I don't want my life to be like this. I have to take a long look at things. I have to do something different, you know. It's time for a change. I know I can do something different and something that works. I want to be in my own place and live my life like everyone else. I want to be like everyone else; have a house, kids, a nice car, a good job and maybe a dog. I just want to be like everyone else. You know you aren't when you are homeless.

> I know I can change my current situation. I know I can do this. And more times than not, you know, I tell myself I can survive. You don't give up trying because this can't be all of what your life is going to be. You have to keep plugging, and that's what I've been doing and God's blessed me so far. I mean, you know, I haven't come out of the quicksand yet, but at least I got my head up above where I can breathe. The angels are dancing on the walls if you know what I mean. I can feel the inspiration of a quiet place, kind of like a retreat center or something like people in church groups go to when they need to regroup and think about what

they will do differently in their lives. That's where I am. The shelter is my kind of retreat to regroup and figure out what I need to do differently.

I used to could figure these things out when I was a kid. I had a hard life with crazy parents, drugs, jail and all of the above, but that is not all of who I am. I believe I control my destiny and I'm taking some action to change its course. I keep that motivation. I don't know how religious you are, but a lot of that goes a long way when you find yourself here. It can be the last stop on the train to nowhere if you don't do something.

Yeah, God gives me the strength to keep going. So being here can be like a religious experience if you can find your own peace, on the inside. It's how I keep myself motivated. I want change and know I can control how I deal with being homeless with God's help. You know, like in your mind you think I'm doomed, but I think I will get out of this mess. I've gotten out of worse situations. I've never been homeless and I never plan to be homeless again. So for me, coming to the shelter is like having my own little safe house of Godly protection. Always something to pray for and be thankful for, but you gotta put some action into leaving here you know. Now I'm at that place where I can put forth the action needed to get out of here and never come back. I'm looking for permanent work; making the connections I need to get a place to stay; asking for help really, from the case manager and other shelter staff. I can use this place to help me get into something better.

Did you ever just wish for something and say; I know I've had this before. That's like being homesick. You say I know I had this; I was on top of the world. I remember what that was like. You forget that sometimes when you are homeless because it feels bad to be here, you know to be homeless. When I begin to forget what used to be, I ask myself, what happened to you? Where'd I lose it? I've got to find it and change this situation. That's how you more or less try to approach it changing things and taking responsibility for yourself. But you got to keep saying that. You know it's out there, and I'm going to get it.

4.8.1.1 Narrator's Commentary

It is important to consider the desire for transition, and efforts to achieve personal agency because it gives insight into how the individual in the homeless situation is dealing with and thinking about the situation. Working to secure transition out the homeless situation for a few participants in this study demonstrates a desire to move out of the homeless experience and hopefully stay out of it (May, 2000; Piliavin, Sosin, Westerfelt, & Matsueda, 1993; Sosin,

Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990). There is some research to suggest control belief differences impact how individuals view their homeless situation, and further whether or not they believe it is possible to get out of this situation (Wagner and Menke, 1991). If coping is effective, it can be the impetus for motivating actions that seek new behaviors and reinforce other positive coping behaviors that translate into successful transition.

While there are varying theoretical propositions for understanding coping in a homeless circumstance, this study considers that coping requires a "constant changing of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 142)." This description essentially places one's control perceptions at the cornerstone of coping with their homeless situation and asserting efforts to gain transition.

Exerting personal agency, or the individual's ability to manage his or her current situation changes the demands of the situation, and thus improves opportunities to change the experience (Lazarus, Kanner, & Folkman, 1980). In Tom's case, the goal is to change the experience of homelessness by exerting agency that brings about transition. The transition can be short or long-term, but the intent is the same at the point transition is achieved. The intent is to no longer be homeless. Transition becomes a process, and can change depending on perceived resources and an external and/or internal demand affecting how much or how little the individual believes he/she has over the homeless circumstance.

Transition as a matter of changing responses to deal with a situation is a function of the person-environment relationship, and can be seen either as directed towards changing the environment externally, or directed internally (Billings & Moos, 1981; Moos & Billings, 1984). The meaning of the situation is changed to reflect individuals' ability to cope using the internal

and external resources perceived to be available to them. Any shift in the person-environment interaction elicits change in the coping response, and a re-evaluation of what is happening and what can be done. In this study, only six individuals out of the twenty interviewed talked seriously about transition and exerting personal agency. They were actively pursuing employment, permanent housing and other social resources that would enable them to get out of and stay out of the homeless experience. The meaning of seeking shelter to achieve sanctuary for them was becoming housed.

4.9 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS PART I: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF SANCTUARY

Through the course of this study, I came to understand that experience works to shape a situation. Even more so, situations often define themselves with or without the cooperation of experience and the meaning made of it. I initially engaged the act of narrating about the lives of others as one of experience, driven by my need to make sense of experience. What I struggled with throughout this narrative is that when retelling the stories of others, sometimes the emphasis, from the point of view of those telling their story, is on the present situation and not necessarily on the life experience in its totality. Narrative researchers seem to agree that there is a narrative quality both in talking about one's life experience and the experience of living in a particular situation (Thompson & Pillai, 2006). When considering one's told story, the individual may situate their life events in the context of past experiences related to their current situation (Thompson & Pillai, 2006), but for participants in this study, the current situation of living in a shelter is the focus of their story. The experience of being homeless is ever present, and often used interchangeably with living in a shelter. The difference for some. however, is

more separate expressions of being homeless and seeking shelter are used depending on the meaning of the event being described by the person telling the story. This was keenly observed in those participants who were seeking shelter to achieve transition. Their expressions of being homeless was framed with clear expectations of actions they would take to make stable housing a reality. Being homeless was a temporary situation. It was an unwelcome life experience, but none the less treated as a temporary situation that could be changed.

When listening to the interviews in this narrative, the distinction of experience and situation was described in the context of past life events and the current situation of homelessness. For example, some would say, "you experience things that you can't imagine you would experience in a lifetime" when talking about life events connected to their current homeless circumstance. Others would say things like, "there is no situation worse than being homeless. It's a bad situation for anyone to be in, but for me a temporary situation." These sentiments were expressions of how they saw their current situation, notwithstanding past life events related to their current homeless situation.

Hanninen (2004) explains that for some, a situation can refer to actual conditions of life such as being homeless and the various possibilities, resources and restrictions of action among which the individual finds him or herself. These are partly beyond the individual's control, but partly the result of his or her own actions. This helps the individual to make sense of the situation, and connect that to other life events or lived experiences. Those experiences refer to the inner narrative of one's life which are the stories you tell others about your life, the stories you tell yourself about your life, and the interpretation of these stories that ultimately render some meaning of experience, even if seen as situational (Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argysis, 1989; Bruner, 1990; Koch, 1998; & Riccoeur, 1981).

Narratives have a way of summoning an experience and allowing the creation of stories that explain and perhaps justify the lived experience. When you ask people about their lived experience, they tell their stories as narrative to make sense of the experience being described (Richardson, 1990). This requires the narrator, in this case me the researcher, some measure of connectivity and/or familiarity and understanding that attempts a re-imagining of the lived experience of homelessness. The value that it affords in my understanding of experience, meaning and the impact of a different kind of "truth claim" that resonates beyond the homeless experience, becomes paramount. This is where, as Gallagher (1992, p. 75) suggests, "interpretation becomes an ocillating body of this very summoning of what is familiar, what is understood, and what is the source of resolve as the story teller attempts to responsibly bridge the demands of familiarity, understanding, and the resolving of experience."

The argument that meaning and not necessarily truth associated with an experience is a legitimate end product of inquiry provides a framework for this narrative. To reframe Goffman (1974), events of a situation are not always "real", but the staging of the situation and, ultimately, experience itself is real when talking with the person who experiences and retells the event. The ability to locate, perceive, identify and label what is "real" to the person who has lived or is living the experience and that of the person retelling the event is "realness" that unfolds in narrative (Goffman, 1974). Hence, the emphasis is not so much the facts of truth from my understanding or that of the study participant, but rather the meaning portrayed as a result of the experience. As one study participant proclaims:

> Do you think the things I am telling you are real? Do you think it is really like this for people who are homeless? Well I tell you for me, being homeless sucks; and that's real! That's the meaning I make of it. It's real in my life and it sucks all day long. No matter if you are homeless one day or 1 year, being homeless sucks.

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This participant is telling me his story with the idea that this is the truth of his story as he is experiencing it in that moment. The realness of the situation lends some truth to his experience, but the meaning he makes of the experience is the more compelling and complex piece. It commands centerstage if you will, and allows me to situate the "realness" of all of the vignettes presented with a measure of experience in the context of a present situation of homelessness. Their "realness" leads me to the idea of sanctuary, and that seeking emergency shelter is somehow connected to the need to achieve a place of respite or sanctuary.

This narrative makes the point that seeking emergency shelter to achieve sanctuary is part of the "real" and "truthful" experience of homelessness for those interviewed in this study. This seeking of emergency shelter is drawn from the very real situation of being homeless with no other options but emergency shelter. In giving voice to the idea of seeking sheltering to achieve sanctuary in this narrative, and the meaning made of it, I am challenged constantly to seek a narrowing of the gap between the story I tell, the experience drawn from society that tells people how to tell their stories, and the voices of study participants that gave light ultimately to the story told about them in this study. In other words, a narrowing of the gap between experience and situation.

Consider the question of telling about experience as queried by Burk (2000). Burk asserts that according to Dewey:

> Experience in the broad sense is a field in and a part of thinking that takes place central to human nature. Experiences are efficacious, directed, dynamic with a beginning and end, and active throughout. Experience subsumes theory and fact, hypothesis and evidence, reason and observation, thought and perception. It is a philosophy and/or psychology of logic where rules of deductive logic can be violated such that the logic provides variations of what makes sense to the hearer and the teller. Situations on the other hand lend themselves to proof of the external world with common sense truisms concerning an event. (pp. 95 & 97)

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Put simply, every experience has its ground and that ground can start with a situation. The two become fluid at some point, and serve to shape a lived representation of an individual's life. The vignettes highlighted in this section emphasize the told story as one of past experiences and the current situation of homelessness. The situation of homelessness for this study's participants is connected, in every case, to some past lifeevent with experiences that set the stage for the current circumstance or situation. We see through the vignettes and commentaries, experiences of distress, abuse, grief and loss, addiction, family and societal rejection, negative social consequences and life histories of instability. We also see a sense of resiliency for a few who are determined not to be controlled by their negative life experiences, but rather to use their current situation of being homeless and living in a shelter to make different choices and work to gain a sense of personal agency to change their situation and rewrite their life story. It is here where this narrative becomes keenly interesting and exciting. This next section presents a discussion at the point where the potential to rewrite the experience and reframe the situation of being homeless from one of powerlessness to one of empowerment is revealed. It represents the possibilities of change through self-reflection. It is the conclusion of this narrative portrayal of homelessness.

4.10   CONCLUDING THOUGHTS PART II: THE ACT OF BEING SELF-REFLECTIVE IN TELLING ONES' STORY

Listening to people tell their life stories is a curious thing. You never are quite sure what will be revealed or how both the listener and the storyteller will react to the story being told. This act of telling one's story and exploring what the storied experience has been, brought me full circle when I considered my past hesitation to inquire about what it means to be homeless.

A curious thing happened as I conducted interviews with study participants. After completing three or four interviews, I began to notice comments made by study participants regarding how good it felt to tell their stories. They suggested that they had not intended to tell as much as they had, and further that they had not expected to feel emotional and experience certain thoughts about their lives. As indicated by study participants, these emotions and thoughts had gone unspoken until this study. While this was not the goal of the interview, participants found themselves being self-reflective and challenged to acknowledge certain truths about their lives that resulted in mixed emotions and thoughts about the experience of being homeless and what it means to them to escape that and other life experiences.

Study participants indicated that the act of telling their stories as being "therapeutic" because there had been a decidedly genuine effort to avoid dealing with not only their current situation, but past experiences contributing to their current situation. Telling their stories, for several, helped them to reframe how they saw their experience, the meaning made of the experience, and the new responsibility of now dealing with a somewhat self-examined life that could serve to help change their situation, or at least have some impact in changing the experience for others who find themselves in a similar situation. Being self-reflective somehow became empowering, even if acts beyond this self-reflection kept them in the homeless circumstance.

Boyd and Fales (1983) define reflection as the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and experience. It can result in a re-evaluation of one's actions and thinking, and encourage self-awareness that can trigger, at least, a curiosity for change, and, at most, full critical analysis of self and circumstance or situation that result in improved understanding of the

interconnectedness between behavior, thoughts and emotions associated with one's current experience and/or situation (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Thorpe & Barsky, 2001).

The vast majority of research participants spoke of the recounting of their homeless experience as being cathartic and empowering, promoting self-reflection and an opportunity to reconsider their current situation regardless as to whether or not they intend to or were able to do anything about it. Is it possible to achieve something beyond shelter and transient living for those who are able to accomplish this? Some study participants suggested that telling their story made them want to, on some level, move to change their situation in a way they hadn't considered before telling their story. As Gina, one of the vignettes featured in this study puts it:

> It's like you don't really think about how messed up your life is or has been until you actually start talking about it. You think about where you have come from, and you think, damn, I have really messed up. All of sudden, your choices and your life are real. It's like you come face to face with your demons. Until you started to ask me questions about being homeless and being here in the shelter, I never talked about it. Who wants to talk about it you know. I can't help but to be real when I talk about it because it's right there. It's like looking through a glass window with your eyes wide open. You see what you want to see or can handle seeing, but unless someone ask you to look out of the window, you don't have to see nothing. I mean you don't have to look. You just sit in here and see everyone else's crap. It's not your crap so you can just chill, you know. But now that you come in here and ask me to talk about my life as a homeless person, I mean wow. Now I have to look out of that window and see my own crap. I think, damn, is this all my life is? I don't want my life to be like this. I have to take a long look at things. Maybe I'll think about it just for today since talking to you, but that's longer than I've ever thought about it before you know.

Gina's observations were like many of the study participants upon completing or nearing completion of the interview. Participants were not asked to be self-reflective upon concluding the interview, but seemed to naturally recognize the value of telling their story once they had finished. It was if they had a light bulb moment. I myself shared in this light bulb moment by asking participants (after the third study participant naturally became self-reflective) to reflect on how they felt about telling their story once they decided they had shared enough about their

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lives. The monetary incentive was a key motivator in getting participants to tell their stories initially. However, I had not considered, and I do not think many of them anticipated, that recounting their lived story of being homeless would have a self-reflective effect that challenged their perception of how they saw themselves and how they saw their experience of being homeless and staying at a shelter. It was if an unanticipated pre-emptive act of storytelling began the process of life examination and the reconsideration of what their life experiences mean in connection to the past and present. They now had to consider what they will do or have/have not done that will impact their future from this moment forward.

Marco describes his storytelling as "like getting a heavy load off of your chest." He, like most of the participants, indicated that no one had ever asked him about what being homeless has been like and what it means. No one had really asked him about why he came to the shelter. It was assumed that he came because he had no other place to go and did not want to be on the streets. While this is true for all in the physical sense, the decision to seek shelter is much more complex as told by the vignettes. Marco suggests:

> It really made you think about being homeless and living at a shelter; why I really came here. It really does mean more than just having a place to sleep inside. When you hear yourself telling your story, you almost can't believe it's you. Who would have thought that I would end up here? I'll be thinking about this long after you are gone, but I'm glad I told my story. Maybe it will help someone else so that they never end up here.

Doing this type of study where individuals are able to tell their stories gave me the chance to hear their voices in a way that I had not heard before, and further to have them raise their voices in an environment where most often silence is the action that keeps their homeless wheel turning. It was important to have someone listen to their story as they told it. In the words of Gary:

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It makes you feel like someone cares about you, you know; like your experience is just as real as anyone else's. People don't see you like everyone else, and for a long time now, I have not seen myself like everyone else. Talking about this though, I think, damn, my life is messed up. I'm not like everyone else in many ways, but in some ways I am. I mean, who hasn't had a messed up life at some point right.

It seems evident that the unanticipated angst of telling one's story can result in mixed thoughts and emotions about the experience of being homeless, but can also have a cathartic effect that moves the individual towards a re-examination of his or her life, even while seeking some sort of personal sanctuary to deal with the past and present harshness of life events.

The therapeutic utility of writing one's story has been well documented in recent years (Greenberg & Stone, 1992; Suedfeld & Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999). Telling one's story often has a similar effect, and creates opportunities for self-empowerment and change that can help persons with a homeless experience fully participate in the helping process such that they are able to transition from being homeless to being housed, and be an active participant in dealing with issues that have contributed to their homeless experience (Rowe, Benedict & Falzer, 2003).

If the notion of sheltering as a way to achieve sanctuary is to have full utility in recounting the homeless experience, using narrative to retell aspects of that experience should be connected to future possibilities of change and a willingness to consider the potential of transition when addressing the experience. The act of self-reflection, though not intentional in this case, became a willing partner in the reconsideration of the lived homeless experience. It challenged me as a researcher and practitioner to embrace personal truths however they are recounted, as a new opportunity to reconsider how I see the experience of homelessness and what can be done to end it, at least for those who are willing and able to help themselves to this end.

4.11   FINAL CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study began as a narrative inquiry of homelessness with the intent of exploring the cultural and personal story of homelessness, and draw from those stories, implications for social work intervention strategies with persons in emergency shelter. From the key theme that emerged, seeking shelter as a place to achieve sanctuary, additional patterns of motivation for seeking shelter were revealed. They included the need to escape personal responsibility; the need to escape the emotional impact of past and current traumatic events currently influencing the homeless circumstance; the need to escape from the social label of "homeless"; and for a few, the need to escape the current homeless circumstance and transition into something more stable. This study, as observed from the stories presented, slowly evolved as one that did not address so much the full experience of homelessness, but rather one aspect of that experience, seeking emergency shelter and motivations for doing so.

Ultimately, this study, much like those living the experience, could not escape the influence of cultural understandings of how people come to see themselves and subsequent actions taken when personal safekeeping is somehow compromised. This study, in the end, shed some light on one aspect of the homeless experience. This was, in part, due to the complexity of the homeless experience and the ongoing process of the experience for those living it. It is indeed an ongoing learning process for those who dare to explore the experience of homelessness through narrative. Ultimately, this narrative process reveals that there remains much to be gained from having individuals tell their stories and consider the impact of retelling their stories.

The findings of this inquiry offer one insightful contribution to the issue of homelessness that has not been explored; that being the insight gained as participants reflected on their recounting of their lives, and how their cultural selves shaped how they saw the lived experience

of homelessness. In the final analysis, this study suggests the importance of telling one's story and its influence on the retelling of that story, both by the participants and the researcher.

Individuals most often will tell the story of their lives through their internalized cultural selves (Schwandt, 1999). This held true for the author of this study as well. The study gave way to a narrative about the homeless experience through familiar assumptions, expectations and interpretations of the researcher drawn from the cultural story. The cultural story ultimately shaped how the study was narrated, the findings of the study, how participants saw their homeless experience, and the struggle to resolve the conflict with the internalized cultural self and that of a more empowered narrative experience that challenges both the author and study participants to re-imagine the story of homelessness as one with the potential for a different beginning, middle and end. It is, for this researcher, the point where recognition of the true narrative process signals the emergence of an honest narration of the homeless experience from my perspective. That point is perhaps starting the next narrative undertaking on homelessness with the participant's reflections as opposed to the actual interviews.

As with any narrative, knowing where to start in the process of understanding and making sense is ongoing and the challenge of narrative work. There perhaps is no happy medium; just the struggle of learning what is narrative in the context of storytelling and coming to terms with what is "real" as not only a matter of interpretation, but a matter of what we come to understand in the process of telling our story.

In the next and final chapter of this study, I use this idea of self-reflection to introduce a sanctuary model of service delivery where the therapeutic utility of personal narrative might hold at least one key to unlocking the cycle of homelessness and/or the prevention of future homeless episodes. Policy implications are discussed in the context of the proposed model where

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opportunities for respite and transition might be achieved. The goal is make the proposed intervention relevant to client-centered services that are collaborative, supportive and empowering, even if sanctuary (respite) is the sole desire of the person entering an emergency shelter program.

5.0   SANCTUARY AS AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

5.1   CHAPTER PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This final chapter brings into focus the interpretive process that Gadamer (1997) calls a "dialogue with the text" (p. 374) where understanding homelessness becomes a conversation of logic with genuine questions that "bring out the not yet determined possibilities of a thing" (p.375). The chapter begins with a questioning of the broader cultural story and how we as a society come to see ourselves based on the stories told to us through cultural or historical experience. The chapter then transitions to a questioning of the current homeless service model by considering the possibility of a different service approach. That service approach challenges service providers and the individual in a homeless circumstance to frame the experience and service approach as one where the provision of a safe place of temporary housing is connected to opportunities for respite, self-reflection, and change. Research and policy implications conclude this chapter.

5.2   SHAPING THE BROADER CULTURAL STORY IN THE STORIES WE TELL ABOUT OURSELVES

Bruner (1986, 1987, 1990) states that our experience of life and self are profoundly influenced by the stories we tell as well as the stories told about us. As human beings, we organize our experiences in the form of stories. Narratives or personal stories provide opportunities for

interpretations and meanings, and further invite a telling of the multiple stories that can be told about an individual's life. The homeless experience is one such story embedded in the personal narrative and shaped by the broader cultural context. As suggested in the personal narratives in this study, there is a measure of tension between the personal narrative and the broader cultural story, particularly as it is told about individuals who are grouped into a social category with many social assumptions and expectations.

There is the assumption that being homeless means living on the streets, living in a shelter, having little to no education, being lazy, unwilling to work or contribute to society, as well as a relying on handouts to meet the needs of the individual. It is expected that an individual in a homeless circumstance has mental health problems; problems with addiction; a history of abuse; and most probably cannot or will not maintain stable employment to meet housing needs. The personal stories collected in this study suggest that all of these assumptions and expectations may be true to some extent. However, these assumptions and expectations are not without significant complexity. The biographical vignettes reveal life stories with challenging beginnings, tougher present circumstances and often uncertain futures. These vignettes reveal a complicated lived experience where being homeless is just one component of an often disconnected and overwhelming life.

In the broader dominant cultural story, the lives of participants in this study are like a double-edged sword. The dominant story can make their lives coherent, but their telling of their lives can, as White and Epston (1990, p. 11) suggest, "Prune from experience, those events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories" that we and others have about individuals who are homeless. In this way, much of their lived experience goes unstoried and constrained because they, like the rest of society, treat their stories as if they are non-existent in as much as we can

justify their existence (Madsen, 2007). In other words, individuals living the homeless experience often are not asked to tell their stories because society and in some cases the individuals themselves do not want to believe anything different than what we already understand about their lives. When they do get the opportunity to tell their story, it is most often told and interpreted in the context of the broader cultural story. It is how we and how they have come to understand their lives, to make sense of the problem of homelessness and respond accordingly.

What is unexpected is what happens during the course of telling one's story. The act of telling one's story by default requires a measure of self-reflection. That reflectiveness can spark insight and alternatives to the dominant story when the storyteller is asked to reflect on the telling of their story. That reflectiveness can invite an opportunity to challenge the cultural assumptions and expectations, and start a process of re-examining the influence and power of the cultural story. That reflectiveness is the perfect place to begin the process of reframing not only the experience of homelessness, but all of the other events embedded in that experience. It is the place where sanctuary or respite is possible, while introducing the idea of personal agency or empowerment. Individuals are given the power and authority to tell their story within the context of the cultural experience (Gadamer, 1989), but with the consideration that they have the ability to influence and change not only the story they tell about their lives, but shape and possibly change the dominant cultural story told by society.

I have come to understand through this narrative study experience, the importance of the dominant cultural story and its influence on the telling of one's story. Individuals most often will tell the story of their lives through their internalized cultural selves (Schwandt, 1998, 1999), where the identity of an experience becomes familiar through the assumptions, expectations and

interpretations of the cultural story. As individuals who are homeless begin to confront their internalized cultural telling of who they are through self-reflection, personal issues such as substance abuse, alcoholism, loss and abuse challenge their cultural selves and bring into focus the connection of life events. There is the recognition of who they are at the moment they narrate their lives. Their lived experience is not only understood in the socio-historical, but also in the very personal, context..

Everyone has a story to tell about who they are and how they make sense of where they are at any moment in their lives. As the narrator of this study's story of homelessness, I have come to recognize a truth that renders the deliberative process as one filled with tension and resistance (Huber, Huber, & Clandinin, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 2004) when considering the influence of the cultural story and what that influence means when telling of the lives of those with a homeless experience. By this I mean that the act of deliberation falls prey to tension that arises when there is an attempt to interrogate what experiences mean in the lives of others, and what that meaning elicits in our understanding and telling of the lived experience. Several study participants, like myself, are attempting to interrogate the meaning of their lives as the story is told. What has it meant at this point of narration? Is there any meaning other than what is already understood? It is complicated and leaves both me, the researcher, and the study participants struggling to come to a place of less resistance in trying to make sense of their lives. I go back and forth in trying to make sense of what being homeless means in their lives. It is apparent that study participants experience this same tension when they become self-reflective at the end of telling their story. This can be a good thing, as will be illustrated later in the discussion of the Sanctuary Model and its potential to bring some resolution to this tension of understanding self versus the known understanding of the cultural self.

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As I slog through the idea of tension, and come to terms with my own resistance to understanding the experience of homelessness as something deeper than what the dominant cultural story presents, I ask the question of what can be learned from the study participants' reaction to telling their very complicated life histories. What can be done differently at the point the individual enters emergency shelter? We learn in this study that the need for respite, which is finding a safe place to take a break from whatever problems have rendered the individual homeless, is primary for participants. In addition, the need to regroup and figure out next steps is also a key motivator for seeking emergency shelter services. Those needs, it seems, can often compete with the social or cultural expectation to be self-motivated to change the homeless circumstance. This next section proposes a Sanctuary Model of emergency shelter services, where value of the individual lived experience is emphasized and used to initiate change and promote the potential for successful transition into a stably housed circumstance. It is a model where the cultural story is renegotiated, and a paradigm shift of the homeless story is encouraged such that the emphasis is not only on the impact of the current homeless situation, but its intersection with life events and our understanding of how individuals see these events when they come to their own crossroad of change..

This next section considers the complexities of the stories told in this narrative, and the need for some type of relief from the harshness of the realities of those stories. That relief comes in the form of a practice model of Sanctuary (Bloom, 1994). This model suggest service possibilities that invite the service provider and the individual to engage services differently by using the lived experience to create new opportunities for change through acts of safety, self-reflection and empowerment.

5.3 PROPOSING A SANCTUARY MODEL IN EMERGENCY SHELTER SERVICES

The Sanctuary Model was orginally developed by psychiatrist Sandra Bloom (1994) in a short-term, acute inpatient psychiatric setting for adults who were traumatized as children. The Sanctuary Model rests upon the basic premise that the therapeutic environment, in this study's case, the service environment, is a critical determinant in facilitating potential transition. The model integrates four conceptual frameworks: Trauma Theory, Social Learning Theory, Nonviolence, and Complexity Theory. For consideration in this study, all except the theory of nonviolence is proposed to frame a sanctuary model of emergency shelter intervention. Trauma theory draws upon a large body of research on the biopsychosocial and existential impact of overwheleming stress on human development and functioning (Abramovitz & Bloom, 2003). Social learning theory emphasizes the active use of the entire environment as a potential agent for change. Complexity theory provides a way to understand complex adaptive systems – that is individuals and service environments – and to utilize their innate capacity for change (Abramovitz & Bloom, 2003).

The Sanctuary Model utilizes the identified theories to provide a framework for understanding the various factors impacting the lives of individuals who are homeless, and reframe how services to this group are delivered. The model further redefines how service providers view the problem of homelessness and proposes alternative considerations when administering services at the point of initial entry into service provision. In this case, that point of initial provision is emergency shelter services. The goal of the Sanctuary Model is to redefine basic assumptions about the problem (homeless experience), reconsider how the service environment can be made optimal to respond to the experience in a meaningful way, respond to the various issues impacting the current homeless circumstance, including a need for respite, and

invite the shelter resident and the service provider to individualize service response. The expertise of both are considered as key in developing strategies (in this case in the short-term) that prepare the individual for more long-term cognitive demands (thinking and processing information) and behaviors (actions in response to thought and process) needed to promote stability and eventually permanent, stable housing.

Bloom (1994) states that the Sanctuary Model shifts the debate about the nature of the problem by changing the definition of the targeted group, in this case the homeless, from "homeless people" to people who are experiencing homelessness. It may seem like the language used in service delivery is not important, but calling someone "homeless" is connected to all of those negative social assumptions and expectations made about the experience. Identifying the individual in a homeless situation as a person who is experiencing homelessness strips those social expectations by acknowledging the individual lived experience and a life with value that is being impacted by a situation of homelessness. The individual is no longer just a social category with negative cultural beliefs, but seen in the context of social and moral interpretations and values where individual lives are seen as complex and filled with multiple challenging experiences that shape their current situation of homelessness.

The Sanctuary Model, in redefining how service providers engage the issue of homelessness, encourages a renegotiation of how services are provided. This means a recognition that some individuals come to emergency shelter often with overwhelming losses, coping responses that are sometimes fed by addictions and abuse, and challenges to the idea of personal responsibility due to poor decision making and the inability to identify alternate choices or options in response to particular problems.

The model proposes a framework called "SAGE" which is an acronym for safety, affect management or grieving, and empowerment. Bloom and colleagues (2003a, b) modified this acronym in later works with troubled teens to be called SELF where S represents safety, E represents emotion, L represents loss and F represents future. This was done to reflect a more meaningful connection to individual experiences and a more relevant conceptual framework that individuals can cognitively and behaviorally access in responding to the experience. The SELF framework will be used in the remainder of this study's discussion to be more reflective of those cognitive and behavioral connections represented in the experience of homelessness.

Safety refers to safety for self, safety in relationships and safety in one's environment. As noted in chapters 2 and 4, safety is a challenge for individuals in a homeless situation because they most often are either fleeing abusive circumstances, or have experienced abuse in their personal relationships at some point in their lives. Affect modulation or connecting to one's emotion refers to how the individual connects to their emotions in response to memories, distressing events and conflictual relationships. Several of the study participants emphasized the overwhelming experience of emotion when they consider their losses and other distressing life events. For example, one study participant stated, "I just can't handle this. I go from being sad to angry to just confused. Up and down all of the time. Thinking about my life and feeling my emotions if just too much." Experiencing the emotions of the present and past is a very real part of living a homeless experience. Whatever events have contributed to the homeless circumstance are connected to emotion. Integrating the use of emotion management holds benefit for those struggling with their response to life events as well as their thoughts or beliefs about their current circumstance.

This leads to the next matter of loss. It refers to the losses and the grief one experiences at all levels of the lived experience. Several study participants indicated losses such as deaths of loved ones, loss of jobs, and interestingly, a loss of their sense of dignity and sense of social membership once becoming homeless. All had obviously lost their housing, and many had lost their sense of who they were. This part of the model offers opportunities to identify what the losses are and begin a process of recovery. That process is linked to the lived experience such that meaning of the losses are identified and reframed in order to empower rather than disempower. The person begins to have some say in how they experience their losses in a different way. The meaning is redirected to promote change, and the loss is connected to the possibility of a future that is hopeful and in the hands of the individual.

Herein lies the final component of the Sanctuary Model, the future. The future focuses on empowering the individual to try new stories about one's life, taking on new roles and ways of self-identifying, and learning behaviors that promote a measure of individual control and responsibility for what happens to the individual (Bloom, Bennington-Davis, Farragher, McCorkle, Nice-Martini, & Wellbank, 2003). Part of that empowerment also means, on the part of the service provider, creating positive interactions with shared assumptions, goals and plans of action that lead to change, transition and ultimately stability. The idea that one can take control of their lives and renegotiate their destiny is paramount. The idea that current service provision can change how it engages service delivery, including the individual, can be the key to unlock the door to success in preventing future homeless episodes.

One of the key features of the Sanctuary Model is the emphasis on intensive staff training where staff persons are challenged to deal with their own historical and social perceptions of who is homeless. In addition, issues around loss, emotion and empowerment are presented to service

providers as a framework for experiencing their own lives. This helps the service provider to consider how society sees them, how they see themselves, and the stories they tell or perpetuate as a result of how they engage service delivery. This is done through ongoing trainings and a rethinking of the organization's mission such that services are in line with the needs of those seeking shelter. In this study, one significant need is that of sanctuary or respite. Trainings with staff might focus on challenging them to redefine what they would want services to look like if they were in a homeless circumstance; how factors in their own lives might impact how they deal with the experience and, further, what would make them feel empowered and be motivated for change or transition once they entered emergency shelter.

They would be challenged to think about the need for respite and other factors that motivate a person to seek emergency shelter other than the need for a roof over your head. How important is safety; what emotions might the individual experience when homeless and what is/are the source(s); how might losses impact the individual life; and what is the expectation for the future? Staff would be asked to consider these issues not only in the context of the clients they might serve, but also in the context of providing services. Once this is done, then the service provider can begin the process of renegotiating their service delivery model.

The Sanctuary Model is a framework that findings from this study suggest has potential for positive impact. It offers alternative solutions that might replace the common service models where shelter is linked to supportive services, but with little emphasis on SELF approach. Traditionally, little to no emphasis has been placed on how service providers view the experience of homelessness in the broader cultural context as well as organizational expectations and understandings regarding what it means to be homeless for those living the homeless experience. The Sanctuary Model trains staff to be able to ask different questions related to their own cultural

selves, how culture shapes their understanding of homelessness and how they engage those who come to a shelter for services. In addition, it explores how the cultural self influences staff responses to emotion and loss of the client, safety needs and the idea of sanctuary or respite when providing services. It is my assertion that providing services that speak to these issues is paramount.

5.4   INTEGRATING THE SELF FRAMEWORK IN THE SANCTUARY MODEL

Some basic assumptions of the SELF framework in a homeless shelter service delivery model are: 1) the environment significantly influences outcomes; 2) the individual affects the environment and holds the greatest responsibility for individual outcomes; 3) the individual, the service provider and other members participating as part of the service environment facilitate the potential for change and transition. The Sanctuary Model adds to these core values an emphasis on creating a "living-learning environment" (Bloom, 1997; p. 127). This environment is seen as physically, psychologically, morally and socially safe for the the shelter resident and the service provider (Rivard, Bloom, Abramovitz, Pasquale, Duncan, McCorkle & Gelman, 2002). Problem-solving is encouraged at all levels of interaction and the shelter resident is seen as a key influential force in shaping service provision, as well as moving their homeless circumstance to one of stability and permanent housing.

Before describing how to integrate a SELF framework in the proposed Sanctuary Model of emergency shelter delivery, I want to emphasize the idea of "sheltering" and how it sets the stage for this alternative service approach. "Sheltering" for some can represent a homeless experience that literally "shelters" one from their lived experiences by allowing them to avoid

dealing with those experiences whether they are self-determined or not. It can be seen as an affective fix or response for some because the emotion of past and present experiences is too overwhelming in a normal social context (i.e. living independently and engaging socially expected environments like school, work and family). It is a "sheltering" of the individual from the SELF. Individuals shelter themselves physically in an emergency shelter for safety, and emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally from emotion, loss and the potential for a different future. As represented by the majority in this study, those persons seeking shelter for this reason have had episodes of homelessness in the past and recognize what "sheltering" can afford them. "Sheltering" becomes the desired response to the lived experience.

While this may be the story for some in the homeless experience, others see "sheltering" as a way to validate their sense of humanness. It allows them to feel connected to the human experience once again, and gain some sense of social participation with socially acceptable behaviors that enable them to become housed. This connectedness is not the antidote to changing one's experience. However, it can accommodate the need for "sheltering" where opportunities for a reconnection are fostered and can promote transition which leads to a desirable future. One such example that stands out in this study is the words of study participant Marco (whose biographical vignette is highlighted in Chapter 4):

> When you can eat, bathe, and socialize like regular people, you feel human again; especially if you have been living on the streets or in places where doing something as simple as taking a bath is impossible. Even if you are at the bottom of the barrel, in the pits of hell, it's not so bad if you can go to a shelter and just rest; even check out of life if you need to. People come here for two reasons: to get away from their lives and just rest or think about what is going on in their lives and do what they need to change it. I'm here because I just need a minute to regroup and do something different.

Marco describes what is so often needed by the participants in this study; to have opportunities for safety and respite, but also to regroup and discover a future that is different from the present. Identifying the potential for a desirable future is utilized in the SELF framework as a way to connect to emotion, deal with loss and achieving a sense of personal agency or empowerment. Thinking and talking about the future is a good place to begin the act of self-reflection and start creating a different story of the lived experience that fully embraces the SELF and all of the challenges that come with it.

The SELF framework considers two key components: (1) the service environment where healthy relationships are supported and demonstrated in the context of client-centered interactions; and (2) psycho-education where cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral responses are considered in the context of safety, emotional connections, grieving and loss and future possibilities for change and transition.

The service environment might start with a few days of respite for the individual to allow them to feel safe and have some time to just rest and give some thought to their next steps. After a few days, the provider might encourage participation in daily reflection circles. The reflection circles are similar to process groups where individuals engage in conversations about their life experiences and are able to make comparisons with others sharing a common experience of homelessness. The shelter staff or team will facilitate the reflection process, and at some point reflect on challenges of providing services to individuals living very complicated lives. The idea is to validate the lived experience such that service response considers the complexities and is looking to respond to needs while also empowering the individual to experience a reality that is empowering and a life that can experience positive change. That change may not result in permanent housing immediately, but can be a future goal that the service provider can assist in

helping the individual to achieve. The reflection circles can help the individual to become self-aware and become acquainted or reacquainted with the person they were, the person they are in the present, and the person they hope to be in the future. Connecting to elements of the SELF is the goal and promotes participation in the psycho-education component of the SELF framework.

The psycho-education component is structured as a twelve session psycho-education group curriculum where education about the homeless experience, factors impacting the experience, and individual and social responses to the experience that impact service delivery are discussed. The psycho-education groups might address issues around trauma, emotion, cognitive and behavioral responses, social skills, positive relationship interactions, and information processing to support empowering decision-making, problem-solving, and life skills building (Rivard, et al., 2002).

The SELF framework sets the stage for client-centeredness and promotes healthy social and individual interactions in the environment that allows for safety and respite. It promotes autonomy with collaborative problem-solving, includes multiple perspectives of dealing with current and past circumstances or experiences, and assumes that the needs of the individual seeking shelter are diverse and varying in their degrees of service needs (Madsen, Blitz, McCorkle, & Panzer, 2003). The SELF framework becomes the center of the service response. Client-centeredness or rather individualized service provision is key. It requires that the client's assessments of his or her needs are just as important in the helping process as that of the service provider (Horowitz, 1990; Population Reports, 1998; Rogers, 1951). The relationship is collaborative in every sense, and the intent of service is to deal with the life experiences contributing to the homeless experience, not just the experience of being homeless. Currently, homeless service models most often view delivery as value-laden with ideas of character flaws

Nunez, 2004), and there is not enough emphasis on life events impacting the homeless experience or supporting the individual needs of persons in a homeless experience.

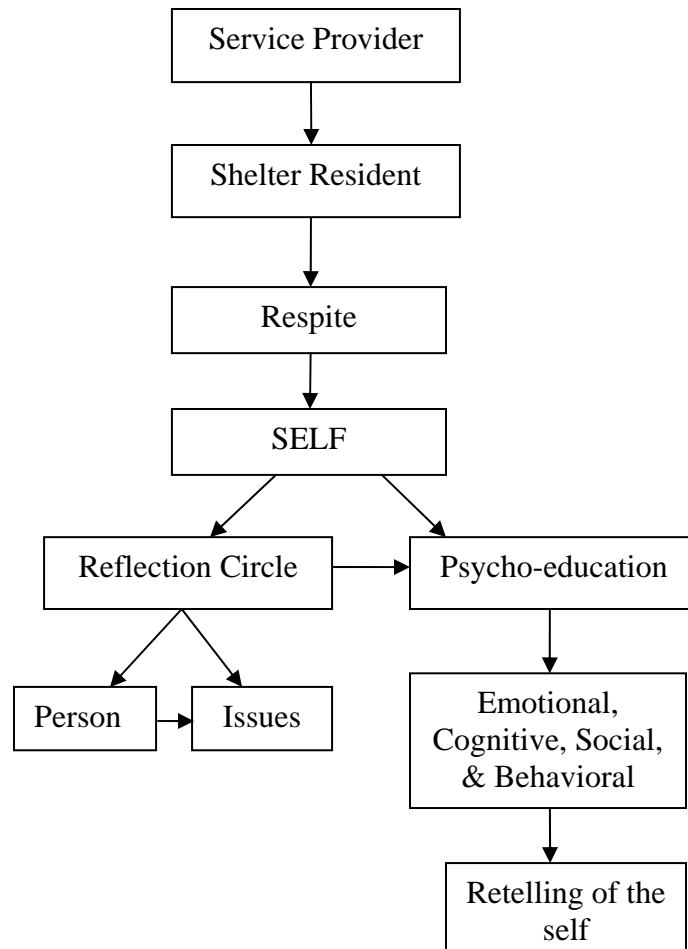The SELF framework is represented in the following pictorial:

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Service Provider│
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
                             ▼
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Shelter Resident│
                    └────────┬────────┘
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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │     Respite     │
                    └────────┬────────┘
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                  │ Reflection │─────▶│ Psycho-education │
                  │   Circle   │      └────────┬─────────┘
                  └──┬──────┬──┘               │
                     │      │                  ▼
              ┌──────▼─┐  ┌─▼──────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
              │ Person │─▶│ Issues │  │    Emotional,    │
              └────────┘  └────────┘  │ Cognitive, Social,│
                                      │   & Behavioral   │
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                                      │       self       │
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Figure 1: SELF framework in the Sanctuary Service Model

The framework depicts the starting point of shelter services and the process once service provision begins under a Sanctuary Model. The individual who is homeless enters the shelter with a need for respite. As the individual gets respite, the idea of sanctuary is introduced where respite comes to mean a physical and psychological resting, but also opportunities to deal with

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those aspects of the individual lived experience that encompass current emotion, thinking, behaviors and individual and social responses to the current situation of homelessness. These factors are understood in the context of trauma, social learning and the complexity of individual experiences. Safety, emotion, loss, and future possibilities are embraced and considered in the context of confronting emotions, renegotiating thoughts and behaviors, and learning in a supportive social environment that serves to empower and prepare the individual for transition. That transition is led by efforts to meet the emotional, cognitive, behavioral and social needs of the individual. Transition then can be an empowered existence as opposed to one of social alienation, continued homelessness and individual uncertainty. I recognize that some who enter emergency shelter may not be seeking transition, but the proposed model may hold some benefit for those who are motivated by a need for respite. Transition can become an unanticipated outcome once the SELF framework is successfully engaged.

Adopting a Sanctuary Model using the SELF framework requires a shift of attitudes for both the shelter resident and the shelter provider. Emergency shelter becomes a learning environment and not just a place to get off the streets. It can be a respite for those seeking such, but also a place of transition where the emotional, social, behavioral and cognitive issues can be addressed with invested interest from the person seeking shelter as well as the service provider. It can be an environment where improved psychosocial responses can challenge and ultimately eliminate the trappings that lead to a homeless experience or situation in the first place. The responsibility for understanding and ultimately changing the homeless experience is shared by both the person in the experience and the service provider. Both are viewed as the expert to some degree in successfully dealing with the homeless circumstance and engage the shelter process with equal commitment and contribution.

The idea of sanctuary is linked with respite and transition but connected to the SELF, such that a new perspective creates a different understanding of the experience and leads to opportunities for change that may not have been possible under the current homeless shelter service model. Each piece of the model draws from a client-centered approach that lends itself to those pressing issues impacting the homeless experience. Whether the person is seeking emergency shelter for respite or perhaps, in the case of a handful in this study, transition, the goal of services is client-centeredness and meeting the shelter residents where they are in their understanding of the homeless experience and past life events. The SELF framework individualizes the homeless experience as well as needed services. The person and the service provider are able to address the current circumstance from shared insights and strengths that can lead to individualized solutions.

5.5 USING THE SELF FRAMEWORK TO RE-AUTHOR THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

Realistic planning, psychoeducation, and social training to engage the environment in a different and more effective way takes place throughout this process. Questions about the experience are asked differently. For example, the externalization of the problem can be transposed from the influence of the problem on the person to the person's and organization's influence on the problem (Madsen, 2007). The problem of being homeless is deconstructed such that evidence of the dominant story is confronted, while bringing to light truths and inconsistencies regarding the influence of the problem, and the influence of the individual on the problem (Madsen, 2007). Madsen outlines what he calls, "Externalizing Conversation Maps" (2007, p. 216) where the service provider and individual attempt to re-author their lived experience. That re-authoring is

seen as a viable strategy to deconstruct the lived experience such that realistic current and future

planning and social engagement or transition are possible. That re-authoring is presented in the

following table (with adjustments to reflect the needs of this study) as part of Madsen's

Externalizing Conversations Map

Table5: Madsen's Externalizing Conversations Map

Questions about the influence of the problem on the person and/or the organization	Questions about the influence of the person and/or organization on the problem
Tracing the history of the problem	Identifying exceptions to the problems influence
Mapping the effects of the problem	Identifying an alternative story about the person's and/or organization's influence on the problem
Identifying supports for the problem and the dominant cultural story	Elaborating on the meaning of the alternative story to be told by the person and/or organization
Exposing the tactics of dealing with the problem in the context of individual and social responses	Identifying supports for the person and/or organization to reframe responses and identify alternative solutions

Madsen's re-authoring leads the person and organization to a preferred experience where

a back and forth of considerations about the problem and its influence support the SELF

framework and set the stage for the potentialities of a Sanctuary Model in emergency services

delivery. It is my observation as a former service provider and now researcher that the unspoken

goal in service delivery is most often to "treat em and street em," with the expectation that the

person will be back at some point. The proposed sanctuary model attempts to do more than just

"treat em" by giving people a bed for a few weeks. It seeks to provide for needed sanctuary

while the person is in shelter, and in doing so, create opportunities for dealing with the problem

of homelessness by examining the influence of the individual and the broader cultural story on

the problem. In addition, a re-examination of how the problem is viewed and the other life events and social interactions impacting the problem is addressed. This proposed model can be the gateway to successful transition even while seeking respite for those who want to and are able to achieve stable housing on their own or with the support of services. It recognizes client preferences as valid and important, and offers a response that speaks to the needs of individuals often overlooked or given little consideration during service engagement. This includes the kinds of questions we ask of shelter residents to inform us about their homeless circumstance, and the kinds of actions we take in response to their answers to these questions.

Bloom and colleagues (2003) contend that the Sanctuary model helps service providers to refocus their moral purpose. It is seen in this study as a process whereby the individual and the service provider are part of a cooperative service system where engagement facilitates change, and change facilitates a readiness for transition. The re-authoring of experience is achieved through a SELF framework, and the re-imagining of one's influence on experience becomes possible.

5.6   STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While studies of this type are non-generalizable, they are not intended to be so. The findings are limited to the experiences of each personal narrative and to the reconstructed biographies of the narrator. The goal is not to demonstrate that every homeless individual presents with a homeless experience much like the participants of this study. The goal is, however, to provide a vehicle by which the voices of a few can be told, and hopefully resonate with those who would read about their stories.

This study hopes to encourage more research on the issue of homelessness and emphasizes the need for both quantitative and qualitative methods as modes of inquiry in the discovery process of what this population thinks and feels. Future research should involve additional studies of this type where the experience of homelessness is told through the first person accounts of persons living the experience. We have a great deal of research that suggests how people become homeless and characteristics of people with this experience. What is needed now is a greater understanding of how persons in the homeless experience view their influence on the experience as well as the influence of service providers in either dealing effectively with the problem or contributing to additional barriers to that prevent stable housing. Do those professional and social interactions in the shelter environment promote housing stability or contribute further to ongoing homeless experiences? What is the potential for a re-imagining of service provision and a Sanctuary Model? Is it possible to achieve? These are just a few questions to draw on in future research regarding our re-examination of the homeless experience and services designed to respond to the experience.

This study emphasizes the need to consider more than causes and characterizations of homelessness. It is that broader cultural story that we often buy into. It is the broader cultural story that can help us to unpack and better understand the homeless experience if we place that broader story in a different framework of individual and social power and influence. If we are serious about ending homelessness, or at least ending continued episodes of the experience, the need to conduct research that deals with the lived experience, meanings associated with it, and transaction of power and influence of culture and the personal are paramount.

Homelessness is an issue that remains quite complex and requires continued research efforts to gain some insight on how it can be tackled. Persons with a homeless experience have

much to tell, and it is worth listening to their stories if we are to give some value to the human experience. Even persons in the experience see the value of telling their stories, if not to change the experience for themselves, then for someone else who may be confronted with this life event. For example, Gary, though not hopeful for change for himself, talks about wanting his story to mean something to those who can change how the homeless are being helped. He states:

> I hope my story will help someone like me in this situation. The programs give you a place to sleep and maybe some food, but they don't really seem to be concerned about what brings people here. I mean, you have young men in here who need someone to step in and talk to them before they end up like me. They will look up twenty years down the road and be just like me; a 47 year-old man with nothing to show for his life except more pain and regrets of his choices. That's me, more pain and more regrets. I wouldn't wish anyone to end up like me.

Study participants echo this same sentiment over and over again as they conclude their stories. They hope service providers will take heed to their stories, and to let others who are homeless know that they are not alone, and that their lives do not have to be just another homeless circumstance. They want to believe that there is hope, if not for themselves, for someone else. The proposed Sanctuary Model rethinks the cultural and personal story so that those who want to change the circumstance for others can now consider that they might be able to change the circumstance for themselves.

Re-evaluating current service strategies and how the McKinney Act responds to the diverse needs of people who are homeless is important if we are to make realistic strides in ending homelessness for those persons caught in a homeless experience. As advocates have worked to change the social characterization and response to persons who are homeless, so should that work continue to embrace truths about the experience of homelessness from all discourses with interest in this issue. This includes the cultural or social discourse, the personal or individual discourse, and the two as a collective. This means that we must not only attack the

issue of homelessness from a deserving or undeserving characterization, but consider the structural underpinnings that perpetuate such characterizations ultimately impacting how services are delivered, the extent to which they are delivered, and the degree to which we are willing to reconsider that current policies and practices contribute to the revolving door of homelessness. For many that door never closes, or closes just long enough for a reprieve as they enter the next phase of the homeless experience.

5.7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

People with a homeless experience have a story to tell. Their experience has value and should help to shape how we treat the issue of homelessness and the strategies we use to help people who live the experience. This includes emergency shelter programs. This study reveals that seeking shelter can indeed represent a going inside, both literally and figuratively, when in the homeless experience. Because shelter programs are most often the first point of service entry for persons in a homeless experience, the meaning individuals make of their experience become critical, because it can influence what they will do once they have entered a shelter program. It can, for some, act as a protective factor from past and present experiences, while for others serve as a barrier to individual responsibility and movement beyond being in a shelter or on the streets.

Responses to homelessness are revealing of both government policies and public attitudes. Throughout the past and into the present a common reaction to homelessness has been passive action and a tendency to attribute problems to individual failures. We have socially constructed an identity for a group by referring to individuals as "homeless" which makes them the problem and alleviates society in general from any responsibility for the problem. That

social language dictates the framing and telling of the story of homelessness. It is what individuals living a homeless experience draw from in order to tell their stories, and what service providers use to respond to those stories.

The sweeping policy of the McKinney Act, today most often referred to as the McKinney-Vento Reauthorization Act of 2002, has provided the parameters for how emergency shelter services can respond to the issue of homelessness. It offers the funding needed to provide services and supports. It provides for the appropriations of dollars to secure physical dwellings to be used for emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing; this in response to the growing need for temporary and long-term, affordable housing needs of vulnerable groups in the U.S. It considers that each individual in a homeless situation most often have experienced multiple complex life events impacting their current homeless circumstance. What is needed now is a re-imagining of the homeless experience that empowers the individual and renegotiates services to include a SELF framework and recognition that sanctuary is a valued need and change a hopeful possibility.

Increasingly, many imaginative schemes or alternative service models are evolving as agencies develop increased understanding of the complexity of issues affecting individuals who are homeless, as well as the diverse nature of their situations. It is important to offer alternative responses rather than simply deploring the magnitude and causal nature of homelessness (Daly, 1996).

Service providers, generally speaking, have standardized packages with often strained participation in problem solving both on the part of the service provider and the individual. This experience often fails the individual and the service provider. In proposing the Sanctuary model using a SELF framework, the key to successful service engagement is having access to

supportive services that promote self-sufficiency, flexibility, and coping education (Madsen et al., 2003). Coping education is not meant solely for the individual seeking shelter services, but for the service provider as well. Daly (1996) believes the problem with the current system of homeless service provision is not so much the level of service, but rather the method of delivery and the assumptions or values on which delivery is based. The proposed Sanctuary Model attempts to deal with this by challenging current service methods and renegotiating the value of the problem, the value of the experience, and the influence of the individual and service on the experience.

Housing stability is important, but the lived experience of the individual becomes just as important. It becomes, in fact, the foundation for future possibilities of stable, permanent housing.

6.0   EPILOGUE: COMING TO TERMS WITH EXPERIENCE THROUGH MY CULTURAL SELF

What do we have in social work that allows us to respond to the cultural and personal story of an experience? I have pondered that question throughout this research endeavor. My conclusion is that we draw from the same tools of understanding that society and the individual with a particular experience draw from to make sense of the experience. We come to know much like the rest of society, through history, social constructions and learned expectations of human behavior. In a sense, we become the challenge of our own understanding. For me, it was coming to terms with my cultural self and its influence on how I tell, or rather experience, the stories of others through storytelling that truly challenged my sense of what it means to understand the experience of others.   I learned that whether it be the storyteller, or the person with the experience telling their story, the cultural self is truly the vehicle by which the truth of an experience gets filtered. I know, after completing this study, that this is the essence of my story as a researcher, practitioner and instructor of social work education. I have become, all at the same time, both a roadblock and entry point to my own understanding as I struggle with reconciling my cultural self so that I can filter that knowledge to tell a more insightful story of homelessness.

At the start of this study, I was so motivated to be insightful as I listened to the stories of persons in a homeless circumstance, to hear a story that would help me to better understand what it means to live a homeless experience and its implications in the lives of those who experience

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it. Perhaps it's the naiveté of a young researcher without the forethought to consider that looking at people's experiences is not just about the person with the experience. In fact, much of being the onlooker is about me and the mark I hoped to make in retelling my participants' stories.

Am I ignorant with good intentions or, with good intentions, ignorantly engage a process of discovery through narrative that I myself have yet to fully understand. This process of discovery has taught me not only how difficult it is to attempt to make sense of lived experiences, but also to make sense of how my cultural self shaped my worldview in such a way that by default, I spent more time dealing with my own sense of what it means to tell a story rather than letting the stories the participants told speak for themselves. Their stories in a sense really did not need any help from me. They were the lived experiences as study participants saw them. Why would I need to do anything differently from having them than just tell their story?

Upon reflection, my cultural self told me long before this inquiry how to see the experience of homelessness and to verify that in my storytelling. This brought about significant tension with my cultural self which then challenged me to question how I saw the experience of homelessness and tell a story that in some way discredited some of what I believe we as a society hold true about the experience of homelessness.

In the final analysis, both served to enhance, at times, and inhibit at others, the story told in this inquiry. It is my own struggle of how I see the homeless experience that I believe is the real contribution to service providers. Do they struggle with the cultural influence of framing homelessness and social response? Have they been challenged to consider the influence of the cultural self and how it impacts service provision and delivery? Does it really matter in the grand scheme of things? Here are my thoughts.

Consider the challenge of teaching understanding and responding to practice with diverse and vulnerable populations. We know there is a cultural story that is socially and historically constructed, and we are challenged to recognize that influence in how we respond to the presenting problem, how we assess the problem and how we engage in problem solving and, most importantly, how we see the client. All of this impacts our response and the stories we understand and tell about the lives of others. I am no less a victim of the same dynamics of bias and social construction that I teach my students and fellow social work colleagues to challenge. Invariably, I see the homeless through the same lens as everyone else, and retell their story through that lens.

I have come to understand just how difficult it is for me and most probably other social workers dealing with those who are homeless to see outside of our own knowledge and understanding that has been socially constructed and which organizes and dictates our social response. This construction may be needed if we are to deal with the problem of homelessness. However, it can impede how we see the problem and ultimately shape our response. The social language or social label of homelessness places individuals in a socially discredited category that may dictate to some degree the experience itself, and how we come to understand and respond to it. In this society, homeless is a familiar category of the human state. We are so familiar with the problem and response that we can become complacent and not challenge that familiarity in a way that might suggest a different response.

I would imagine that, like me, social workers and perhaps young social work researchers do not often consider that we are a part of the shaping of the cultural story and the social constructions that are henceforth derived. In not embracing this influence, we may be resistant to think against the grain of past and current understanding. We may teach our clients the cultural

story, in fact emphasize it, in the work we do. We may teach general society the cultural story through our writing of the research we do. We may do this to sustain social acceptance that is familiar and gives us the cultural story we desire. The client's personal story then can be no less than the cultural story they hear and see from the rest of society. This includes social workers and social work researchers. I now can fully appreciate Richardson's (1990) assertion that the stories people tell about their lives are embedded in the stories others tell about them. They have little to draw on about their lives except the others' stories. That is until they come to understand their stories outside of common knowledge or others' stories.

This has been my challenge throughout this dissertation endeavor, to go outside of the others' stories. What I hadn't recognized until the end of this inquiry is that I am one of the others. I am the source I asserted in the beginning that I would not rely on in telling the stories of persons with a homeless experience. I would not rely on the stories of the other. I was challenged to interrogate and dissect my own understanding and how I came to that understanding in my experience as a social worker working with homeless services. The extent to which I was able to accomplish a sincere interrogation and dissection of my own pre-existing understanding significantly influences my concluding thoughts about this inquiry. I now embrace that I am one of the others and that a genuine story can be told despite this fact.

I think I arrived at point of contestation that leads me to consider the opportunity to be self-reflective and what that self-reflection does to shape a story the second time it is told. The study participants were left with this opportunity, and in my final analysis, I am faced with a similar charge; to shape a story drawn from self-reflection while taking advantage of the knowledge of the struggle of the cultural self and how I might retell the story of homelessness. The socio-historical and political knowledge of the cultural self in many ways impedes my so

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called "out of the box" thinking. Is it possible that I would have difficulty thinking against the grain? Self-reflection suggest that not only is it difficult when I engage experience that comes with pre-existing understanding, but, further, that it becomes a metaphor for my intellectual engagement of experience. It is me standing on the edge of myself with only my understanding as the safety net should I decide to jump. And I am not so sure I can trust my own safety net of knowledge.

I have to say I was more than ready to take that leap at the beginning of this study, but by the end I am not quite sure if the leap served any real purpose. Is the story told here any different than other stories told about the homeless experience? Was I able to move beyond familiarity and enter a place of discomfort for the sake of the story to be revealed on its own? I have challenged myself to ponder these questions in all of my future activities regarding this issue of homelessness.

It has been said that a goal of qualitative research is to lessen the distance between the populations under study and our understanding of the problem (Padgett, 1998). In quantitative research, this distance is understood and welcomed to ensure objectivity. I wonder, in considering both qualitative and quantitative methods, just how often both are working to maintain an understanding that speaks to the cultural status quo. Regardless of the research tradition, I have come to better appreciate the discourses that challenge the cultural self. Understanding the lives of people and how they function in the context of their circumstances is never without ongoing questions. It is my responsibility as a researcher and practitioner to constantly challenge my thinking about the lives of others by asking the questions that I may not understand, but at least am willing to engage if I am to live up to a standard of work that is worthy of future considerations when examining the human condition.

This study has taught me that people are a culmination of their experiences, and that research is not just dissecting the experience under study. I now see research not just as an exploration of an experience, but what constitutes the self in the experience. In essence, research to me is now a question of who I am as a researcher, who participants are and what has lead them to a particular circumstance, and what about me as researcher and the circumstance being explored makes me want to know more about it. The answers lie in the knowledge of the cultural self.

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please answer the following items as accurately and carefully as possible. This information is strictly anonymous and will not be used for any purposes other than this research project. The researcher is the only person with access to this information. Your response on each item is greatly appreciated. Please indicate your response by placing a check mark or X on the appropriate response, or by writing in your response where appropriate.

1. Gender
    ____(1)Male
    ____(2)Female
    ____(3)Transgendered

2. Race
    ____(1)White
    ____(2)Black
    ____(3)Hispanic
    ____(4)Asian
    ____(5)American Indian
    ____(6)Biracial
    ____(7)Other; Please Specify _____

3. Year of Birth or Age: _____

4. Education
    ____(1)less than 12th grade
    ____(2)high school diploma or GED
    ____(3)some college
    ____(4)Bachelor degree
    ____(5)Beyond Bachelor degree

5. Marital Status
    _____(1)Married
    _____(2)Single
    _____(3)Divorced
    _____(4)Widowed
    _____(5)Separated
    _____(6)Partnered (current relationship with someone of same sex)
    _____(7)Coupled (current relationship with someone of opposite sex)

6. Employment Status

     _____(1)Employed Full-time
     _____(2)Employed Part-time
     _____(3)Employed seasonally or temporarily (odd jobs on occasion)
     _____(4)Unemployed
     _____(5) Day laborer

7. Do you have children?

     _____(1)Yes
     _____(2) No

8. If yes, how many?

     _____(1 child)
     _____(2 children)
     _____(3 to 4 children)
     _____(5 children or more)

9. What are their ages?

     _____(0-2 years)
     _____(3 – 6 years)
     _____(7-10 years)
     _____(11-12 years)
     _____(13-17 years)
     _____(18 years or older)

10. Substance Abuse History

    ____(1)Yes
    ____(2)No

11. Mental Illness History (have you ever received treatment or taken medication for a mental health problem)

    ____(1)Yes
    ____(2)No

12. If yes, please state the problem (for example, depression, anxiety disorder or bad nerves, bipolar disorder)._____

13. Any Health Problems

    ____(1) Yes
    ____(2) No

14. If yes, please state the health problem (for example, heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, dental-related problems).

_____

15. Incarceration History (ever been to jail or prison)

　　____(1) Yes
　　(if yes how long ago were you in jail or prison; give days, months or years) _____

　　____(2) No

16. Sexual Orientation
　　_____(1) Heterosexual or Straight
　　_____(2) Gay/Lesbian or Homosexual
　　_____(3) Transgendered
　　_____(4) Bisexual

17. How long have you been homeless? (give in days, weeks, months or years)
　　_____

18. How many times have you been homeless in your life? _____
　　In the past 2 years (give in days, weeks, and/or months? _____

19. How much time has passed between your last housed status and your being homeless now?
　　(give in days, weeks, months or years) _____

20. How long have you been in this shelter (give in days, weeks, months)?
　　_____

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

Exempt and Expedited Reviews

University of Pittsburgh FWA: 00006790
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center: FWA 00006735
Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh: FWA 00000600

3500 Fifth Avenue
Suite 100
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
Phone: 412.383.1480
Fax: 412.383.1508

TO: Ms. So'Nia Gilkey

FROM: Sue R. Beers, Ph.D., Vice Chair

DATE: March 27, 2006

PROTOCOL: The Experiences of Being Homeless: A Narrative Inquiry with Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

IRB Number: 0602165

The above-referenced protocol has been reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided in the IRB protocol, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

The regulations of the University of Pittsburgh IRB require that exempt protocols be re-reviewed every three years. If you wish to continue the research after that time, a new application must be submitted.

- If any modifications are made to this project, please submit an 'exempt modification' form to the IRB.

- Please advise the IRB when your project has been completed so that it may be officially terminated in the IRB database.

- This research study may be audited by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

Approval Date: March 27, 2006
Expiration Date: March 27, 2009

SRB:kh

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