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by

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"Just Out of Sight": Homeless (In)visibilities in Austin, Texas

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"Just Out of Sight": Homeless (In)visibilities in Austin, Texas

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the many people who shared their time and experiences with me – including but not limited to Tim, Andre, Marie, Slim, Ernest, J.J., Ben, Pastor George Crisp, Howard, and Scott. I also dedicate this work to my husband, Wesley Faulkner, who has been steadfast in his support and unending in his praise. I write for my two children, Oliver and Violet, who inspire me to keep going just by sharing with me their joy for life. Finally, I dedicate this work to my parents, Archie Tate and Cindy Tate, who taught me how to think critically and never settle for common sense.

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"Just Out of Sight": Homeless (In)visibilities in Austin, Texas

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Supervisor: Ben Carrington

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of homelessness as a problem of (in)visibility. The concept of visibility is central to the construction of homelessness as a societal phenomenon, but in ways that are overly simplistic and reifying of stereotypes that perpetuate the marginalization of homeless people. The purpose of this study is to analyze the meanings of visibility in the discourse surrounding homelessness in Austin, Texas, and to understand what meanings the people in my study made of their own relationships to visibility. Understanding the complexity of visibility, that is at once empowering and disempowering and somewhere in between, is important for recognizing the complex conditions within which homeless people make lives and enter frames of representation. Discursive and visual constructions of "the homeless problem" shape both the popular understanding of homelessness as well as policy responses at both the local and national level. That the urban core and the entertainment district in downtown Austin is an area that business owners and public officials manage the visual appearance of, and that this has consequences for the city's homeless, is not a surprising outcome. How people manage to find comfort (which requires taking up space in ways that are normally restricted), and friendship (which includes the congregation of two or more visibly homeless people), within the conditions of homeless are questions that present more

interesting conclusions which inform the sociological study of homelessness, visibility, and friendship. My experience in this research project, revealed in the discussions throughout, brought about a critical perspective of a variety of initiatives that are meant to address homelessness. In particular, I am critical of the dominant framework suggesting that the best way to deal with "the homeless problem" is through the goal of ending homelessness. This foundation, that homelessness must be ended, appears at first to be the only moral perspective that makes sense. However, I clarify the unintended consequences of "ending homelessness" that further marginalize and stigmatize those who experience conditions of poverty and housing instability.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Landscapes remember. 1
"Just out of sight" 3
Dissertation Overview 11
Comfort and Friendship 14
Chapter 2: Literature Review 16
Defining Homelessness 16
Race, Gender and Homelessness 21
Pathways to Homelessness 22
Public Policy 25
Visibility 28
Chapter 3: Methods 34
Methodology 34
Epistemology 38
Data Collection 45
Limitations 62
Chapter 4: Who Counts? 64
Counting the Homeless 70
Homelessness on the Decline 76
Growing Homeless Population 78
Point-in-time Count 80
Who Counts as Homeless? 90
Street Counts 92
Quality of Life 96
Optics and Counting 101
The End of Times 103
Chapter 5: (In)visibility 107
Theorizing Homeless Visibilities 112

"Am I Invisible?" 116
"If only they could see [what I see]" 124
"I just can't stand the way they look at me" 128
"An Embarrassment to the City" 131
"Designed to be open and accessible" 134
Visibility is Complicated 137
Conclusion 143

Chapter 6: Comfortable While Homeless 147
Policing Comfort 149
The Stranger 150
The Annihilation of Space by Law 153
Finding Comfort 156
Knowing Surveillance 159
Photographing Comfort 161
Comfort 176
Conclusion 179

Chapter 7: We Been Knowin' Each Other 182
Homeless Friendships 184
"But we're not friends" 190
"We're taking care of him on his way out" 193
The "Real Homeless" 197
The Endurance of Affiliation 200
"Man, I love you. I just can't say it." 204
"And that was my last seven dollars" 211
Failure to Bond 213
"Tim just got arrested" 215
The Politics of Friendship 218

Chapter 8: Conclusion 222
Research Questions 224

Social Policy 225
Discourse of Visibility 236
Countervisuality 237

Afterword..243

Bibliography 244

List of Figures

Figure 1: Mattress Caught in Trees in Southeast Austin 1
Figure 2: Slim collecting cans in a dumpster in the alley behind the ARCH. 42
Figure 3: A View of the Mobile Loaves and Fishes Racks with the Capitol in the Distance 64
Figure 4: Interactive: Texas' Homeless Population Declines 81
Figure 5: City Council District Map, Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission .. 84
Figure 6: A Suitcase, Sleeping Bag and Pillow. Tim was watching this for a friend in Northwest Austin while his friend ran errands. 110
Figure 7: Marie at Hut's Hamburgers in downtown Austin... 126
Figure 8: Tim at Waterloo Park 156
Figure 9: Andre and Ernest in Waterloo Park.. 158
Figure 10: Steve Lying and Listening to Radio Near Church under the Bridge............. 162
Figure 11: Clarence Resting Feet on Wheelchair Near Bridge of Angels...................... 163
Figure 12: Penny Waiting for Supplies Near Church under the Bridge 164
Figure 13: Danny with Dog at Spicewood Springs and McNeil 165
Figure 14: Two People Lying Down in Front of the ARCH 167
Figure 15: Ernest and Andre Hugging After Laughing So Hard They Made Each Other Cry.. 167
Figure 16: Slim Hugging His Friend Patrice Outside of the ARCH.............................. 168
Figure 17: Slim Reading His Bible During Church under the Bridge........................... 169
Figure 18: Andre at "His Spot" by Waller Creek 169
Figure 19: Small Hand-made Paper and Wooden Boat Sailing on Waller Creek 170
Figure 20: Donna with Colorful Bracelets and Bright Blue Nail Polish 171
Figure 21: Gail Wearing Plastic Red Firefighter Hat 172
Figure 22: Rapping Outside of the ARCH.. 173
Figure 23: A Domino Game Setup Outside of the ARCH 174
Figure 24: J.J. in his "Living Room" at Spicewood Springs and McNeil 175
Figure 25: A View from Tim's Spot at Spicewood Springs and McNeil in Northwest Austin.. 182
Figure 26: "Tucson Man Jailed After Two Slain." Prescott Daily Courier, September 19, 1983.. 189
Figure 27: Andre Holding a Picture of his Four Brothers 190
Figure 28: The Mover at Spicewood Springs and McNeil in Northwest Austin............ 194
Figure 29: "Anglo Population Concentrations, Austin, Texas." Map produced by Ryan Robinson, City Demography, Department of Planning, City of Austin, July 2011 199
Figure 30: Tim and Andre in Waterloo Park 203
Figure 31: Tim and Andre in Downtown Austin on a Tour of "Their Spots" 206
Figure 32: The Car Where Billy Died. It has since been towed from this location outside of a car wash near Spicewood Springs and McNeil 209

Chapter 1: Introduction

LANDSCAPES REMEMBER.

Trees hold tightly to precious things turned to debris by pillaging waters.

Figure 1: Mattress Caught in Trees in Southeast Austin

I remember only occasionally when I pass by a tattered mattress caught by a group of trees. But the mattress gets me thinking.

Over the course of this research project, almost two years apart, two significant floods occurred in the area of town in which I live; the first on Halloween night of 2013 and the second on October 30 of 2015. Onion Creek, which I have known mostly as a dry creek bed, was twice filled with the force of unstoppable muddy water making such a

scene so as to attract crowds and cameras. Both times, homes in the Onion Creek floodplain were devastated. As evacuation efforts turned into rescue efforts, reports emerged about missing people who were swept from their houses or trapped in their submerged cars. Other news stories focused on people who were made homeless by the floods because their houses were destroyed beyond salvage.

The mattress gets me thinking about what is never reported. Because I have been studying homelessness, I know that the greenspaces surrounding Onion Creek serve as the home sites for many people, mostly men but not all, sleeping rough in the overgrowth between apartment complexes and in the vast park that is largely empty because it sits on top of a network of petroleum lines. When I see the mattress caught by trees near the bridge where Running Water Drive meets East William Cannon Drive, I wonder whether any of those people were swept away by the floods. I have no doubt that many lost almost everything they have. Why is there no mention of any of this in the news? Would it be a story to say that a homeless person was rendered even more homeless by a flood? Or that a clandestine shelter made of tarp was torn from its anchors? Could that be seen as a loss of home? Do people count as missing when there is not an address to be missing from?

The "visibility" in the news of residential destruction and the threat of homelessness for those who lost their houses in the floods put into shadows the possibility that the otherwise relatively visible homeless community could have been threatened by the floods. However, if one looks hard enough, there are traces of homeless camps being affected. I found one mention of homeless people as victims of the flooding – not in a news story about the floods but in an *Austin-American Statesman* investigative

story that was specifically focused on the dangers that homeless people are exposed to when they live in the makeshift housing of homeless camps. This was part of an ongoing investigation using medical examiner reports to "examine the ways that Austin's homeless population is dying" (Barragán 2015a). In the story, the author states that after the 2015 flood, a homeless man was found suspended from a tree after being washed out of his camp. He also writes that in 2013, two homeless men were found dead after being washed from their campsite.

"JUST OUT OF SIGHT"

James Barragán, the journalist who wrote this investigative series, aptly employs the language of visibility to convey how death amidst homelessness appears or does not appear to the larger Austin community. In the first story of the series, entitled "Shining a light on a vulnerable population," the author writes; "They died just out of sight: In the wooded area behind Krieg fields in Southeast Austin; in the drainage ditch outside of a North Austin Jiffy Lube; suspended in the branches of a Williamson Creek tree" (Barragán 2015b). This "just out of sight" suggests that the bodies were both present and absent, or neither present nor absent, in the larger social body of the city of Austin. It also reveals that, contrary to common assumptions, there are aspects of homelessness – including death – that are not observable.

In their article, "The New Homelessness Revisited" (2010), Lee, Tyler and Wright state that "intellectually, visible homeless people—those in shelters or on the streets—are attractive subjects because they lead their lives in the open, rendering social

processes observable" (2010, 501). Throughout the dissertation that follows, I will show that this visibility is a taken for granted assumption. While some aspects of homelessness are on display or made highly visible, others are obscured or less obvious. There is a tension between invisibility and visibility that makes homelessness as a social phenomenon more complex than is often acknowledged. This complexity is important both for humanizing a population that often gets dehumanized and for thinking critically about policy efforts that aim to help the homeless.

Lee et. al. were not unaware of the complexity of homelessness. A little further on the authors state that while a lack of permanent residence renders homeless people visible to all, "that marginality in turn poses the challenge of how best to study a fluid, stigmatized, and sometimes inaccessible group" and that "although recent investigations tend to be more sophisticated…knowledge of homelessness remains tentative" (2010, 502). This complexity becomes a problem of knowledge, where a population whose visibility in public is often viewed as problematic is at the same time just out of sight of the seeing eye of knowledge.

The homeless, therefore, have a haunting presence in both the physical and social scientific landscapes. They are known yet never really known, seen yet never really seen. Other social groups have experienced this tension of visibility. In *Invisible Man* (1995[1952]), Ralph Ellison invoked the simultaneous hypervisibility and un-visibility of being an African-American man in a culture that saw past his personhood to see only stereotypes ascribed to blackness. The complicated nature of this type of social invisibility is captured precisely in Ellison's phrasing when Burnside advises the narrator

on the bus to Washington D.C.: "you're hidden right out in the open" (1995, 154). Reflecting on *Invisible Man*, Avery Gordon states that we are encouraged to "interrogate the mechanisms by which the highly visible can actually be a type of invisibility"(1997, 17). Visibility produces blind spots as "the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows" (Gordon 1997, 17).

That there is no perfect form of visibility is captured by W.T.J. Mitchell in his essay for the journal *Public Culture* entitled "Seeing Disability" (2001). In it he argued that what visual studies can learn from disabilities studies is that vision, or the act of seeing, is "always under the threat of blindness or, more precisely, constituted on the constant experience of blindness, failures of seeing, ignorance, overlookings, (2001, 394). This applies both to the physical act of seeing as well as the kind of visibility referred to as the politics of representation as it "challenge[s] the very notion of what it means to look at other people or see things from their point of view" (2001, 393). Mitchell elaborates that

> "Being stared at" may be more than mere objectification, dehumanization, or reification. It may also be a sign of curiosity, wonder, empathy, surprise, or acknowledgment. For another thing, hypervisibility--being remarked, noticed, stared at--can only be understood if it is placed in some relation to its dialectical twin: invisibility (2001, 393).

The dialectics of visibility and invisibility are crystallized in the following news headline from December 8, 2015: "APD Wants Homeless Pedestrians More Visible For

Safety's Sake" (KLBJ Newsroom 2015). This phrasing is eye-catching because more commonly news stories in Austin write about the Austin Police Department, and others, wanting a less visible presence of homeless people in the city. The seemingly contradictory headline above summarized a short news clip by one of Austin's local radio stations and it addressed the rising number of pedestrians killed by cars. Of the 92 pedestrians killed during 2015, over 30% were documented as homeless. This form of death is statistically disproportionate within population trends by a long shot as "less than one-tenth of a percent of the general population in Travis County and Texas die in auto-pedestrian accidents" while "among the homeless population of Travis County, that tally spikes to 14 percent" (Barragán 2015b).

As a response to this high percentage of auto accidents taking the lives of homeless pedestrians, a commander for APD is quoted in the aforementioned local radio news story suggesting that the police department hand out glow in the dark backpacks to homeless people so they can be more visible on the roadways. Rather than install lights to make the roadways safer for homeless pedestrians by increasing their ability to see, the idea was to simply make homeless people objects of greater visibility through simple glow in the dark technology. This felt like a painful irony as it made me realize the extent to which there are multiple consequences of the pressure to make homelessness invisible and there are multiple ways that visibility takes shape.

Ordinances, such as "no sitting or lying," "no camping," and others, were passed and continue to be enforced in order to make homelessness less visible in the downtown area and other high priced residential areas. This policing practice has led to an increased

presence of homeless people underneath the overpasses of Austin's highway system where they are just out of sight enough to keep neighborhood associations happy. This is coupled with the fact that Texas has a convenient feature on its highways that allows cars to make U-turns by using a designated lane that loops underneath a raised highway. Drivers can change directions without waiting for the lights at an intersection – and these lanes are not regulated by lights nor are they lit by street lamps. From my experience doing field work it is really hard to see whether a car is coming around the curve and it really only becomes visible to someone underneath the overpass when the car is already speeding through the turn. Even during the daylight, you have to do a little darting and praying in order to reach the sidewalk across the street.

The above example is just one among many in the discourse about homelessness in Austin, Texas, where visibility must be understood in relation to invisibility. Throughout the chapters that follow, I analyze visibility in relation to homelessness on the terms delineated by Ellison, Gordon and Mitchell. Getting to this point has been a challenge because, as it turns out, I had my own hidden relationship to visibility and poverty which this project revealed. In April of 2013, I set out to do an enthnographically informed cultural analysis of the "No Sit, No Lie" ordinance that was passed by Austin City Council in 2001. In my proposal, I framed my research agenda in terms of the politics of aesthetics and sought to gain an understanding of how various stakeholders articulated an aesthetic position in relation to "the homeless problem."

In retrospect, I can see that I was politically motivated to expose business owners, downtown residents, and others with using the language of fear to cover up a financially

motivated interest in appearances. I was determined to objectify those who I viewed as privileged in this story rather than to objectify the homeless, as too often the social sciences place the homeless under scrutiny rather than the myriad of other actors who play a part in the problem of homelessness. In other words, I wanted to change the scope of who was seen as the problem.

Following my proposal defense, I felt challenged by the astute feedback I received to make the perspective of people who are homeless a more central source of knowledge about “No Sit, No Lie” and other ordinances, because they, after all, are the people most affected by them. This suggestion was challenging because I had to rethink a position that I had thought carefully about, which was the position that the social sciences ought to find more ways to study privilege rather than oppression. But, as my committee reminded me, social life is not actually experienced as such a strict binary of privilege and oppression. As Patricia Hill Collins states, “depending on the context, individuals and groups may be alternately oppressors in some settings, oppressed in others, or simultaneously oppressing and oppressed in still others” (2002, 246). So I committed to being attentive to the voices of people experiencing homelessness by including them in the groups of people that I was going to interview.

This commitment was further challenged by the personal emotions that arose upon acknowledging that this was, in fact, the right thing to do. My resistance to making “the homeless” an object of my study was part intellectual and – it turns out – part personal. I had an image in my mind of homeless people experiencing such emotional and physical suffering that I was unsure I had what it takes to be able to sit with that

suffering. And, to be fair, there was a good deal of my research that included sitting with suffering. But, as soon as I decided to commit to an interview strategy that fore-fronted people experiencing homelessness, I became burdened by the persistence of childhood memories that I barely knew I remembered let alone realized the significance of.

One particularly persistent memory was the image of a childhood schoolmate of mine sitting in a pretty dress on my parents' bed in a room that doubled as the living room in our four room house. She was sitting on the bed next to her younger sister as they might otherwise sit on the couch of a more traditional home. The girls lived just outside of the school bus route so their parents were dropping them off to catch the bus. It was the beginning of my first year in school. The room with my parents' bed also included a bunkbed that I shared with one of my younger brothers and a crib for my youngest brother who was still a toddler – both pieces of furniture handmade by my father. In the corner of the room was an old brown dresser with a ten inch black and white television sitting on top, rabbit ear antennas and all. In my memory, the younger girl was giggling with my youngest brother in her arms, while the older of the two sat speechless with eyes wide in wonder taking in the chaos of the house and eventually laying them to rest on me. My playful school preparation was interrupted by the look that I saw on her face. As a six year old I did not yet know how to name that look.

Curiosity? Disgust? Fear? Pity? Too many years have passed to say for sure. That is the only memory I have of them coming over to our house. Either they only came once or I have buried every other memory. But, every time that scene replayed in my mind in 2013 – of the girl in her dress looking at me and seeing me for the truth that I was – I felt

the skin-burning feeling of shame. I was poor. I knew it was the case because my parents always argued about not having enough money. But, what I learned that day was that being poor made other people uncomfortable. That memory was a wound and I was afraid my research project was about to open that wound wide open.

And it did. Over the course of May of 2013 to September of 2015 I wrestled with my own internalization of the stigma of poverty. The house that the little girl in her pretty dress stared at was an upgrade for us, a family of seven, from a one room cabin in the woods that had no running water or electricity. The cabin was an upgrade from the tent we lived in for over a year as my father and his friends, Howie and Troy, built that one room cabin. The tent was an upgrade – my parents thought – from a small apartment in Minneapolis, where I was born, in a neighborhood that was becoming both increasingly violent and unaffordable to them. My parents chose the hippie version of white flight – out of the inner city, into the wilderness, and off the grid.

It took this dissertation project for me to realize and confront my own issues surrounding the visibility of poverty – and the way that poverty reads on your clothes, your skin, your vehicle (if you have one), and your home (whatever form it takes). The effects of this do not remain on the surface of things. They seep deep into the spirit and, for me, produced a strong sense of shame, inadequacy, self-doubt, and hopelessness that were almost debilitating for me as a researcher.

I include this short personal history and this confession of deeply rooted insecurity because I cannot separate it from the way the research and writing has unfolded. For all the talk about visibility in this dissertation, the relationship that became

the most visible to me was the one I have with myself. It was the progression of my methodological choices, unfolding slowly over time that brought me to see myself more clearly. I was drawn to this project by a news clip about the "no sitting or lying" ordinance that denigrated the homeless for being visibly disruptive to the atmosphere of downtown Austin. The clip struck a nerve because I identified with those whose poverty made other people feel uncomfortable.

The questions beneath the surface, that I could not name in my proposal, had less to do with why people (business owners, home owners, city managers, etc.) have a problem with the presence of homelessness and more to do with how other people who are faced with the stigma of visible poverty deal with that realization. How do they understand their own visibility? Not only how do they manage their "spoiled identities" (E. Goffman 1986), but how do they feel about having to do so? I am not sure if I ever found answers to these questions, but they in part inform why I focus on the topics related to visibility that I do throughout the following dissertation.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

First, I spend time in "Chapter 2: Literature Review" summarizing the major arguments in the sociological writing on homelessness. Here, I also define what I mean by the homeless or homelessness and clarify why I have chosen to use those words as opposed to others, such as the under-housed, the unhoused or the inadequately housed. In "Chapter 3: Methods," I describe the mixed method approach that I took to this qualitative study. While I employed a variety of methodological techniques, I simplify

my experience as a progression of movement from distance to closeness that has consequences both for my understanding of visibility as well as the arguments I make in the conclusion against the emphasis on ending homelessness.

Because homeless counts are one of the primary ways through which "the homeless problem" becomes visible, as well as the fact that they assume a certain degree of homeless visibility, I explore the concept and power dynamics related to counting the homeless in "Chapter 4: Who Counts?" I relate my fieldwork experience as a volunteer for Mobile Loaves and Fishes, through which I learned about some invisible dimensions of homelessness, to the political intensions of various counting practices. I also claim that the most crucial aspect that is missing from homeless counts in Austin, Texas, is the way that homelessness is disproportionately affecting Austin's historically black neighborhood east of Interstate 35.

In "Chapter 5: (In)visibility," I use an exchange with one of my research participants, Marie, as a starting point for thinking through the term visibility in relation to homelessness and the various and conflicting ways that it takes shape both in homeless management and in the lives of people who experience homelessness. I state that while visibility and invisibility get oversimplified in discussions of homelessness, the analysis in the chapter provides ways to think about visibility that recognize how complex and contradictory it can be.

"Chapter 6: Comfortable While Homeless," explores comfort as a mode of homelessness that takes shape in a myriad of everyday practices. It plays on the phrase Driving While Black to emphasize that being comfortable in public is something that

housed people take for granted while it has become a criminalized act amongst the homeless. I draw on the knowledge perspective of two black, homeless men named Howard and Andre who were research participants that offered clear understandings of how their comfort is minimized through police practices. Through the analysis in this chapter, I argue that their experience as black men positions them uniquely to understand and theorize the intersection of surveillance and comfortability for homeless people who must find ways to exist within public spaces in which they are legislated out of place.

In "Chapter 7: We Been Knowin' Each Other," I explore the intimacy of friendships within a group of homeless men and specifically the meanings of affiliation between Andre and Tim whose interracial friendship defies the racial segregation prevalent in Austin's housed and unhoused communities. While moralistic readings of friendship might find little value in their affiliation, which would be consistent with the way that friendship within homelessness is constructed in social science literature, I read their relationship as having an utopian potential that sheds light on the endurance of human connection despite the trying conditions within which those connections develop.

"Chapter 8: Conclusion," summarizes the arguments made throughout the dissertation and challenges the emphasis on ending homelessness that is present in public policy. I state that while I do not argue that living without housing is neither pleasurable nor ideal for everyone, there are consequences of assuming that all homeless people need to be taken off the streets which further alienates some homeless populations and puts them at greater risk of dying "just out of sight."

Comfort and Friendship

While comfort and friendship might feel like departures from the topic of visibility, I see them as linked in a couple of ways. First, and to return to my original interest, "sitting or lying" are forms of comfort that upset the visible landscape of the city in such a way that business owners, residents and city managers produce ways minimize that practice. Secondly, comfort is almost entirely absent from the literature on homelessness making it an invisible topic within the literature. Along the same lines, friendship is constructed as part of the homeless problem because where there are friendships, there are people congregating together in space. Along with sitting on the sidewalk or on benches, the presence of multiple homeless people in one location often attracts the attention of police who then label that area a "homeless hotspot." Additionally, friendship among the homeless is constructed as a factor that leads to a failure to be rehabilitated and is therefore invisible as a social tie that matters in a positive sense.

As these two topics emerged in my conversational interviews with people who experience homelessness, they felt to me like unaccommodating resilience. Making social connections and resisting the pressure to disappear were less about managing stigma and more about living despite stigma, about claiming personhood even if it makes people uncomfortable. These chapters, though framed by the language of sociology, are also a personal journey to find self-acceptance – to see in others the permission to exist even if it puts people at dis-ease. Through this project I have discovered why I have a secret desire to disappear and why I have difficulty making social bonds. The memory that

revealed itself repeatedly as I began in earnest to do this research showed me what I needed to learn – both about myself and about the world.

Sociology is the perfect tool to do this kind of work because, as Harvie Ferguson has argued, “it is an exploration of the world that is simultaneously a *self*-exploration” (Ferguson 2006, 9, italics in original). Sociology can offer “an understanding of [one’s] own experience that makes sense in terms of the fundamental characteristics of the society in which [one] live[s]” (Ferguson 2006, 9). The sociological imagination, as C. Wright Mills called it, grants people the perspective “to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society” (2000 [1959], 7).

I started this project with a six year old’s curiosity about a look that was given to me, which informed a reaction I had thirty-some years later to the news of an ordinance called “No Sit, No Lie” or “no sitting or lying.” The ordinance was just a beginning, however. I used it as a starting point to get to the questions that were hidden under the surface. Those questions were: What does it mean to be an object of visibility? How do people carry the weight (or lightness) of that objectivity? In what ways is visibility desired, avoided, required, rejected, sought after, denied, or possibly irrelevant? What issues emerge about the conditions of homelessness if visibility itself is put into question?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

Reviewing the literature on the study of "the homeless" requires first a discussion of how homelessness is defined in the first place. Homelessness has had at least three strands of definition in the United States which limits the efficacy of policy debates concerning the issue. Prior to the 1980s the term homeless referred to "skid-row residents, people who roamed from place to place, and vagrants" (O'Flaherty 1996, 9). The term referred less to housing status and more to a state of disaffiliation or disconnection from society (O'Flaherty 1996; DePastino 2010; Jencks 1995). This definition led to an overly visual based definition of homelessness where "most Americans usually refer to shabbily dressed people they notice in public places during the day as homeless," which lingers in the current everyday discussion of homelessness (O'Flaherty 1996, 10).

Following the 1980s and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, which was the first federal legislative response to homelessness, the meaning of the term homeless took on a more housing-specific definition of where one slept at night (Rossi 1991; Hopper 2002). However this has not answered all the questions regarding who should or should not be counted as homeless (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). While many agree that the definition of homeless includes "temporary" sleeping locations such as "bus stations, abandoned buildings, doorways, and 'other places not intended for sleeping'," there has been less agreement around other temporary situations where people

“double up” with friends or family or sleep in welfare hotels or flop houses (both relics of past eras of homelessness) (Jencks 1995, 4). Finally, as Christopher Jencks points out, from 1980 onward the term homeless took on a meaning more broadly in relation to privacy rather than sleeping location and has often been used to refer to “those who have no private space of their own, no matter how temporary” (Jencks 1995, 4).

But the public/private distinction has its own history of confusion, lack of specificity and power relationships. In legal theory it has been used to demarcate property ownership, distinguishing what is owned by individuals and what is owned a collective citizenry (Weintraub and Kumar 1997). It has been used to represent different scales of social engagement, where the private is the scale of the individual thought and the public is the realm of the civic action (Hirschman 1982). It has also been used to mark the distinction between safety and risk, where private is equated with safety and public means exposure to risk (Harden 2000). Mary Douglas noted that cultural practices upholding the boundary between purity and danger do the work of reifying the division between the public and the private as part of the preservation of social order (Douglas 2002 [1966]). Sociological theory has also been complicit in maintaining a social order based on patriarchy by continuing to imagine the private sphere as a location for women and the public sphere as a location for men (Mulinari and Sandell 2009).

Without a clear foundation for understanding the term homeless, agreeing on a precise definition is challenging because, materially speaking, “housing hardship forms a continuum not easily dichotomized into homeless and non-homeless segments” (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010, 3). Whether to use the term homeless at all has also been

contested because some argue that it inaccurately diminishes the processes of making home or making business that people who live outside of formal housing engage in. For example, Mitch Duneier clarified his use of the term unhoused rather than homeless when discussing the experiences of street vendors in his book *Sidewalk* because it avoided some of the more passive and/or negative connotations associated with the term homeless (Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000). However, Duneier's participant observation was focused on vendors in New York's Greenwich Village who sell used books and magazines, and was therefore limited to a very specific subset of the larger population referred to as homeless. His preference for unhoused or street people reflected Duneier's findings that people in his study did not think of themselves as homeless and instead thought of themselves in terms of their "entrepreneurial activity" (Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000, 168). Despite Duneier's stance, many who write from a sociological perspective about homelessness employ the terms unhoused and homeless relatively interchangeably (Perry 2013; Herring 2014; Toft 2014; Norman and Pauly 2013; Willse 2010).

Throughout the research and writing processes of this dissertation, I have struggled to settle on a term that I felt comfortable with. The term "the homeless" felt like an objectifying way to refer to a heterogeneous group of people and I too felt it diminished the meanings of space that people gave to the locations they claimed as their own. Not having arrived at a feeling of ease with any of the terms available to me, I have chosen to use the term homeless because it accurately represents how participants in my research referred to themselves. I chose not to "know better" than they did about how to

describe their social status. Further, the term homeless did not always carry negative connotations. For people such as Earnest, Slim, Howard, Andre and Tim, who are a handful of my research participants that the reader will be introduced to in the chapters that follow, being able to say that they had survived homelessness for many years conveyed a sense of pride. None of them claimed that living on the streets was easy or enjoyable, but all of them expressed their ability to do so as though it were an accomplishment that had meaning to them. While their survival strategies do not make up much of the stories I tell, their unhesitating use of the term homeless to describe themselves informed my decision to settle on using it.

The lack of precision concerning what the term homeless refers to has created confusion and disagreement in projects that aim to determine who the homeless are and how big the problem is. One argument is that the phenomenon of homelessness should be divided into three different categories and each group should be treated differently from a policy perspective: first, there is transitional homelessness where people experience singular life events that produce brief periods of housing instability; second is episodic homelessness where people experience cycles of housing instability; and third, chronic homelessness which is overrepresented in the literature on homelessness and which represents people who live in a relatively fixed state of lack of housing (Kuhn and Culhane 1998). Aside from definitional disagreement, the processes for counting the homeless have also been flawed and have led some to believe that there is a gross underestimate of how many people are affected by homelessness (Devine and Wright 1992; S. Farrell and Reissing 2004; Bogard 2001; Takahashi 1996; Yan et al. 2014).

No matter the counting mechanisms, estimates that represent the size of the homeless population are inherently political. This is described by Martha Burt, Lauden Aron, and Edgar Lee in the following way:

> Those who do not want to help homeless people will use a low number to suggest that the problem is not big enough to worry about, or a high number contingent in part on service availability to suggest perhaps the amount of service should be decreased. Those who want to help homeless people will discount a low number, attacking the methodology used to produce it, and use a high number to argue for more services. Virtually everyone will concentrate on a point-in-time number and ignore the much larger proportion of the poor population that will probably experience some homelessness in the course of a year (2001, 24)

Burt and her coauthors draw on data from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) to assert that homelessness is more pervasive than even the highest reported estimates. They also argue that because most policy initiatives have produced a service structure that is specific to homeless people, rather than people at risk of becoming homeless in the future, the plans rarely "reduce homelessness, prevent homelessness, or change the conditions that push people into homelessness" (Burt, Aron, and Lee 2001, 16).

Race, Gender and Homelessness

Despite the overwhelming amount of social scientific literature on homelessness from the 1990s onward (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010), there has been little attention paid to the fact that homelessness is experienced disproportionately by America's black population (Bogard 2003). This is an issue I take up in Chapter 4: Who Counts?, in relation to Austin's historically black neighborhood east of Interstate 35. In 2012, the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness released a report stating that "in 2010, one out of every 141 persons in black families stayed in a homeless shelter, a rate seven times higher when compared with persons in white families (one in 990)" ("Intergenerational Disparities Experienced by Homeless Black Families" 2016). This is likely connected to the fact that black Americans, and especially black men, also experience a disproportionate level of incarceration, and the connection between incarceration and homelessness has become clear (Gowan 2002; Tsai et al. 2014; Tejani et al. 2014; Weiser et al. 2009; Geller and Curtis 2011). In an ethnographic study of homeless men in San Francisco and St. Louis, Teresa Gowan found that "the road to the street almost always included stretches of prison or jail time" (2002, 524).

A thorough analysis of how gender and race ideologies affect the persistence of homelessness among black men in New York City was done by Joanne Passaro in her book, *The Unequal Homeless: Men on the Streets, Women in Their Place* (1996). Passaro writes that "homeless street people are men and women in gender crisis" (1996, 1). Women, she continues, can use stereotypes of femininity as vulnerable and frightened to gain access to temporary and/or permanent housing from a welfare system that sees them

as naturally "worthy" of assistance. If they fail to conform to gender stereotypes they are seen as just as undeserving as homeless men. Men who live on the streets, however, are "doubly-stigmatized" and there is no reliable strategy for assistance. New federal initiatives that target homeless veterans as deserving of assistance now provide one potential pathway to worthiness.

The double stigma faced by homeless men stems from their emasculation on the one hand, as they are unable to support themselves in accordance with traditional gender norms, and they are hypermasculinized because they "appear to be independent of the control of women, family, and society, and thus they are considered dangerous, violent, and aggressive" (Passaro 1996, 1). "Non-white" men, Passaro continues, are further stigmatized by racial stereotypes that exaggerate this sense of violence and aggression and further moralize them as deserving of their position in homelessness.

PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

Just as there is contestation around how to define homelessness, there are also conflicting ideas about how people become homeless in the first place. In their study of homelessness in Austin, Texas, David Snow and Leon Anderson (1993) provide an analysis that combines both structural and personal causes of homelessness. The structural causes they identify are unemployment, low wage jobs, and lack of affordable housing. These are confounded by personal stories of substance abuse and mental illness. However, Snow and Anderson argue that mental illness contributes far less to the pathways to homelessness than is commonly believed.

Arguments that downplay the role of mental illness in causing homelessness is contrasted by activists such as Alice Baum and Donald Burnes (Baum and Burnes 1993), who argued that a desire to paint the homeless in a sympathetic light has led to an irresponsible denial of the extent to which mental illness and substance abuse are causally linked to homelessness. Based on their experience of working with the homeless population in Washington, D.C., Baum and Burnes argued that shelters should be transformed into "intake centers" that perform outreach services for providing long term medical care and substance abuse treatment. For Baum and Burnes, the primary cause of homelessness were these individual conditions that prevented people from being able to perform in steady positions of employment.

This perspective has been critiqued by others who refer to it as the medicalization of homelessness that denies the structural causes of both mental illness and substance abuse (Jason A. Wasserman and Clair 2011). Bourgois and Schonberg make an argument along these lines in *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), where they state that police sweeps, evictions, and failures of the health care system are at least equally to blame for the conditions of homelessness among the heroin addicts in their San Francisco study. Bourgois has focused extensively on the symbolic violence experienced by his research participants at the hands of police, outreach workers, and neighborhood residents as well as in the unequal relationships that develop within and between encampments. For example, Bourgois et al. identified the "patriarchal definitions of romantic love that legitimize the violent domination of women by older men" that led to female injectors contracting Hepatitis C (Bourgois, Prince, and Moss 2004, 254).

In his study on housing in Milwaukee, Matt Desmond found that eviction is one of the leading causes of homelessness and eviction courts almost always rule in favor of property owners who can afford legal representation because, in contrast, low income renters rarely appear in court with lawyers (Desmond 2016). Desmond found that eviction was a regular and central occurrence in the lives of low income black women in Milwaukee, and that when they fail to maintain housing it is due to the impossibility of keeping up with rent which could cost up to 80% of their total income (2016).

While there are conflicting conclusions about the causes and conditions within homelessness, most sociological studies emphasize the structural factors such as lack of affordable housing in the housing market (Rossi 1991) and the deindustrialization of the economic structure that led to higher rates of unemployment (Ropers 1988). They do not, however, agree on solutions or policy recommendations. Structures are harder to address than are individual issues and therefore policy recommendations focus on understanding the interconnections between "tight housing markets, individual risk factors (family conflict, a weak support network, etc.), and moments of heightened vulnerability (e.g., after release from an institution)" (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010, 17). These approaches tend to emphasize rehabilitation programs such as job training or drug treatment that, while they recognize structural forces, still approach change at the level of the individual.

One exception is Joel Blau, author of *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States* (1993). He argued that the social sciences have lacked a real theory that explains the connection between structural and psychological causes of homelessness and

therefore representations of the homeless as addicted, ill or otherwise unfit to work have provided a convenient myth to justify the lack of change. One problem Blau identified was the seemingly unending search for more precise ways to count the homeless and make distinctions among their subpopulations. Therefore, by focusing on methods that turn the homeless into numerical statistics the social sciences have made little intervention into the problems of homelessness because, he points out "it is one thing to make some distinctions about the population's makeup; it is quite another to substitute the pursuit of these distinctions for significant policy interventions" (Blau 1993, 16). Blau's policy recommendations include a federally regulated standard for welfare benefits, an increase in the minimum wage, and the creation of a non-profit sector of the housing economy that provides an adequate supply of affordable housing.

PUBLIC POLICY

The most recent trend in alleviating the effects of homelessness on individuals and communities has been to enact Housing First policies that attempt to get those who are chronically homeless off the streets first and provide rehabilitative care once housing is established. This approach contends that "chronic homelessness affects a relatively finite population, and that interventions which target them can have lasting and substantial impacts" (Culhane and Metraux 2008, 115). Advocates of Housing First argue that this policy shift would not only reduce the cost of providing temporary shelter to the chronically homeless in emergency or transitional shelters, which tend to keep them in a pattern of homelessness, but it has been shown to offset the cost of other services such as

health care or job training that tend to have little effect within a recurring state of chronic homelessness (Culhane and Metraux 2008).

Aside from cost, the Housing First perspective has been in part a response to ethnographic research in shelter settings that found the conditions to produce “a routine existence marked by stress, fear, and distractions” (Desjarlais 1994, 886). Despite often poor conditions, emergency shelters still serve as the dominant form of assistance for homeless individuals and families. Some view this as an “over-reliance on emergency shelters as a consequence of governments’ inability to respond to the social and economic factors that cause homelessness” (Gilderbloom, Squires, and Wuerstle 2013, 3). Others argue that more effective change would come from homeless mobilizations that can garner support from influential people and adeptly shape strategies toward the local context (Cress and Snow 2000).

Aside from revealing the sometimes dysfunctional and disruptive conditions of shelters, ethnographers have also done important work in uncovering the coping and survival strategies of those who make long term lives within homeless settings outside of shelters (Snow and Anderson 1993; Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000; Gowan 2010). This has been important for emphasizing the point that the homeless is not a uniform category and their experience as humans are as diverse as any other social group. Not only has the category of the homeless been complicated, but so too have municipal responses to homelessness. Urban policies toward the homeless are sometimes seen as punishing or repressive (N. Smith 1996a; Hopkins Burke 1999), and in other instances compassionate (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010; Forst 1997).

Whether through compassion or criminalization, the emphasis on getting the homeless off the street at the community level has produced a high degree of surveillance that forces them to live in the shadows. Therefore, scholars of homelessness have looked at how surveillance takes place both inside and outside of shelters (Jackson 2012; Daya and Wilkins 2013). Michel Foucault's (2007 [1975]) concept of panopticon, an ideal type design for a prison in which prisoners are always potentially being watched, has been useful for thinking about surveillance of the homeless and the power employed through visibility. Foucauldian analyses have also pointed to the disciplinary mechanisms that shelters and social services use to gain knowledge about the homeless during intake processes and to maintain order among the homeless who are generally seen as a disorderly group of people (J. C. Williams 1996).

In Robert Desjarlais' study of Boston's Station Street Shelter, the author noted that the shelter design segmented the building into spaces that made residents visible to the staff, allowing staff members to employ "techniques of observations, note taking, medicating, and therapeutic advice" with the intended effect of producing normalization (Desjarlais 1997, 97). Similarly, Talmadge Wright states that shelters enforce "elaborate rules systems and punitive measures," and that these rules combined with police surveillance practices and arrest procedures make up "the panoptic regulation of homeless bodies…that convert[s] those who find themselves homeless into statistical data" (T. Wright 1997b, 52).

But, as Simone Browne discusses in her book *Dark Matters* (2015), several scholars in surveillance studies have asserted that the overreliance on the panopticon

"leaves the role of visibility overstated" (Browne 2015, 39). In their studies mentioned above, both Wright and Desjarlais also identified actions of resistance to the all-seeing eyes of the shelter institutions. In his study of homeless mobilizations in San Jose and Chicago, Wright found that some people chose to stay in encampments and refused to use shelters because the shelters treated them like "spoiled identities" that needed to be reformed or normalized. While many of the residents in Desjarlais' study stayed in the shelter, some sought out areas where they could "hide in the building's nooks and crannies" and obscure themselves from visibility (1997, 99). Doing so within the shelter setting, however, prevented mobilizations of the kind that were formed in the encampments that Wright discussed, as obscurity also meant isolation. Desjarlais noted that obscuring themselves sometimes meant opting out of comfort, police safety, and therapeutic care.

VISIBILITY

It is clear then that visibility in relation to homelessness is not as straightforward as it might seem, in particular when related concepts such as representation become objects of study. John Fiske (1999) analyzed the symbolic meanings about homelessness that circulated in U.S. culture during the 1990s. He looked at three domains through which the meanings of homelessness generally take shape; organizations, or the aggregation of service providers (including shelters) that "are trying to cope with homeless people at the local level;" national policy toward the homeless; and "the

uncountable encounters with homelessness that have become part of the daily experience of life in the contemporary United States" (Fiske 1999, 5).

By encounters, Fiske included things like passing a homeless person on the street, reading about homelessness in the news, and even introspectively thinking about the concept of homelessness. Fiske claimed that "Reaganism in the 1980s provided the semiotic and economic framework within which homelessness developed as both a concept and a social reality," where the role of the state was minimized in social life and the roles of capital and the market were maximized (Fiske 1999, 6). In organizations and encounters, Fiske identified a "dependency mentality" that symbolically constructed homeless people as outside of the community proper. This resulted in clashes at the level of policy and personal encounter because "when homelessness is semiotically deviant but economically structural, the social conflict between the privileged (the 'normal') and the homeless (the 'deviant') becomes explicit" (Fiske 1999, 7).

Fiske's argument is that the micro-environments in which instances of homelessness become visible must be understood in relation to broader macro-environments, such as policy (where meanings and resources are put into circulation), organizations and collective encounters. In *Seasons Such As These* (2003), Cynthia Bogard described the macro-environment in which homelessness became visible as a social problem during the 1980s. She argued that the prevailing images of homelessness resulted from the actions of competing claimsmakers, including journalists; activists; and local, state, and federal politicians. Each claimsmaker constructed homelessness

differently according to their desired outcome, whether it was gaining more power and influence, getting more federal funding, or raising public awareness.

Bogard noted that homelessness increased during the last quarter of the twentieth century alongside other issues related to poverty because the country had entered a recession. Yet, homelessness gained the most visibility, obscuring other poverty-related issues, because claimsmakers constructed it through dramatic imagery, and the press "thrives on drama." Profiles about the homeless "stressed their unique attributes and modes of making ends meet… [they] were often portrayed as 'characters' living interesting lives, often touched by mystery or tragedy" (Bogard 2003, 185). While there are many instances of competing meanings and images about homeless, journalists who "discovered" the problem of homelessness in the early 1980s shaped how the issue became visible on wide scale (Campbell and Reeves 1999). The homeless became visible at the margins of mainstream culture because "the drama of class conflict is generally resolved by celebrating, not condemning, the social order – order that often identifies those who progress economically as portraits in the triumph of ingenuity and those who regress as sketches in personal failure" (Campbell and Reeves 1999, 42).

Visibility as a concept has set the terms for the debates about homelessness in both social policy and the social sciences. The questions have largely been related to whether homeless people are seen or not seen, either literally in public spaces or metaphorically in terms of whether their personhood is seen beyond the stigma associated with homelessness. Either way, the lens of visibility is fixed on those who are homeless. The way that the contemporary problem of homelessness (1980s to present) is framed is

frequently a matter of visibility – homelessness was a problem that was hidden away in Skid Row districts until there was a "seemingly sudden explosion of street populations in the early years of the Reagan era" (D. Mitchell 2011, 934). With the increase in street homeless, there was also an increase in face to face encounters between the housed and the unhoused. In *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States*, Joel Blau (1993) stated that, "perhaps the single most significant attribute of homelessness is its visibility" (4). Sometimes compared to urban graffiti, homelessness is a form of visibility that "undermines the rules governing the use of public space" (Blau 1993, 4).

During the 1970s "the street homeless and their camps became a permanent fixture in most cities of the United States," and then "during the rapid economic expansion of the 1990s and early 2000s, dozens of U.S. cities experienced the rise of durable homeless encampments on a scale unseen since the Great Depression" (Herring 2014, 285–86). For those trying to maintain order in urban spaces, it "is not the mere existence of homelessness, but rather its public visibility, which turns the unhoused into symbols of incivility and objects of policy action" (Herring 2014, 292) As more homeless were becoming visible on the streets since the 1980s, so too was the issue of homelessness becoming more visible in mainstream news outlets. In *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, Peter Rossi (1991) argued that although one cause of the increase in attention to homelessness was compassion, it was the high degree of visibility of homeless people that made Americans "shudder empathically." He wrote, "hardly anyone visiting the downtown areas of our major cities can avoid direct sight of homeless people" and this direct sight was shocking because of the "incongruity of a

shabby person rummaging through a trash can in front of a modern office building while well-dressed and well-fed professionals and clerks go in and out the doors" (Rossi 1991, 14).

The centrality of visibility in the cultural and academic constructions of homelessness led me to wonder whether the larger debates around homelessness, even within sociology, were reifying the very stereotypes that some were trying to combat. As I was seeing the limited ways that visibility was constructed in the literature about homelessness, I was also being exposed to more complex understandings of visibility through the theorizing of my research participants. I wondered how, if at all, an interrogation of homelessness defined as a problem of visibility - with the help of the knowledge work of my participants - might offer alternative, less reifying visions of how homelessness and its related issues are imagined.

While the literature on homelessness is saturated with the word visibility, the concept itself has not been explored as a sociological category in its own right. Therefore, this dissertation is an exploration of visibility in relation to homelessness in Austin, as opposed to an analysis of homelessness in Austin. Andrea Brighenti has argued on a more broad scale that the concept of visibility has not been "counted as a fully entitled sociological category" (2007, 324). He further states the field of visibility is important for sociological research because it lies at the intersection of relations of perception and relations of power (A. Brighenti 2007). It is on this theoretical basis that I built this dissertation around the questions related to visibility and homelessness that I spelled out in the Introduction: What does it mean to be an object of visibility? How do people carry

the weight (or lightness) of that objectivity? In what ways is visibility desired, avoided, required, rejected, sought after, denied, or possibly irrelevant? What issues emerge about the conditions of homelessness if visibility itself is put into question? The next chapter explains my methodological approach, which is a qualitative case study that draws primarily on ethnographic methods. The chapter also discusses why Austin is an ideal location to ask these particular questions.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the meanings of visibility in the construction of homelessness as a social problem in Austin, Texas, and to understand what meanings the people in my study made of their own relationships to visibility. The original project design was a qualitative case study of the "no sitting or lying" ordinance that was passed by city council in 2001. Half way through the research process, as I was speaking directly with more people affected by anti-homeless ordinances, I learned that the specificity of that ordinance had little meaning (few of my participants had even heard of it). Through self-reflection and analysis of secondary documents, I also realized that what I was curious about was the concept of visibility more broadly, including but not limited to ordinances. Therefore, the methods shifted from a case study, which was more bounded (any data I could find that related specifically to "no sitting or lying") to an open-ended ethnographic study of visibility related to homelessness in Austin.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach in this case study can be described as somewhere between cultural sociology (the systematic analysis of culture) and cultural studies (the interdisciplinary study of cultural phenomena) as I explore the meaning making involved in the construction of the "the homeless problem," in a way that is theoretically informed yet relatively unsystematic (Edles 1991). By unsystematic, I mean that my data sources were not closed from the start of the project, nor even at the end, and instead I acquired them as I went in an attempt to be as open-ended as possible. This limited the extent to

which I was able to produce standardized codes for data analysis, and therefore I relied on a more fluid hermeneutical practice that involved reflexively reading each individual piece of data within the growing picture of data sources that I was exposed to. I used these sources, both secondary documents and primary observation and interviews, to understand the construction of homelessness as a social problem of visibility in relation to the broader structural forces of class, race and gender in Austin, Texas. While "participant observation, listening and interviewing" are the traditional methods of ethnography, I was inspired by the claim made in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (2013)*,*that "any approach that assists the journey towards a detailed empirical knowledge of a particular 'social world' can be ethnographic" (S. Hall et al. 2013, xi).

John Fiske provided some methodological distinctions that were useful for my project in his essay for the book, *Reading the Homeless: The Media's Image of Homeless Culture* (Min 1999). He clarifies the difference between empirical and empiricist, where empiricist data is positivistic and is understood as generalizable in that they "should constitute a proportionately accurate miniaturization of the larger social reality" (Fiske 1999, 15). Empirical data, on the other hand, is not positivistic and should be understood as systemic rather than representative, where data are understood as "instances of a system in process" (Fiske 1999, 15). The chapters in this dissertation work to provide descriptions and interpretations of how visibility takes shape in what Fiske calls "micro-environments." In the conclusion, I provide a systemic analysis of these instances within

the "macro-environments" of local and federal neo-liberal policy approaches to "ending homelessness."

One benefit of the open-ended approach to data collection and analysis that an ethnographic case study lends itself to is that I was able to follow leads as they arose, but a drawback is that the overall project is not replicable or positivistic (if one considers that a drawback). Nor is it generalizable in the sense that it is not representative of the practices and thoughts of an imagined population of homeless people more broadly or of organizations that work with homeless people or of city actors who work in positions of relative power. In *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* (1995), Pertti Alasuutari states that generalizability is not the point of qualitative research, and instead its job is to explain a social phenomenon or make it intelligible. The purpose of this dissertation is to make intelligible the social phenomenon of (in)visibility in relation to problem of homelessness and to describe some of the actions taken by people (homeless and not) in relation to that social phenomenon.

The issue of homelessness is so complex (though perhaps no more so than any other), and I was not an expert on the matter from the start, therefore I was continually learning over time which actors or organizations were taking part in the debate in Austin about how the problem of homelessness is imagined and how it should be addressed. Additionally, to be up to date on changes in the municipal governance of homelessness required openness to new documents and meetings and therefore I felt a flexible, open-ended approach to data collection and analysis most suited this project.

Data collection involved a mix of qualitative methods which is characteristic of case studies, and which I will describe in greater detail below. Put briefly, I analyzed secondary documents including but not limited to city council meeting minutes, archival collections of newspaper articles, and documents produced by municipal departments and social service agencies. I also conducted conversational interviews with people who were experiencing homelessness and with volunteers working in various organizations. These were recorded and transcribed to the extent that I could make out the conversations. I also engaged in ethnographic observation resulting in the production of field notes and in some cases field recordings. Field notes were sometimes written in my car directly after a volunteer shift or a meeting and occasionally the following day. However, more often I used voice recording technology on my phone to record my thoughts in a program called Evernote. The sites for observation included interactions that I had with homeless participants, organizations where I was serving as a volunteer, and meetings held by various entities on the topics of affordable housing, urban development and growth, homelessness, neighborhood safety and preservation, and Austin's declining black population. In addition I produced my own visual data with the use of a Nikon D90 digital camera and a Nokia Lumia camera phone, focusing primarily on my research participants who were homeless and secondarily on the construction of new buildings in Austin.

EPISTEMOLOGY

While I run the risk of oversimplifying my research methods, I reflect on this mixed methods approach as a shift in social distance from far removed to the intimacy of friendship. This shift represents a process of looking closer at my own relation to poverty (of which homelessness is one condition) as well as acknowledging and pushing up against the social distance that exists between my identity/status as white, female graduate student and the various identities that are embodied within the overdetermined position of homelessness.

I experienced an epistemological change in the field that shaped the kind of ethnographic approach I took. What I found is that the more I was learning the less I knew on the topic of homelessness in Austin and no theory or researcher-led observation/experience was going bring me to something more meaningful than I was hearing in the words of my respondents. There is a tradition in ethnography that favors the truth perspective of the researcher (Jerolmack and Khan 2014) and calls for the ethnographer to be further embodied in the role/s they are trying to observe (Wacquant 2015). Loic Wacquant calls this a "sociology of flesh and blood," as he critiques virtually all ethnographers of homelessness for not spending "extended stretches sleeping on the streets, shacking up in a SRO hotel, or checked in at a city shelter" (Wacquant 2015, 6).

A level of embeddedness such as this one favors a particular social location of the unattached male ethnographer figure of previous eras, where limited social or familial obligations get in the way of full immersion – a version of ethnography was unavailable

to me as a mother of young children. But I also do not alighn with it intellectually for two reasons.

First, Wacquant's argument relies on a belief that respondents are unable to describe their own experiences, and that should the researcher "to the highest degree possible, apprentice in the ways of the people studied," then said researcher would be better suited to offer such description (Wacquant 2015, 6). He further reasons that:

> So many facets of the phenomenon that can best be revealed by body, in the very enactment of homelessness –be it willful and temporary, in the case of the investigator– because they are woven into the very fabric of urgent yet banal action and thus become partly imperceptible to and indescribable by those most inured to it (Wacquant 2015, 6).

In thinking about the priority of "immersion" over research participants' words, I reflect back to Howard Becker's comments in *Tricks of the Trade* (1998), in which he was describing a project on college campuses where he and his team collectively knew more than the people in their study knew but only in regards to things they did not have access to know. Becker states, "Knowing these things didn't mean…that we thought we could find meanings in the events they participated in that were too subtle for them to understand. That would indeed be disrespectful" (1998, 100). Becker's advice to researchers was, "when the people studied know what they are doing and tell you about it, listen and pay attention" (1998, 100)

My second concern with Wacquant's argument is that it assumes a universal notion of embodiment as though the researcher's embodied experience would accurately

reflect that of the participants with whom they have apprenticed. Being of relatively sound body, I would not have experienced the various bodily ailments that my participants spoke of which shaped a good deal of their experience in their particular conditions of homelessness; I would not have felt Tim's (Chapters 6 and 7) stomach pain and vomiting every morning when he woke, or Slim's (Chapter 7) debilitating foot pain from bunions and arthritis, or the ache in Andre's (Chapters 6 and 7) back from his failing kidneys, or the stabbing pain in Marie's (Chapter 5) right knee every time she walked at an incline.

The tradition of ethnography that centralizes the expert knowledge of the ethnographer is historically grounded in the Chicago School during the 1920s and 1930s. Inspired by anthropology, these ethnographers "advocated a research strategy of going out to the slums to see what sorts of lives people actually lived there" (Alasuutari 1995, 143). I sometimes think of these ethnographers as the little girl in the dress, who I mention in the Introduction, sitting on my parents' bed with eyes wide in wonder, trying to figure out what all the strange activity was about. Ethnography has had a way of staring at the poor and trying to figure them out, and this has led to lucrative careers for many a researcher (For just a few examples see: Newman 2009; Ehrenreich 2010; Edin and Lein 1997; Goffman 2014; Desmond 2016; Bourgois 2003). While these scholars have contributed much to the knowledge of the causes and consequences of poverty, I attempt to do something different in how I tell this sociological story. Though it might be tempting to draw the reader into the story through descriptions of the dramatic

circumstances, I limit the extent to which I do that out of an interest in avoiding the reduction of poverty to spectacle.

Further, I was far more interested in what my participants were saying. The absence of the ability to notice or describe the embodied experience of homelessness, implied in Wacquant's statement above, was far from accurate in my fieldwork. I admit that it was with some degree of surprise that I found the descriptions I encountered during fieldwork to be as clear and powerful with insight as they were. But when I realized the extent to which the homeless people involved in my study were theorizing their own experiences, and doing so better than I would had I spent any significant time searching for or making a place to sleep, I took the epistemological position that my key informants were more like consultants on their values, experience, and expert knowledge.

The term consultant is particularly accurate in relation to Tim, Andre, and Slim who I discuss at length in Chapters 6 and 7. During the months of May, June and July of 2014 I had a limited amount of funds that I used toward paying them in exchange for their time and perspective. The ethical concern with this is that they may have felt coerced to participate, especially given that they had very little money and were in need of goods that money could buy. However, discussion of payment happened during the second time I met with them, after they already agreed to participate. I recognized that by taking time from Tim, Andre and Slim they were unable to gain money in the ways they normally would, either through flying signs or collecting cans. I did accompany Slim in a can hunt and delivery one afternoon and Andre twice as he flew signs. But Tim said he was too embarrassed for me to see him fly signs. We agreed on the amount of $10 an

hour for a consultation not to exceed two hours of pay per individual on any given day. When my money ran out, they continued to meet with me. But, that initial payment arrangement set up a relationship of respect that helped build rapport. It also set up the expectation that I would give them something; food, drink, socks, razers, or a small amount of cash, each time I saw them.

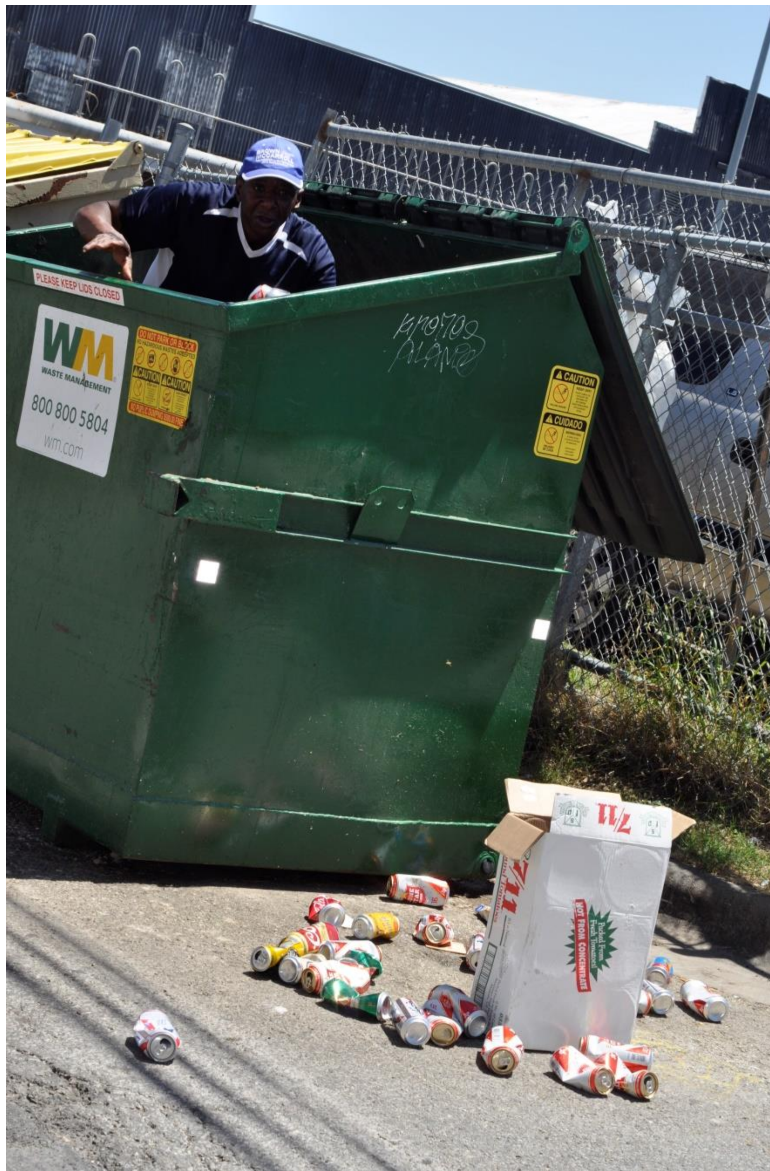


Figure 2: Slim collecting cans in a dumpster in the alley behind the ARCH.

Because partway through the research process I began to see my informants more along the lines of consultants, I construct each of the substantive chapters around the theorizing of one or two people who I met during my ethnographic research. "Chapter 4: Who Counts?," builds on an interaction I experienced with a woman outside of the Urban Market on a Mobile Loaves and Fishes food run in east Austin's historically black neighborhood. "Chapter 5: (In)visibility," begins with the theorization of a respondent named Marie who spoke about visibility, stigma, and the many ways she understood her relationship to sight. "Chapter 6: Comfortable While Homeless," draws on the perspectives of Howard and Andre, who offered unique insight into their experiences of surveillance. Finally, "Chapter 7: We Been Knowin' Each Other," explores the interracial affiliation between Tim and Andre and builds on the ambivalence yet endurance of their friendship experience to speak to friendship more broadly.

Some of the names in this dissertation are pseudonyms and some are real – people have been made anonymous except in instances where an individual asked to have their real name used. I honored that choice because I recognized it as a request for recognition or visibility that would have been too ironic to deny. The decision to reveal Austin as the location for this research was made because of the attention that the city continues to receive as a growing and vibrant city. While this decision does present the ethical dilemma of endangering the protection of confidentiality for my research participants, I have thoughtfully excluded actions or details that might put participants at risk. Aside from conversational interviews,

many of the sources that I quote from were made in situations where anonymity was not expected, such as public meetings or public documents.

Further, I wanted to engage directly in the conversation about how Austin's growth relates to inequality. While recent news stories have highlighted the presence of inequality within the narrative of Austin's success (Zehr 2015; King 2015) there remains an impression of the city that obscures the existence of this social inequality (Kaufman 2014; FOX 2016; Swiatecki 2014). As Javier Auyero points out in his introduction to *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City,* "wealth and poverty, material abundance and penury, are booming right alongside one another in contemporary Austin" (Auyero 2015, 4). As the city grows and changes, business owners and city leaders have become concerned with managing the appearance of the city so that it maintains a feeling of "authentic Austin" while also developing the downtown area specifically for retail and tourism (Economic Research Associates 2005).

Urban development of this kind places an emphasis on visibility, and as such Austin development has been a process where "making urbanity trendy has meant the removal of what was once considered urban: working class minority populations and the shops and stores which served them, homeless people, and ugly structures, all lumped together as blight" (Busch 2015). But the removal of the homeless has never been a complete project, at least in Austin, which has left in a cycle of "attempts to find answers" (Savlov 2009). During the course of this research project, the range of city actions included three main strategies – getting

the homeless off the streets through public order citations, which often lead to jail time; the removal of homeless encampments, which usually amounts to dispersal; and a modestly sized permanent supportive housing program, which only minimally addresses the need for affordable housing. What is happening in Austin, a mid-size city that has been experiencing rapid population and economic growth, is unique enough to make it interesting and common enough to make it relevant.

DATA COLLECTION

Secondary Documents

Understanding visibility in relation to homelessness required an extended engagement with secondary documents in which the problem of homelessness was discussed. The benefit of using archives and recorded meeting minutes to do secondary data collection is that it offered an invaluable historical perspective to a problem that was continuing to unfold over time. The limitation, however, was that the documents do not speak back and therefore provide little opportunity to ask for further details or follow up questions. I draw on the collection of secondary documents throughout the dissertation as I situate the perspectives of my key participants in the larger context of homelessness in Austin and in the conclusion when I engage with how the city has been attempting to address its affordable housing shortage.

I started the data collection in the spring of 2013 at the Austin History Center, reading through their news clippings collection labeled "Homeless," in which they had saved stories related to the topic of homelessness from the 1980s through the 1990s. I continued this archival research throughout the remainder of the research process by reading about homelessness in the digital archives of the local newspapers, *Austin American-Statesman* and *The Austin Chronicle*. During the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, as I was preparing for and reflecting on my participation in the 2014 point in time count of the homeless in Austin, I focused on the *Austin American-Statesman* articles related to "S-Night" (street and shelter night),when the federal government attempted a 1990 census of the homeless population. As I was thinking through comfortability and the policing of space following an insightful conversation during a volunteer shift for Art from the Streets (a program that provides studio time, supplies, and exhibition opportunities for artists who are or have experienced homelessness) I began focusing on news stories related to Public Order Initiatives (when police "crack down" on panhandling, loitering and other "public order" misdemeanors).

During the summer months of 2014, when I was engaging in participant observation and conversational interviews with men who at the time were living in Waterloo Park (a park in the northeast of the urban core that is located on the banks of Waller Creek which runs through the east side of downtown), I paid particular attention to news stories that discussed renovation plans for the creek and its surrounding area. In addition to these stories, I included an analysis of any

comments that accompanied them as these reflected examples of how the discourse of visibility is used to discuss homelessness. Studies that base their results on internet comments have been challenged in their ability to provide valid sociological data (D. Farrell and Petersen 2010; Hesse-Biber and Griffin 2013; Gosling et al. 2004). This is because comment forums are self-selecting and therefore cannot be seen as a representative sample of a social group. My use of this source of data is limited to instances of a discourse of visibility and should not be understood as representative of how people in Austin view the homeless.

In addition to these secondary documents, I collected copies of 100 citations still outstanding from the Travis County court system that were written for the “no sitting or lying” ordinance. Using the city’s search portal, I found and read through the meeting minutes for every city council meeting that is logged as having discussed the issue of homelessness. This led to additional meeting minutes for departmental meetings such as Health and Human Services and the Community Planning Department where homelessness was discussed. I also set up a google alert that sent a message to my email anytime something appeared on the internet (usually one to three times a day) with the words “Austin” and “homeless.”

Ethnographic Observation

While the secondary research above was part my research design, it was also used for contextual knowledge about the issue of homelessness particular to Austin, Texas. In search of meaning in relation to visibility, I thought ethnographic observation would

serve as a useful tool because “there is something rare and special about the symbolic stresses of the common and everyday that ethnography so routinely picks up and records” (Willis 2000, 6). I drew on Mitch Duneier’s use in *Sidewalk* (2000) of George Marcus’s conception of “multi-sited ethnography” as a way to get a “more rounded picture” than I could with a single site approach. Duneier conceptualized this himself as an “extended place method” because he recognized that “the street” had meaningful connections to other places within the city, including Pennsylvania Station, the City Council, and the Business Improvement District (Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000).

My initial step to get out off of the page and into life, so to speak, was to begin volunteering at various organizations that provide resources to people experiencing homelessness. In October of 2013, I joined a team at a church downtown that delivers meals on one night a month through the Mobile Loaves and Fishes organization. In February of 2014, I became a member of the Data Working Group of ECHO (Ending Community Homelessness Organization). I volunteered for the point in time count organized by ECHO in January of 2014, which included the count itself and a two hour training session in the week leading up to the count. During the spring, summer and fall of 2014, I volunteered roughly two days a month as a studio assistant in the Art from the Streets program. During that same time frame, I volunteered twice a week serving meals and handing out toiletries and mail at the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH). During the late summer and fall of 2014 I also started volunteering on some Saturdays scooping casseroles for the food service of Bridge of Angels, which I did a total of six times.

During these volunteer shifts, I did not use my audio recorder for data collection and instead relied on immediate note taking, in the case of the Data Working Group, or audio recordings of my immediate reflections that were supplemented by field notes written later in the day or the following day. I also chose not to audio record meetings that I attended, which I discuss below. I was always open about my presence being in the interest of research, but I felt that raising the question of recording and introducing the presence of a recording device would 1.) compromise the anonymity that some homeless individuals may want, and 2.) potentially alter what people were willing to say. Because I felt that a recording device would be too intrusive, and I did not feel it would be ethical to record in secret, I only have access to the notes that I took. While I would make that same decision again regarding the volunteer roles, I would probably do more recording in large meetings or meetings that were technically open to the public (such as Commander's Forums or Community Court Advisory Board meetings) where my presence or the presence of a recorder would make a smaller difference. When I quote people from these ethnographic observations, I am doing so from my field notes in which I try to capture as close as I can the words and tone that the person used.

Mobile Loaves and Fishes and the Data Working Group were once a month occasions, while Art from the Streets and ARCH were places I could volunteer as frequently as I wanted, which I did usually twice per week. I also attended two of the downtown Austin Police Department Commanders' Forum meetings, where residents and business owners voiced concerns about homelessness in the urban core; three Community Court Advisory Committee meetings, in which the problem of chronic homelessness was

discussed; and two planning meetings for the Integrated Care Collaboration, where various representatives from healthcare providers and Medicaid discussed how to handle the heath issues of the homeless in a more efficient manner (how to find people who have fallen off the grid, how to curb the "frequent flyer" problem and how to reduce emergency room visits for non-emergencies). I also attended two Housing Works meetings where they were planning their "Keep Austin Affordable" campaign in hopes of getting Austin voters to approve $65 million in housing bonds during the November 2013 election (a topic which I return to during the conclusion).

Cumulatively, this ethnographic observation began in May of 2013 and lasted through the fall of 2014 when I began writing some of my findings. In March of 2015 I temporarily suspended the research and writing process to prepare for the birth of my second child, Violet, in April of 2015.

Conversational Interviews

After roughly one year of Mobile Loaves and Fishes (MLF) runs, I developed a rapport with some of the men who were staying in Waterloo Park where we had been stopping fairly regularly. One thing I appreciated about MLF was that the truck went to where the homeless were rather than providing a central location to which homeless people had to come. Another thing I grew to appreciate was that the organization includes low income housing on their runs rather than exclusively serving the homeless, which I viewed as recognition that homelessness is a problem of poverty and not just housing.

I conducted four semi-formal interviews with men who were living in Waterloo Park at the time (Tim, Andre, Slim and Ernest). The organizer for the

MLF team I was on recommended I interview Tim because he had received some ordinances for camping. Following my initial interview with Tim, he introduced me to Andre, Slim and Ernest as a researcher who was interviewing homeless people in Austin. These initial interviews were recorded but not fully transcribed because in listening to them I found them to be almost useless. While they had little structure, I was asking questions specific to the "no sitting or lying" ordinance and the "no camping" ordinance. As I sat down with the intention of transcribing them, I could hear myself redirecting the conversation so that I could ask my prearranged questions or stay on topic. Despite the fact that there were actually only a few questions, the interviews took almost two hours each (two on the first visit to the park and two on the second visit) and despite my attempts to keep it topically focused the discussions became very tangential.

It bothered me as I listened to my recorded voice cut a respondent off in order to keep some of the tangents from taking over the interview. So, I returned to the park with the intention of letting go of any structure in the interview and just sitting with them where they were, together around a cement park bench. I decided a better approach for this particular project would be a "naturalistic" one that would include a "non-directive interview" in which the "interviewee is allowed to talk at length in his or her own terms" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 101). This allowed me to get "unsolicited accounts" from research participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Only here I was not sitting down with one interviewee but instead a few people at a time. The use of quotes here is

to signal that these are all ideals and that a naturalistic approach cannot and should not alleviate the “problem” of the influence of the researcher. Because I did have a particular topic in mind from the start, I reminded participants that I was doing a research project on how anti-homeless ordinances affected the lives of homeless people. I got permission from each of them to record their thoughts on this and other topics and then I recorded the hours of unstructured conversation that followed. While occasionally an interview was as little as twenty minutes, the majority of them lasted for two or three hours and a few times as long as seven hours.

I continued to do these conversational interviews for two days a week with these four men and the people that were hanging out with them on any given day, through the spring, summer, and early fall of 2014. I accompanied them wherever they were going or sat with them if they were going nowhere (collecting and dropping off cans, sitting under an overpass for hours at a time, attending church service, sitting in waiting rooms, walking to the convenience store for beer and cigarettes). Late into the summer Tim began staying under a Highway 183 overpass on Spicewood Springs Road in Northwest Austin. I relocated my conversational interviews there to get a sense of how location changed the basic conditions of homelessness in Austin. I saved a total of 21 recordings of my conversations with Tim and his acquaintances in both Waterloo Park and Spicewood Springs. I was unable to transcribe these in totality due to the sometimes obstructive sound of cars passing overhead or blurring of voices as the

men would sometimes yell over each other. Two conversations were lost entirely; one to a recording failure (on my part because I forgot to delete and clear memory and my recording device) and one to the sound of a helicopter that landed at Brackenridge Hospital, which is located across the street from the park, and kept is rotors spinning.

During the late summer of 2014, I also met a woman named Marie who was staying at the Salvation Army women's shelter. Because I felt good about how the conversational interviews were going with the group at Waterloo, I continued that approach with Marie as well. I recorded 3 conversational interviews with Marie, most of which had to do with her experience as a person new to homelessness. We met several additional times as I helped her run errands while her mobility was restricted as she waited to get a bus pass (I finally bought one for her after three weeks of waiting). I chose not to record all of them as some of our conversations had to do with mental health issues and other sensitive topics.

These moments, along with other similar experiences with Tim, Andre, and Slim, made me question when I was a researcher and when I was not. There were times when I could not in good conscience turn away from the opportunity to help out in small ways, such as the day that Slim needed a ride to get his belongings from the treatment center he had just left or they were going to throw it all away. My willingness to "help" had limitations, though, like on that same day when Slim kept asking me for "just five dollars" for him to buy a ticket home

to see his sister. I assumed Slim was going to use that money to buy drugs and I did not want to contribute to that decision (though he likely made it anyway later in the day).

In terms of research, it could also be argued that helping participants and changing their situations (such as offering rides and buying bus tickets) leads to corrupted data. By reflecting on these moments I became clearer on what/who I was and was not studying and why I felt okay about helping my participants. Because homeless people and their actions in relation to surviving homelessness were not the objects of my research project, I felt that my involvement did not change the "outcomes" of my study.

In addition to the conversational interviews mentioned above, I also recorded conversational interviews with two volunteers for Church under the Bridge, one with a volunteer for Art from the Streets, one with a volunteer for Mobile Loaves and Fishes, and one with a convenience store clerk that was frequented by homeless men buying beer. In addition, I met with Pastor George Crisp, who runs Bridge of Angels and recorded four of our conversational interviews.

Photography

Since I began this research project interested in the issues of visual appearance and the uses of urban space, visual methods provided by photographic technology felt like an appropriate and promising approach to gathering data. While this did turn out to be true to some degree, particularly for "Chapter 6:

Comfortable While Homeless," I found that the camera was more useful in building rapport with research participants as it added a dimension of "exploring individual subjectivities and creative collaboration" (Pink 2007, 43). Photography was as much about building relationships as it was about capturing images.

I have wrestled with the ethics of using photography for this project. In some ways, it could be argued that the homeless are among the most overrepresented in photography of "vulnerable populations" and that my use of photography ran the risk of joining the ranks of this form of "poverty porn." Photography, especially by ethnographers, has a long history of serving as an objectifying tool through which knowledge production reproduces stereotypes and exploits difference. Many scholars have pointed out the "pervasiveness of the symbolic and scientific uses of photography for the verification and justification of colonial rule" (Hight and Sampson 2004, 2). Colonial photographs had multiple purposes, which included "the dehumanizing practices of isolating allegedly degenerate groups" on the one hand while on the other they served to "identify others for their suitability to service or for their receptiveness to reculturation in accord with colonial authority" (Hight and Sampson 2004, 2).

The power of photography comes from the fact that "photographs are thought to reproduce reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report" (D. Schwartz 1989, 120). Yes, as Les Back has pointed out, "the lens is not always about the control and fixing of subjects. To see photography as merely a governing technology misses the instability and complexity of the drama that unfolds on either side of the lens" (Back 2007, 104). There was a drama unfolding on my side of the

camera that can be traced from the earliest picture in my project, where everything is taken from a distance, and the later images where the images reveal a proximity that was achieved only through the formation of close contact and friendship.

The shift in photographic methodology was inspired in part by a photography workshop that Ben Carrington arranged on behalf of the Race and Ethnicity study group and the Urban Ethnography Lab. Ben had invited one of his mentors, Max Farrar, to share his experience with using photography as an ethnographic method. In preparation for his visit, we read an essay by Farrar called “Making and Breaking Racialised Boundaries: an Essay in Reflexive, Radical, Visual Sociology” (2005). I did not understand the significance that the essay would have on me at the time, and I remember voicing some critique about Farrar overstating the extent to which racialised boundaries had been crossed. But, in looking back I realize that essay and the workshop were pivotal in pushing me to be honest with myself about the boundaries that were shaping and inhibiting my own research practices.

The photographs that I shared for the workshop focused on traces of homelessness such as piss stains, rolled up sleeping bags and backpacks. I had absented the people about whom I supposedly cared enough about to expend the labor of a dissertation. The only person who appeared in the photos was a man washing his feet in Waller Creek and his body was small in the frame because I was on top of a bridge and he was below. There was no face or name or person – he was a body that stood for a concept. When Farrar shared his photos of people there were names and faces and permissions granted and facial characteristics that recognized that each person was special. They were not

absented and they did not stand in for a concept – they stood in for themselves in relation to a concept.

This closeness did not come naturally to Max. It had developed through time in a reflexive photographic process that recognized boundaries and worked to make those boundaries less severe and less concrete. In his essay, he wrote a line that now has particular resonance for me in which he states his aim to practice "sociological reflexivity, not in the cold sense of critical reflection, but in the hot sense of acknowledging the intensely emotional state in which I, at least, attempt to make sense of and change the world, and intending to reveal a little of how this emotional work infuses and shapes my sociological and political work" (Farrar 2005, 1.4)

For Max, his whiteness and his camera created a barrier for getting the kind of photos he wanted of the Black Power movement in the Leeds' neighborhood of Chapeltown during the 1970s. His early photographs reveal social distance as he was never let in close enough to capture a sense of personal relationship. Over time, some of the photographed become closer and they look into the camera, which for Max means "an unmistakable representation of pleasure and friendship which overcomes the difference that colour is supposed to make" (Farrar 2005, 5.2).

While I do not claim a practice of radical photography, I was challenged by Max Farrar's practice of using photography to challenge racial boundaries. I was pushed out of the complacency of my claim of being interested in the traces of homelessness as they represent the city's processes of removal. I was initially very uncomfortable using my camera to collect visual data about homelessness. Over time, it became an integral took in

my research process, and I think the subsequent photographs evince a similar movement from distance to intimacy that reveals the changing nature of the social boundaries that existed between me and the people in my study. In the dissertation, the reader will see photographs that depict social distance or difference as well as photographs that represent affinity and pleasure. This shift helped me see that the camera is not always a tool of objectification (though it often has been) and that the relationship between the photographer and the photographed is important in shaping what kind of political work the photograph does.

The social distance/difference that stood between me and people experiencing homelessness was/is both personal (as I detailed in the Introduction) and structural. The management techniques that city actors employ to reduce the visible presence of homelessness in the downtown core of Austin (as well as other areas) reduce the likelihood of social interaction across this classed and racialized boundary to take place (between the housed and the unhoused). The ordinances that legalize the moral or economic claims that the homeless should not reside on the sidewalk or on benches create as well as reflect the idea that only those with a proper dwelling ought to find leisure in public space. Therefore, the public is not a site of social mixing and the social distance/difference between the housed and the unhoused is made more definite.

It was this social distance that also presented methodological challenges for me. This might be counterintuitive if you think of the homeless being highly visible and therefore highly available for questioning. But I felt uneasy with the idea of just sauntering up to someone whose availability had largely to do with the fact that they do

not necessarily have anywhere else to go. If public space was home for some people, I did not want to just barge into that home like a door to door salesperson. And to be honest, I was also afraid – a fear which was mostly based in the fact that I had very little information about homelessness other than what I have gleaned from a distance. I wanted to find research respondents in a way that felt more ethical to me and also that felt more informed.

It has been argued that ethnographic methods, and qualitative methods in general, raise tricky ethical concerns because they require practitioners to "form relationships and become close enough to informants to see the world through their perspective" (Morse 1994, 334). Of particular concern throughout my research project was the ethical requirement of gaining informed consent, which is a common concern among researchers who do ethnographic studies of homelessness (Menih 2013). In many cases, it is not possible to gain informed consent prior to beginning research and oftentimes consent is "negotiated and renegotiated over time" (E. Murphy and Dingwall 2007, 2225).

Each time I recorded a conversation I began by reminding my participants that I was required to get their permission to record them and that they were free to stop the conversation or recording at any time. But, there were times when a respondents' inebriation or mental/emotional distress/illness clouded my confidence in whether they knew what they were agreeing to. As I concluded interviews and began transcribing and analyzing my data, I was not sure if I felt comfortable using any of it at all. I still do not know if there is any greater good that this project will add to and as time went on I knew that the expectations that participants had of "the book" that my research would produce

was different than what a dissertation actually looks like. On the other hand, I felt that subjecting all of them to my interviews and then doing nothing with it would be even more disingenuous.

In the end, I decided to weigh very heavily on the respondents who I had gotten to know well through repeated and long contact because I felt the most comfortable in my ability to represent their thoughts. The strength and the weakness of this is that I witnessed the changing of tides that happens within any person over the course of time when they consider and speak about the conditions of their lives. On any given day, for example, the police might be seen as harsh and controlling or permissive and even friendly – depending on the mood or the weather on the day an interview occurred. I felt frustrated with the inconsistency until I realized that I too was riding a rollercoaster of feelings about my own life conditions and my experience of academia and graduate school. Had someone interviewed me about the specifics of my life I would have given wildly different answers depending on the day.

This prolonged engagement became important, then, to my ability to hear the stories within their many stories that resonated with what I felt was important to tell in this one project. But, I miss a lot. The time I spent with Tim and Andre, and others, showed me the complexity of living in homelessness in a way that I could not have understood with one or two or even three interviews. The way they spoke about Austin, ordinances, people, health, job prospects, their pasts, religion, social services, weather, each other, and a host of other topics showed me that not only is homelessness a varied experience between people but it is as well within the course of one person's experience.

In retrospect, another form of storytelling, such as creative non-fiction, painting, sculpture, creative photography, poetry, or a combination of all of these, would be better suited for me to relay the findings of this project. But as I faced the task of writing a sociological dissertation, I tried to make room for some of the nuance while at the same time telling a set of coherent stories.

While I felt constrained by the ethics of retelling the stories of people I had interviewed, I was further constrained by some of the institutional limitations that I faced as a researcher. For example, I can only speak generally about my experience volunteering at the ARCH because writing about it puts me at risk of being in violation of the paperwork I signed when I began volunteering there. While I had been open about being there as a researcher, I was also asked to sign the standard form of confidentiality stating that I am not allowed to discuss in detail any people, statements or events that I saw there during my volunteer time. Forms such as these can be used by Front Steps to further obfuscate what actually happens inside the walls of the shelter, so I feel it is important to at least offer a small window into my experience there. While the form of confidentiality may on the one hand protect residents from being exposed, it also protects the organization from vulnerability to exposure. The organization is in the position of having the privilege to conceal and selectively make visible, while the residents experience the exposure of the Homeless Management Information System data technology as well as the stigma of their housing status by their spatial association to the shelter. Additionally, they are kept in the dark about why certain decisions are made about facilities that intimately affect their lives.

This confidentiality form recalls the tension in the politics of visibility discussed by Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore in their book *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visiblity* (2009). They devote the second part of the book to the idea of exposure, which is the process through which bodies come into view. They argue that exposure is paradoxical in that it "can be dangerous or damaging to bodies, [but] it can also bring bodies into focus and mobilize resources" (2009: 79). Throughout the process of this dissertation I have faced the anxiety of this paradox; that I am exposing people at the same time that I wish to make their visibility count and that I have the power to expose some more than others. Casper and Moore ask their readers to consider the social conditions of exposure and to think about what social positions benefit from the unequal relations of exposure. That I cannot write in specifics about what I saw at the ARCH, yet clients were subject to the surveillance of both data management and security guards is a finding in itself. The lack of visibility surrounding the conditions within the shelter and how resource decisions are made suggests that confidentiality has less to do with protecting the anonymity of clients and more to do with protecting Front Steps (and the city of Austin) from exposure to a critique of the conditions of the shelter.

LIMITATIONS

As I have alluded to in different sections above, the project represented in this dissertation had its limitations as a result of both the researcher and the research design. While the study makes contributions to the understanding of visibility and its role in reifying the marginalization of homeless people, it cannot be read as a generalized

representation of the ways that homeless people as a social group relate to visibility. The interpretations also cannot be generalized to other cities, and especially to places outside of the U.S. I do engage in limited ways to the national discourse on homelessness and to policies that are enacted by cities outside of Austin. Therefore, the dissertation could be used to understand some phenomena related to visibility in other U.S. cities, or even possibly places outside of the U.S. that share cultural and economic similarities to Austin. The validity of the data collected is enhanced by revealing the name of the city in which the study took place, as well as the specific locations and organizations involved.

Perhaps more concerning are the limitations that stem from my own internalized relationship to the stigma of poverty. This overdetermined my difficulty in finding a voice with which to tell a sociological story, in finding my own sense of ethics related to telling the stories of others, and determining how comfortable I was putting other people's lives on display. In the case of the latter, I was cautious and sometimes erred on the side of omission. The danger of this cautiousness is that my key participants are not depicted as rounded, complex people. The may not come to life on the page as I would wish them to. Because I have so much recorded time with many of them, this issue could be addressed in future work as I continue to develop arguments from this dissertation as well as my intellectual voice.

Chapter 4: Who Counts?

Figure 3: A View of the Mobile Loaves and Fishes Racks with the Capitol in the Distance

The sun was just setting behind the pink granite capitol building on a colder than usual November night in Austin, Texas. On the street between the expansive greenspace that surrounds the capitol and the First United Methodist Church of Austin sat a white food truck running idle with heat blowing from its vents to warm the cabin. Along with four other volunteers, I hurriedly opened the truck's side latches, lifted up the metal side panel turned awning, and filled the truck's three stainless steel shelves with bins of sandwiches, chips, cookies, fruit, socks and toiletries. The strongest of us, Gus, lifted the half full, 10 gallon water dispenser into the truck's back storage, along with a plastic bag of disposable cups and bulk size tins of Swiss Miss hot chocolate, no marshmallows, and

Folger's instant coffee. I tried to move fast because I was freezing and regretting leaving my sweater in the car.

On warmer nights, there had been at least a few people standing outside the church waiting for this moment to have the first choice at our food supply, but tonight there was nobody. Before we loaded ourselves into the truck, we did the customary holding hands in prayer and then climbed into the heated truck, for which I felt thankful, to begin the food delivery run. That night our team leader had chosen three spots all within close distance to each other on the east side of Austin, meaning the run would be shorter than usual. Sometimes the stops spanned from east Austin to southwest Austin and could run for several hours. As we made our way eastward across Interstate 35 we all commented on the emptiness of the sidewalks because we were used to being waved down several times on the drive by people who wanted food. In the absence of these usual people, we began to wonder if anyone would be around at our scheduled stopping points. Debra, the middle-aged white woman leading that night's volunteer team, considered out loud whether that night might have been the first night we returned to the church with a truck still filled with food.

I began asking a series of questions about where she thought people might be staying and what would happen to the food if we returned with a full truck. She reached over to pat my right leg and reassured me that the food would not be wasted, that if nothing else we would do a drop outside of the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) because, she commented, there are always people standing out there. The ARCH is Austin's "one stop shop" for a variety of homeless services including "a large

common-use room, public showers, public restrooms, storage lockers, laundry facilities, a computer room, study spaces, and offices for various nonprofit organizations that provide a direct service to the homeless clients" ("ARCH" 2013). I was told during a previous run that the ARCH is not a frequent or desirable stop for the team because the people are too aggressive, they will not make ordered lines, and they tend not to express gratitude for the food. We never made it to the ARCH that night, though.

Our first stop was the parking lot outside of a convenience store on the east side of town called the Urban Market. Mark, who was driving the truck that night, honked the horn several times as we turned left into the lot and came to a stop under a lone street lamp. Honking as the truck pulls up is the standard process on these stops, but that night the effect on visibility was particularly obvious. By the time we were out of the truck and opening the food compartment, there were already several people walking toward us. They emerged from the darkness in all directions, from behind the building and out of the alley, from down the street and out of cars. The first to arrive were a handful of men who had an apparent familiarity with the food truck, evidenced by the way they immediately stood in two neat lines, waiting in silence except for one young man who was audibly angry as he tried to fix his bike seat. Almost everyone was dressed in layers of sweatshirts and sweaters and wind-blocking jackets. As the line got longer, people – especially women – began appearing who I had not yet seen in this spot. I heard many of these women on their cell phones telling others to join them because the food truck had just pulled up and the line was not too long this time. Previous stops at this location were usually greeted by a group of generally the same men hanging around the alley. What

was different this time was not just the larger presence of women, but many of them asked for extra bags for their children who were waiting elsewhere. In less than thirty minutes, the bins in the truck were empty and we were pulling out to head back to the church.

As we began to pull away, I could see that the parking lot had returned back into the deserted, barely lit space to which we had arrived. A few people were standing near the convenience store entrance and an old green sedan was sitting near it with its engine running and lights on. As we drove slowly passed the car, which was facing toward us, its wide passenger side door suddenly swung open. A woman stepped out. Her hair was short and straight, dark underneath and bleach blonde on top. We all watched silently as she walked toward the truck, me from spot directly behind Mark in the driver's seat. The woman gestured with a hand of long, bright blue nails for Mark to roll his driver's side window down. As he obliged, she started to yell and I could feel the tension in the truck rise, especially in the space where my leg was touching Debra's who was sitting to the right of me. Her face looked angry but as she got closer I saw tears hanging on the edges of her eyelids. She stuck her head through the door frame to look at each of us, repeating the words "thank you" over and over, and the tears that were welling in her eyes began rolling down her face.

"Thank you for not ignoring us," she said. "Thank you for coming here. Nobody comes out here. Y'all never used to stop here but I'm glad you did because we really need it." I remember that she had strong cheek bones and they glistened from the headlights reflecting off the wetness of her cheeks. As our bodies relaxed from the

tension of not knowing why she was approaching us, they also began to sag from the weight of her words. For the next ten minutes she described for us in fast-spoken words all the loss she was witnessing in the lives that surrounded her. She said that she had chosen not to take any food that night because on that day she had eaten and she knew how bad others were suffering, that kids were becoming orphans because their parents were dying of drug abuse and AIDS; that people were losing their homes and sleeping in their cars if they were lucky to have them. She said that so many people had nothing and lives were wasting away. I will never forget the words she used to sum it all up: "These are the end of times over here."

I had tears in my eyes too as she kissed the inside of her hand and then sent us off with a wave. On the short drive back to the church the truck was heavy with silence. I wanted to jump out and go back to ask her all the questions that were running through my head. I wanted to hear her stories. But I stayed. I struggled with the shame of knowing that we were actually doing so little and feeling relief that the food run was over for the night. As we neared the church Debra broke the silence with the kind of self-praise that I had been hearing frequently from well-meaning, middle-aged white women volunteers. In my field notes, I wrote that she said: "See guys, that's what this is all about. I love it when someone shows gratitude like that. It lets me know I'm really doing something, that what we do here matters." I do not doubt that food relief organizations do something important. But, from my perspective the food run brought to visibility a level of suffering that was more wide spread and urgent than I had previously known – and so accomplishment was the last thing I was feeling.

The food run describe above was one of many that I went on as a volunteer for Mobile Loaves and Fishes (MLF). MLF is a local, non-profit religious-based organization that coordinates volunteer teams to deliver food goods by truck in locations that are known to be the home sites for people living on the spectrum of housing instability. Funding for these runs comes from local donors, including members of each particular church that operates an MLF kitchen as well as people in the Austin community who donate money through a monthly fund drive called "Everyday Angels." The donations provide each team leader with money to purchase food which is standardized across the kitchens except for one that serves hamburgers provided by a local restaurant. Team leaders are also responsible for recruiting volunteers to make, load and deliver the food. MLF has 11 trucks in locations dispersed throughout the city and sends out a team of volunteers to a few locations selected from a standard MLF list of stops by the team lead which is coordinated through an online mapping system so that no teams do not double deliver to a spot. These runs happen almost every night of the month.

That night illuminated some important aspects on the themes of visibility, invisibility, and the quantification of homelessness. In this chapter, I look at particular examples in Austin of organizations that take account of homelessness. I draw on the testimony of the woman outside of the Urban Market described above, as well as literature from the sociology of homelessness, to move beyond a theoretical perspective that takes numbers for granted. Amongst those who study homelessness, the "most common questions about the homeless concern numbers, composition, and geographic

distribution" (Lee et. al 2010, 503). As Wendy Espeland and Mitchell Stevens argue in "A Sociology of Quantification" (2008), the interest of sociologists in the accuracy of numbers rather than questioning the implications of quantifications has created a gap in the sociological understanding of modern life. They argue that over the last thirty years, the demand for quantification has increased dramatically, yet sociologists have failed to address "the work that numbers do." This is perhaps nowhere more accurate than in the knowledge production around the topic of homelessness.

COUNTING THE HOMELESS

Quantifying the homeless is not a straightforward task. Nor is defining who is homeless in the first place, as was discussed in the Literature Review. How homelessness is defined dramatically shapes the result of any homeless enumeration. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recognizes two categories of what is referred to as "housing instability:" those who are "literally homeless" and those who are "precariously housed." The first group includes people who are either using homeless shelters or who sleep in places "place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings."[1] The second group would include anybody who is at immanent risk of losing access to housing for a variety of reasons, and would also include anyone seeking shelter in the homes of friends or family. By HUD's definition, the second category is not included in any count of homelessness that adheres to HUD standards (Shumsky 2012).

[1] See the definition of "homeless" in the McKinney-Vento Act for Homeless Assistance amended in 2009 (McKinney 2009, sec. SEC. 103. [42 USC 11302] Sec. 103).

While the social phenomenon of homelessness has a long history, the practice of counting and surveying homeless populations is a relatively new phenomenon and has become an increasingly common practice in the last decade (Colletti 2016). Technologies for counting the homeless have varied from ocular-based judgments of volunteer counters, to self-reporting on surveys, to forms filed during emergency shelter in-take. Debates around the issue of counting flared in the United States during the 1980s, when media reports of the supposedly newly visible, growing homeless population circulated through national news. Homeless advocates at the time were arguing for an estimate as high as 2.2 million, while federal agencies reported official counts as low as 250,000 (Shumsky 2012). This extreme discrepancy launched a controversy about best methodological practices for assessing the homeless problem. For the most part, scholarly debate on this issue has generally been quieted, with interested parties agreeing that any reported number is a rough estimate and likely falls somewhere between the two extremes (Shumsky 2012; Jencks 1995).

In a recent story for the *Guardian*, the journalist Gary Younge introduces a new project called The Counted, which has the capacity to count the number of people killed by police. This counting is important because, as the title states, “The U.S. can’t keep track of how many people its police kill” (Younge 2015). Younge’s story reveals that “the question of who counts and whom is counted is not simply a matter of numbers. It’s also about power… Collecting information, particularly about people, demands both the authority to gather data and the capacity to keep and transmit it. (Younge 2015). In this instance, to be counted is to matter. In other instances, being counted is a form of social

control. It is therefore important to consider the implications that follow from particular counting strategies and numerical reports.

Counting and numerical assessments are one of the main ways that homelessness becomes visible to the culture more broadly. Who counts, both in terms of who does the counting and who is counted, affects various forms of resource allocation as well as perceptions of safety and quality of life in a given place. Further, the emergence of the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) technology in the early 2000s provided the United States federal government with greater control over how local agencies assist and gather data on the homeless. HMIS is "a local information technology system used to collect client-level data, and data on the provision of housing and services for homeless individuals, families, and persons at risk of homelessness" ("ECHO – HMIS" 2016). The HEARTH Act, which amended and reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Act, passed in 2009 with an addition stating that "all communities [must] have an HMIS with the capacity to collect unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing homelessness" (HUD Exchange 2016).

The necessity for "unduplicated counts" hints at the emphasis on the pathology of the individual as the site of the homeless problem. Bush has been credited with bringing the issue of homeless back into view of public policy through his passage of the HEARTH Act in 2009 as well as his stated goal in the FY2003 budget of ending chronic homelessness in ten years (Mangano 2006; J. Day and Cavallaro 2014). At first it may seem surprising that a republican president such as George W. Bush would have endorsed and then passed a bill that reinvigorated the government's involvement in providing aid

to people in poverty. This policy action begins to make sense when understood as an individualized, market-based approach to ending homelessness. His plans called for "more services to reform individual homeless people" rather than address the "need for more affordable housing units," which indicates a neoliberal mentality that views providing housing to poor people as "increasing their dependence on government and decreasing their drive to become self-reliant individuals" (Lyon-Callo 2004, 12).

In Austin, the implementation of HMIS is led by an organization called Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). ECHO is Austin's Continuum of Care (CoC) organization that serves as the centralized coordinator for homeless services in the area and reports data on "the homeless problem" in Austin to the federal government. The "continuum of care" strategy was put into place in the mid-1990s, under the leadership of Bill Clinton's administration, and required local communities to have a centrally organized, "less wasteful" way to manage and coordinate the needs of homeless individuals. CoCs recruit local agencies to become part of a coordinated care network, which includes taking part in a Coordinated Assessment program through standardized intake processes and using HMIS software to compile data on each individual that approaches an agency for services. HMIS allows each participating agency, including emergency rooms in hospitals, to have access to a shared system of data that saves standardized data points for any person entered into the system, including a field for flagging individuals as "high risk clients" or "qualified for immediate housing" or

"substance abuser."[2] Through ECHO's guidance, the majority of homeless services in Austin have been centralized through the coordinated assessment program, which has resulted in fewer points of entry into receiving care. ECHO requires that individuals in need of services go through one of three "front doors" – the ARCH, the Salvation Army, and ECHO.

The neoliberal mindset that drives homeless services to be organized around individual pathologies rather than structural problems means that assessment of success is based on individual measures, which are counts of whether individuals are meeting standard measures of improvement. I saw an example of this during a Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) Advisory Committee meeting on July 19, 2013, when an update was presented by two DACC case managers on the progress of a Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) strategy called Partnership Housing. The DACC, in partnership with the Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA, a network of downtown business owners), Caritas (a non-profit organization that provides homeless services), and Foundation Communities (a non-profit provider of affordable housing), was investing in Partnership Housing in hopes of reducing offenses by people identified as chronically homeless.

The interest in getting chronically homeless offenders housed, who in this case were all men and were referred to as clients once they entered case management, was stated by the DACC committee as a cost issue, both the cost of court proceedings and the

[2] These categories and the necessity to flag individuals in the HMIS software were discussed during an ECHO Data Working Group meeting on April 24, 2014.

cost of paying for space to store the documents that are generated by repeat offenders – space that the DACC was running out of. According to the presentation, between January of 2013 and July of 2013, only 2 chronically homeless clients had been housed through Partnership Housing, 3 were in the process of applying (which was a long process requiring much paperwork, letters of recommendation, and income verification), and 4 began the application process but disengaged due to incarceration. Many of the chronically homeless offenders who were in case management through the DACC were not eligible for Partnership Housing "due to criminal background."

Subsequent counts in the presentation indicated that 8 housing clients had received new charges in the DACC system even though they were in permanent housing (there were 18 clients in housing at the time), 1 was discharged because of a lease violation, and 1 had a unit reserved for him but he never moved because he left drug treatment early. Just as these measurements of whether Partnership Housing worked were individualized rather than viewed as systemic, so too were the proposed solutions on how to make the program work better. The top suggestions for increasing success were to: 1.) "Motivate clients to stay engaged in the process through positive support and incentives," and 2.) "Support clients who are in housing through continued collaboration with case managers, intensive services, peer support, pro-social activities, etc." (B. Williams and Myles 2013).

The scenario described above is nothing new. The homeless, along with other sub-populations of the poor, have long been under the measuring eyes of both caregivers and public order officials. Beginning with the surveying and badging of the poor in

sixteenth century Europe, to social worker home visits in the U.S. during the early 1900s, to today's computerized information systems; "governments have closely examined those who seek assistance" (Gilliom 2001, 19). To be poor and to enter the system of care has meant being subjected to examination, measurement and tracking by the "helping professions" (Parenti 2007). Because of this, Christian Parenti argues that the management of the poor has served as a laboratory for testing technologies of surveillance that are then used in society more broadly.

HOMELESSNESS ON THE DECLINE

In the case of the Partnership Housing program developed through the DACC system discussed above, the work that numbers do is to label the problem of homelessness as 1.) a problem of deviant and criminal behavior and 2.) an issue that is defined by the behavior of individuals. Numbers are also used in the media to represent the size of the homeless problem, sometimes as an indicator of that state of the economy and other times as an indicator of a need for greater public order (usually through police presence). Stories about the size of the homeless problem often make a statement in terms of temporal comparisons, where the number of homeless is thought to be either growing or shrinking, and therefore the problem is understood to be either getting more or less urgent. This directionality is important, because it often tells a lot about the interests that lie behind the particular construction of homelessness at hand.

In 2010, the U.S. government introduced what it claims is "the nation's first comprehensive strategy to prevent and end homelessness," an initiative called *Opening*

Doors (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness). Since the plan was put into place, millions of federal dollars have gone towards funding homeless assistance service providers, including $8 million alone that went toward housing assistance for veterans. Part of *Opening Doors* policy includes setting targets, measuring results, and reporting those results to the public. That process alone is a costly enterprise that requires its own funding sources, which primarily comes through tax dollars. The government, therefore, has an interest in telling a story of progress through the reduction of homelessness.

On November 21, 2013, one week before Thanksgiving, HUD reported a 6% decline in the overall number of homeless since 2010, the year *Opening Doors* went into effect. Like at the national level, Austin also reported a decline in people experiencing homelessness since 2007. On November 27, the Texas Tribune ran an online, interactive story giving testimony to this decline (R. Murphy and MacLaggan 2013). A user of the site can choose from seventeen specific cities to see an individualized map of the trend in that area between the years of 2007 and 2013.

This reduction in the account of homelessness mirrors the story of economic progress that is popular in the media representation of contemporary Austin, where the city is constructed as a booming technology city with expanding opportunities both culturally and economically. A recent report by the Praxis Strategy Group identified Austin as the U.S. metro region with the most economic momentum, citing that the city has "enjoyed double-digit growth in GDP, jobs, population and birthrate since 2007" (Kotkin 2013). While losses in the petroleum industry are affecting the economy in Texas

overall, economists claim that the technology, housing, and retail industries will keep Austin's economy growing, though perhaps not as fast, through 2016 (Zehr 2016).

GROWING HOMELESS POPULATION

While the economic health of Austin may indeed be better than many U.S. cities, economic growth is not shared equally by all city inhabitants – as is evident in the number of people lining up for food in the opening scene of this chapter. In fact, in March of 2013 a local station ran a news story stating that growth of the technology industry in Austin has also meant a higher cost of housing in the city. This increase cost of living was not accompanied by an increase in wages, particularly for low paying jobs. Austin ranks top in the state of Texas with the highest average for fair market rent, averaging $830 for a one-bedroom apartment and $1050 for a two-bedroom (Weber and Dunbar 2013). A person making minimum wage would have to work a 111 hour work week to meet that rent.

The high rental rate can be attributed in part to what Elizabeth Mueller has identified as an uneven pattern of apartment construction over Austin's history. Apartment complexes built during an apartment construction boom during the 1970s and 1980s serve as a primary source of housing (53.6%) for Austin's low income renters (Mueller 2010). Following this boom, less investment has been placed in multi-family complexes because the city has adopted planning practices that focus on "redevelopment to achieve the dense, mixed-use patterns thought crucial to environmental sustainability," which is seen in opposition to strictly residential, multi-family apartment complexes

(Mueller 2010, 121). Therefore, as the older complexes fall into disrepair, they are often demolished and replaced by mixed-use structures that have less residential space in general, and far less that is affordable to Austin's working class and low income populations.

In addition to high rents, the city has also experienced several increases in property taxes. In fact, the property tax for the typical Austin home rose 38% between the years of 2000 and 2010, while the median income remained steady (Toohey 2012). These property tax increases without a similar increase in income has often meant that home owners on fixed incomes can no longer afford to keep their homes. Trends in the rising costs of both home rental and home ownership have led some to make the claim that more Austinites are experiencing displacement from housing and that the number of people using homeless services is growing (Vaught 2013).

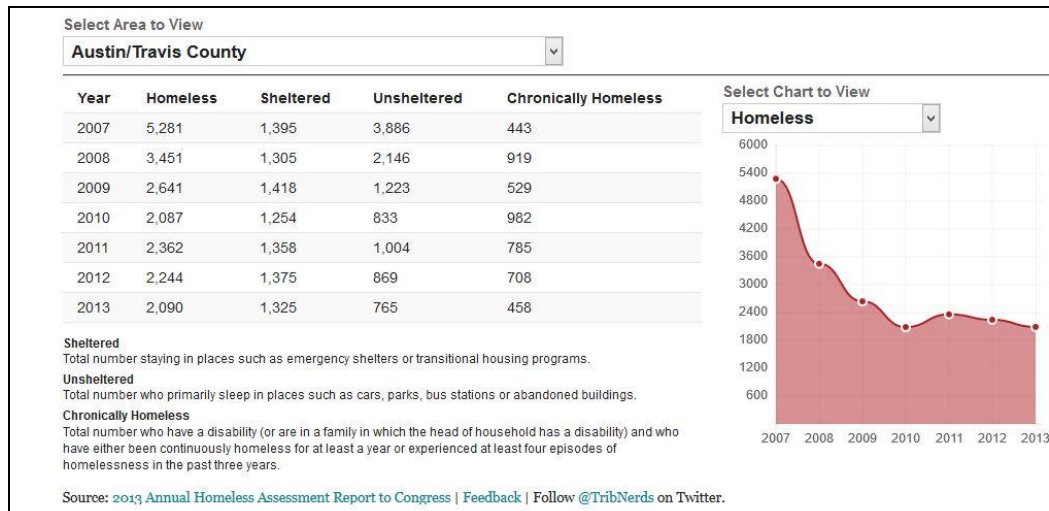
So, at the same time that media reports have continued to tell a story of the growing problem of homelessness in Austin (for business and home owners), the official count that was reported to both HUD and the public claims that homelessness has been on a steady decline over the past six years. Another set of numbers provided by ECHO also contradicts the recent report on the decline in homelessness. As part of their relationship with the HUD, local communities also have to track and report service usage each week. These weekly reports are generated through HMIS and provide an unduplicated count of how many people used housing, shelter, or other services providing assistance to people experiencing housing instability. As of December 7, the number of people who were served in 2013 was 13,588, 131 more people than at the same point in

2012.[3] While it is likely that media reports of homelessness tend to sensationalize the problem and exaggerate the rate of growth, the contradiction in stories also demands a critical look at counting and assessing practices, and in particular the "street count" that is used to inform the public on the issue of homelessness.

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

How, then, are numbers about homelessness produced? Important information emerges if the recently reported numbers are read more carefully. The interactive report on homelessness in Texas cited above is categorized by the subpopulations of sheltered, unsheltered, and chronically homeless. The numerical information of the sheltered population shows a relatively steady count, with the highest at 1,418 in 2009 and the lowest at 1,254 in 2010 (See Fig. 4). So, the 1,325 count of 2013 appears to be hovering around average for the years between 2007 and 2013. This is not a surprising outcome, considering that the sheltered count is constrained by the number of beds available in shelters, which are almost always at full capacity. A comparison between the counts of chronically homeless in 2007 and 2013 also shows little difference, though it rose and fell again between those years.

[3] Since I no longer volunteer for ECHO's Data Working Group, and in fact the group was eliminated for redundancy due to the capabilities of HMIS, I no longer have access to HMIS numbers to give updated accounts.



Select Area to View

Austin/Travis County

Year	Homeless	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Chronically Homeless
2007	5,281	1,395	3,886	443
2008	3,451	1,305	2,146	919
2009	2,641	1,418	1,223	529
2010	2,087	1,254	833	982
2011	2,362	1,358	1,004	785
2012	2,244	1,375	869	708
2013	2,090	1,325	765	458

Sheltered
Total number staying in places such as emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.

Unsheltered
Total number who primarily sleep in places such as cars, parks, bus stations or abandoned buildings.

Chronically Homeless
Total number who have a disability (or are in a family in which the head of household has a disability) and who have either been continuously homeless for at least a year or experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Source: 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress | Feedback | Follow @TribNerds on Twitter.

Figure 4: Interactive: Texas' Homeless Population Declines

What this information reveals is that the narrative of homelessness on the decline relies heavily on data gathered about the unsheltered population, which is depicted in the graph in Figure 4. Isolating the unsheltered subpopulation in the interactive graph shows a consistent decline over these years, with the sharpest decrease occurring between 2007 and 2009, but falling steadily from 3,886 in 2007 to 765 in 2013. This topic made news again in March of 2016 when the preliminary results of the 2016 point-in-time count showed a 20% increase in the total homeless population (sheltered and unsheltered) since 2015 (Barragán 2016). Because the unsheltered population almost entirely accounts for the increase or decline in homelessness in the city of Austin, as told through point-in-time counts, then receivers of this data should take into consideration how this data is gathered. And on this, we return to the issue of visibility.

The data in the interactive Texas Tribune story above was drawn from the 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR). While AHAR is an

extensive report with multiple types of data, what was released to the press and reported in the media was data gathered through what is called a point-in-time count of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. These counts have been mandated by HUD since 2003, when a Congressional directive went into effect that requires all CoCs to improve the quality of information on homelessness at the local level by reporting to HUD the number of people who are homeless in the community at a given time.

The 2003 directive is enforced by requiring an annual data report, including a point-in-time count, as part of the application process for federal funding. No count, no money. Further, HUD has provided government documents that spell out the agency's standards of how the homeless will be counted, who will count as homeless, what subpopulation an individual should fall into, and what methods should be used for locating and counting the homeless. Written testimonial that these standards were followed must accompany the data report in order for the application for funding to be processed.

Point-in-time counts, often called street counts, are standardized by HUD through documentation that supplies suggested strategies for locating the homeless, identifying who is homeless, and avoiding the risk of danger on the part of volunteer counters. I was trained in these standards through the mandatory training process when I volunteered for the street count that took place in Austin on January 24th and 25th of 2014. The standardization of these practices allows HUD to see local counts as comparable, and can therefore rank geographical areas in terms of how well or poorly they are addressing the local "homeless problem." Despite the training mandates, however, there were many

informal, off-the-record suggestions given by the organizers that suggested two key points. First, the organizers of the particular point-in-time count I participated in viewed HUD's standardized practices and definitions as constraining, primarily because following them would produce a smaller count and would therefore limit the amount of money that local agencies would receive in federal funding. This shows that even those who organize the count do not see it as accurate. Secondly, the informal suggestions provided by organizers directly affected the outcome of each count at the local level, but did so in ways that could not be standardized across teams of volunteer counters.

As mandated, the point-in-time count occurs annually on one night in January, and is organized by a community's CoC agency. ECHO serves as Austin's local CoC, and as such recruits volunteers from the community to "canvass our community to count homeless men, women and children on the streets, under highway bridges and in camps" (ECHO 2013). I was assigned to the counting shift that ran from 3am to 6am in the western downtown district, which is represented by the north half of district 9 in the city council district map (Figure 5). The night was freezing and I wore my warmest jacket, hat, gloves and boots anticipating that we would be "canvassing" our assigned area as ECHO's claim suggests. We were directed to meet at UT's Social Work building where the organizers were headquartered and I arrived to a room filled with mostly white college aged students and some middle-aged white women. One of the few non-white volunteers was a man named Charles, who led the team that I was assigned to. A fellow teammate, who is a graduate student in Social Work, later explained that his participation

as well as that of several others was because both graduate and undergraduate students could earn course credit for taking part in the point-in-time count.

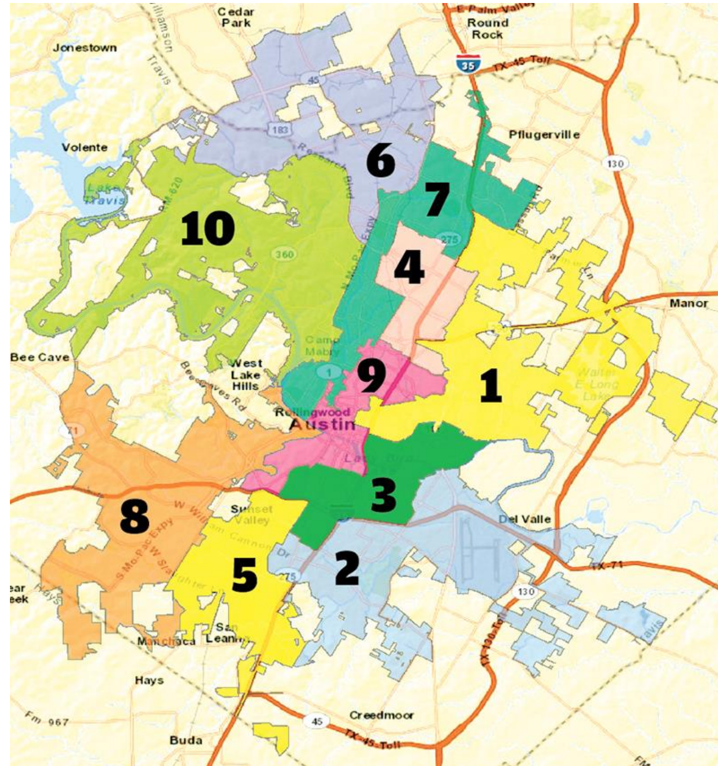


Figure 5: City Council District Map, Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

That night we did not canvas the area by foot, but instead loaded up into my car and drove street by street through our assigned area. Our task of taking a headcount of people who slept in “places not suitable for human habitation”[4] consisted of four people in a blue, two door Volkswagen Rabbit, looking through the windows for people who appeared to be homeless. In addition to identifying homeless people, ECHO was having volunteers identify the race and gender of each person as well, though this information

[4] See HUD definition of unsheltered population.

was never reported to the public because the data, particularly on race, was determined to be unreliable.[5] When I asked in a short interview before the count whether we would park somewhere and walk Charles, our team leader, exclaimed: "No way, it's too cold! I'm not getting' out of the car to walk around lookin' for people. We'll see 'em from the car. I know where people are anyway, I know the homeless in this city so I know it's not worth it to get out in the cold. We'll drive around and be finished in no time." And we were. We had completed our count in a little over an hour by skipping several streets and had counted one person, a young black man who we had seen walking west in an area that Charles said he did not belong.

Charles had retired after working for homeless service organizations in Austin for almost thirty years and felt that it was important for us to have the experience of face to face contact with someone who was homeless. Getting an accurate count was less important to him than was the opportunity for volunteers who do not usually work with the homeless to get to talk to someone who lives on the street. He wanted to hurry through our portion of the count where he had low expectations of finding someone so that we could help a neighboring group, those who were counting in the southeastern portion of District 1 (See Figure 5 above). Their area included the underpasses under I-35, where many homeless people sleep, and the area around the ARCH. Charles was certain that if we could finish the night helping them we would get the kind of contact that he was hoping for us to have.

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[5] This topic was discussed during several of ECHO's Data Working Group meetings.

As mentioned above, the sheltered count is relatively unproblematic considering that it depends for the most part on the number of beds available in the shelter system. The unsheltered count, however, is about as fuzzy as one would imagine, given that it relies on the ability of a counter to observe and identify someone as homeless, in our case from the windows of a passing car. When we began helping the group in the neighboring district, Charles directed me to park the car on Congress Avenue, one of the main streets that runs through town (directly to the capitol if traveling north) parallel to Interstate 35. I zipped up my jackets and put on my hat and gloves, but it was still freezing cold. We walked east toward the interstate, shivering, as Charles tried to get us excited about finally being able to meet some homeless people. At that point an assessment of housing status was made first by reading the appearance or behavior of a given person in public space. If a person looked to be homeless, Charles would direct a volunteer to approach them to confirm whether they had a place to stay that night. In training we were told to count only people who said they did not have a place to sleep. However, during the shift for which I volunteered, I witnessed a handful of encounters where people who claimed to have an apartment were counted anyway, and several ticks were made on the counting sheet where a person was never asked about their housing status at all. This revealed that while HUD has precise guidelines for counting, the resulting “street count” is shaped by the subjective decisions made on the ground by volunteer counters. That street counts often distort the overall picture of homelessness by drastically undercounting rough sleepers has been noted (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2001). However, that volunteers who count are aware of this tendency, that they may take subjective measures

to counteract it, and that there may be effects from those decisions has not been explored in the literature on enumerating homelessness.

Because staff from ECHO were in charge of training and they directly benefit from government funding, they had reasons for trying to report as high of a number as possible. One trainer stated the number of people who get counted during point-in-time counts tend to underestimate the number of people who are actually homeless. They knew that there would be several people unaccounted for because they were residing in places that volunteers would feel uncomfortable going. Some do not get counted because they sleep out of sight, others do not get counted because they have been jailed for misdemeanors. In addition, as I learned during my time volunteering on the Working Data Group for ECHO, leaders in social service organizations and medical facilities that serve the homeless understand that many do not get counted because they are temporarily off the streets in rehabilitation facilities.

Kim Dear, who was leading the working group at the time and was managing the Emergency Service Partners' High Alert Program (HAP) for Seton Northwest Hospital, had direct knowledge about the ways that health service systems can cause someone who is homeless to be invisible in any kind of homeless count. At a meeting on April 24, 2014, she stated that Seton alone had 22 homeless people that she knew of in in-patient care, but that it's likely that their system could miss 100 or so easily. From the perspective of the data collectors in the group, who represented various organizations in Austin that came into contact with homeless people, there was a problem of not being able to get an accurate picture of homelessness, including how many and also, as a social

worker by the name of Rick stated, “who are they and what do they look like because that information is important in being able to provide a continuity of care.”

During the same Data Working Group meeting, Rick was concerned about getting accurate counts. But he was less concerned with the data that is sent to HUD, which is primarily the data that ECHO is concerned with, and more concerned with the data that elected officials and the community get. Because of the “disjointed way the systems are set up” and because in the past they have “been able to count on the street but not in institutions” the picture of homelessness is inaccurate and likely a gross underestimation. Rick was therefore more interested in the numbers that HMIS reveals. Members of the group felt that the fact of underestimation was obvious to them because of their respective roles in organizations that provide some kind of care to homeless individuals. The general agreement was that HMIS would facilitate the disparate institutions that serve the homeless. Dave Gomez, who ran an outreach team named ACCESS that helped homeless people get Social Security benefits, food stamps, psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment and other services said that by using HMIS, ACCESS was “making strides forward in getting the information they need to make interventions for individuals.” However, Dave had been frustrated with the slowness with which HMIS had been implemented in all of the organizations that provide homeless services. When some members raised concern about privacy or HEPA, he stated that “fear tactics regarding how the data will be used has kept us in neutral” and that we should “try not to look at it from a fear standpoint.”

For Dave, data sharing between organizations is a high priority both for helping individuals get the care they need and for the community to be able to understand the trends. He argued that the group should find a way to approach elected officials through the language of cost because that is what community leaders are going to care about. Especially concerning groups that "are not in a place where they're even gonna' contribute" such as "homeless bums" and "crack addicted pregnant females we should be able to say this is how much they cost you and this is how much you would save by getting them treatment and getting them housed." Dave felt an urgent need to get homeless people counted and understand who they were not because he had lofty dreams of ending homelessness but because he felt that "the best we can do is make the lives of these homeless people less painful."

The choices that I witnessed by point-in-time count trainers and volunteers acted as a small corrective for the fact that no point-in-time count on a single given night could locate all people sleeping outside of formal housing. Leaders in the CoCs are faced with a difficult challenge – to report enough homeless people in the point on time count so as to receive the most possible amount of federal funding while at the same time reporting a decline in homelessness so as to be recognized as a "high performing community" and therefore earn greater flexibility in how funding can be spent (Housing and Urban Development 2012).

Who Counts as Homeless?

That funding provided by the federal government relies on a point-in-time count produces a tension between those who count, because they need funding, and those who fund, because they lack endless tax dollars with which to fund. Service providers work within the system to get as much funding as they can given the constraints of how HUD determines funding. This means there is surprisingly little push back from local agencies to change what picture HUD looks at in assessing funding. Prior to the 1980s, there was no source of federal funding for local agencies that specifically addressed homelessness. This changed following highly visible advocacy by Mitch Snyder, who ran a homeless shelter in Washington D.C. He gave testimony to Congress arguing for federal relief money because the number of people who could be categorized as homeless had reached well into the millions, he argued. This was echoed in innumerable media stories that reported homelessness in epidemic fashion (Shumsky 2012; Bogard 2003; Jencks 1995).

While the media echoed Snyder's estimations, they were by contrast met with resistance and skepticism by the federal government. This is at least partly because he was addressing an administration headed by Ronald Reagan, a president who has since become infamous for his resistance to the idea that it was the federal government's role to provide relief for those experiencing poverty. While pressure from Snyder and others did eventually lead to an emergency relief act, which passed in 1987 as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the legislation was worded in such a way as to limit the definition, and therefore the number, of people in the United States experiencing homelessness (Shumsky 2012).

Chapter 119 of the legislation, which described who was eligible for assistance, had been authored to specifically include definitions only related to where people slept. In addition, it excluded "any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained" (101 Stat. 482, 42 U.S.C. 11301). The chapter further imposed an income limit that defined the edge of the category of homeless, no matter where or under what conditions a person resided. Defining homelessness in this limited way meant that the Reagan administration could underestimate the number of people living without adequate housing, and could therefore justify a slimmer approach to funding relief efforts (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010).

What resulted were two very different ideas about the degree of homelessness in the United States. Wishing for an authoritative numerical representation, the federal government allotted an additional two million dollars for the 1990 census in order to conduct a head count of people in the U.S. living outside of traditional housing – a census that has since been used as the model for conducting point-in-time counts. Back alleys, parks, and shelters became "hunting grounds … as census takers spread out to mount what may be the most far-reaching social experiment in recent American history" (Kunstel 1990). The experiment was called Street and Shelter Night, or S-Night for short, referring to the locations to which the census would look.

Despite the large budget and vast human labor that went into "hunting down the homeless," it was immediately clear that only a portion of the unsheltered population was in fact counted. Anxieties about the count could be seen in news stories as early as the next day – even here in Austin. One Census Bureau manager claimed, "I'm sure there are some that don't want to be counted, and there's nothing we can do about that. They

can hide so far back in the woods or caves that we'll never find them" (Horn in Breaux 1990). A volunteer census taker counting the homeless in a local Austin shelter also expressed doubt, stating "I'd say about 50 percent were eager to answer, but a lot of people are hiding from us right now. This place is usually packed" (Schooley in Wright 1990).

STREET COUNTS

Counts that depend on the visibility of the homeless are problematic in several ways. First, they miss unsheltered people who remain out of sight and judging whether an individual should count as homeless is subject to inaccuracies (Hopper et al. 2008). Further, enumerations from point-in-time counts "provide a time-limited, static representation that stands in contrast to the dynamic nature of homelessness" and often underestimate the extent of homelessness (Metraux et al. 2001, 116). Additionally, because "politicians have evacuated homeless bodies from the city through the imposition of new laws," life on the streets takes place in more dispersed, less visibly concentrated locations (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008, 192). The effects of expanding laws that manage the behavior of the homeless is that streets and sidewalks are minimized in their habitable spaces (N. Smith 1996b), increasing the importance of hidden spaces (DeVerteuil 2006). The effects of this type of dispersal are not yet well understood (Walby and Lippert 2012). However, it is safe to conclude that dispersal has a profound effect on reducing visibility during the quantification practices of street counts.

There are a number of dynamics that determine whether homeless individuals will remain out of sight of counters – even if the potentially counted are not meaning to hide. January is a month of low temperatures, often compelling people either to find shelter in tucked-away locations to stay out of the cold or spending the money they have on a hotel stay, or they may choose that night to sleep on the couch of friends or family. The night of the January 2014 count was particularly cold, with the temperature dropping to a low of 22 degrees Fahrenheit (the average to date was 38). The low temperatures prompted the city to open emergency shelters for the night, which obscured the distinction between who would count as sheltered and who would count as unsheltered.

Because volunteer safety is also a concern for agencies conducting the count, volunteer counters were trained to avoid locations that made them feel scared. Feeling scared in public space is subjective, and is influenced by race and gender dynamics (Yavuz and Welch 2010; Day 2001; Paul 2011; Sandberg et al. 2013). During this phase of our counting experience, all the people we encountered were black men. Fear goes in multiple directions, however, and during the 2014 point-in-time count it seemed that the counters were doing their share of scaring. While some respondents seemed familiar with the street count, including a few who had already been counted, others seemed caught off guard by being approached. A pair of men crossed to the other side of the road when one of my team members was approaching them and another looked away and moved faster as if hoping to avoid us. The places that are assumed to produce the most fear in volunteer counters often coincide with locations of low visibility such as alleys, areas

with trees, and bridge underpasses. Such locations have become common places to sleep for people without shelter because they are less likely to be approached by police.

Counting in areas such as the Skid Rows of the 1950s and 60s or the Hoovervilles of the 1930s produced more confidence in accuracy than did later counts due to the notion that homelessness was contained in a specific area. Urban redevelopment during the 1960s and 70s contributed to the dispersal of the homeless out of the abandoned buildings in which they were living, a process that continued over the 1970s (Bahr 1967). So what emerged during the 1980s was not the problem of homelessness itself, as it is often narrated, but the problem of visibility and contamination (Bahr 1967). Getting "the homeless problem" under control was seen as a matter of quantification, because determining the number of the homeless would allow legislators to figure out the appropriate magnitude of federal intervention (Devine and Wright 1992). The government was then faced with the virtually impossible task of quantifying a dispersing homeless population as the conditions of homelessness were no longer, if they ever actually were, tied to a location.

It has been pointed out that even when homelessness was supposedly fixed to a location, street counts were never accurate. They often excluded women because they were not legally allowed in Hoovervilles or Skid Rows, and they were required to enter shelters through backdoor entrances (Wardhaugh 1999). Current street counting methods continue to be more likely to exclude women, as "20–40 percent of the total population of single homeless people who are women are often hidden away in long-term hostels, squats, or on the floors of friends and family" (Radley, Hodgetts, and Cullen 2006).

Women, therefore, make up more of what is referred to as the “hidden homeless,” or those who lack housing but do not count as homeless because, by the HUD standards mentioned above, they are “precariously housed” rather than “literally homeless.”

Because street counts are likely to underestimate the number of women experiencing any degree of homelessness, representations of the homeless continue to reproduce homelessness as a problem of unattached, single men. Additionally, men are viewed as being more naturally homeless because women are seen as taking home with them wherever they go (Wardhaugh 1999). This is because home and homemaking are conceptually tied to feminine roles (Abelson 1999; hooks 1990). It has also been argued that women continue to be excluded from street counts because homeless women often manage to achieve greater invisibility in the ways they choose to use public space (Casey, Goudie, and Reeve 2008).

In addition, the meaning and magnitude of homelessness are shaped by the norms of the respectable middle-class job. The extent of homelessness is often described beginning with the words “on any given night…” and therefore, time of day is important to how homelessness is understood. Often, point-in-time counts are only conducted from late afternoon to early morning, the time frame when daytime workers return to their dwelling for the night. This reduces homelessness, basically, to the life domain of sleep and supposes that having no home to go to at the end of the work day is when home or lack of home matter. But, many of those experiencing homelessness are either unemployed or underemployed and others work unconventional shifts that do not accord with the nine to five frame. Unemployment and homelessness are not equivalence, but

employment instability is correlated with housing instability. The standard policy approach is that employment instability causes housing instability, but Matthew Desmond makes a counter argument in his work on eviction, stating loss of housing is often a causal factor in the loss of employment (Desmond 2016; Desmond and Gershenson 2016). However, some people who are homeless are employed. While I volunteered in the kitchen at the ARCH, we prepared on average ten meals a night in to-go containers for ARCH residents who, as part of the case management program, have permission to return to the shelter after curfew if their job ends later than the shelter doors close. Because at least some homeless people work, it is worth noting that they may not get counted during a street count because they are located in their place of work during the time of the count.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Often without capital or political power, the homeless become "a kind of Rorshach (sic) test onto which the rest of the society consistently projects its envies and its fears" (Blau 1988, 6). Therefore, the visibility of homelessness in a given neighborhood often becomes associated with insecurity. The narrative of the growth in homelessness is told as one that demands police attention, and has even been used by neighborhood advocates to elicit funding for an increased police presence[6]. While policing of the homeless is highly concentrated in the downtown district of Austin, it has

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[6] I witnessed one such proposal during the Austin Community Court Advisory Committee meeting on July 24, 2013, when a representative of the Downtown Austin Alliance presented data that would later be used during a city council meeting to make a combined budget request for the Austin Police Department, the Downtown Community Court and the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless.

also spread to a few key areas that are of recurring concern, including the areas of Rundberg, East Austin, and Waller Creek. Each time the need for policing is asserted, it is coupled with the justification that homelessness is equivalent to a lack of safety for residents and tourists in the neighborhood.

The association between homelessness and violent criminality specific to Austin was shown to have no empirical basis by Snow, Baker and Anderson, who found that while the homeless are arrested more frequently than the housed, "the majority of their arrests [were] for non-violent, relatively minor, and victimless offenses" (Snow, Baker, and Anderson 1989, 546). Yet, linking visible homelessness with danger is still a common foundation for policing initiatives. Policing the homeless continues to be shaped by the Quality of Life campaign in New York during the 1980s, often referred to as a "broken windows" theory of policing, which claims that the presence of symbols of disorder, such as broken windows or a person asleep on a bench, "initiates a snowball effect whereby drug dealers, vandals, and other urban predators begin to engulf a neighborhood" (McArdle and Erzen 2001, 20). During a downtown commander's forum on July 7, 2013, "broken windows policing" was mentioned several times as the rationale for the Austin Police Department's public order initiatives that have disproportionately affected the homeless. Viewing "orderliness as equivalent to control, the theory assumes that visual disorder imbues people with a sense of fear and the menace of crime" (McArdle and Erzen 2001, 20). The purpose of Quality of Life initiatives is therefore to restore a feeling of safety to the "common, decent people in neighborhoods whose quality

of life is being adversely affected by various forms of disorder" (McArdle and Erzen 2001, 21).

Broken windows policing is also heavily reliant on civilian reporting. During the above mentioned downtown police commander's forum, the commander urged participants in the meeting to report any suspicious activity, which included panhandling, suspected drug use, and even areas that smell like urine[7]. This is akin to the "if you see something, say something" campaign that became a popular slogan of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In fact, national security is reliant on hometown security, as the DHS website states "homeland security begins with hometown security."[8] The "if you see something, say something" campaign was originally used by the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority in the city's subways in 2002 following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. The slogan has since become a nation-wide campaign that gets people involved in the production of a sense of security by relying on them to be able to identify and report suspicious behavior.

Sara Ahmed argues that determining whether someone is suspicious includes assessing whether they belong or do not belong in a given space. Determining whether they are a stranger, involves "ways of reading the bodies of others we come to face" (Ahmed 2000, 21). She further argues that in fact, the constitution of a given space itself requires that there be a stranger because the "enforcement of boundaries requires that some-body – here locatable in the dirty figure of the stranger – has already crossed the

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[7] Notes from Downtown Austin Commander's Forum on July 9, 2013.
[8] http://www.dhs.gov/if-you-see-something-say-something

line…" (2000, 22). What has been conceptualized as a good or healthy neighborhood is one that is sealed, one that "does not leak outside itself, and hence does not let outsiders (or foreign agents/viruses) in" (Ahmed 2000, 25).

Neighborhoods become imagined this way through "the social perception of danger posed by outsiders to moral and social health or well-being" (Ahmed 2000, 26). Determining who is an outsider is done through common sense notions of who belongs and who does not, of who is suspicious and who is not. The "good citizen" knows who to look out for, and therefore the belonging of one individual is bound up with the ability to optically recognize the non-belonging of another. At the neighborhood level, only residents are assured a right to security.

The assumption that home and security are synonymous is worth challenging, however. bell hooks argues that the intimate space of the homeplace or dwelling can have differing relationships to the concept of security, depending on the social relations inside and outside. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), a reader finds two different essays on the meaning of home, each of which conceptualizes home differently. The first, in "Homeplace: a site of resistance," describes the homeplace with adjectives like warmth, comfort and nurturance. It was within this space of safety, albeit fragile, that the black liberation movement was made possible because "one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (hooks 1990, 43).

Later in the book, her essay "Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness," presents a more ambivalent understanding of home. In the essay, she writes

of her need to leave home, because aside from the potential for safety, it was also a site of silencing and censorship. The result of leaving home, for hooks, was a transformation in the very concept of home, as it became "no longer just one place" but instead any place that "enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (hooks 1990, 148). This transformed conception of home is not one that necessitates a sense of security through the use of borders, either through walls or laws, that keep the outside out.

Because my research participants, excluding Marie, had been living on the streets for so long, they developed their own conceptualizations for home that were also not defined by walls or a roof. Ernest, who spent every night sleeping under a tree in Waterloo Park, felt most comfortable when he was not confined by walls. He said he never wanted to stay indoors again because it just made him feel too locked up. Andre later hinted that Ernest had spent some time when he was younger in an institution, but I never asked for clarification. Ernest referred to the park as his home, which became clear one Sunday when I tagged along with Andre and Tim to a service at Church under the Bridge. We passed Ernest going the opposite direction pushing a cart full of plastic garbage bags that looked to be filled with cans. When Andre asked him if he was coming along to the service, Ernest said, "Nah, I'm going home to sleep, I've been up all night and I'm too tired." Tim also used language related to home when he described the spots that he stayed at in northwest Austin, a place he went when he racked up too many tickets and wanted to avoid the police. In a tour that he gave me of the spaces he used there, he described a spot under a tree as his bedroom and an area under an overpass as his living

room, where he and his friend J.J. were storing some food and had (at the time) a few pillows they were using for seats. Over time, J.J. acquired some small pieces of furniture typical of traditional living room, such as an ottoman and an end table.

While conceptions of home seemed to be freed of the structural specificity of home in the typical sense, and there was a general openness to new people coming and going through these spaces, I also became aware that, for Tim and Andre at least, safety was a concern that was constant enough that the threat of violence made their un-walled homes less than liberating. Tim told me that when he slept in Waterloo Park he never felt rested because "he had to sleep with one eye open the whole night." Andre told me something similar one morning when I was meeting him to go to another service at Church under the Bridge. When I showed up, he was sleeping heavily on top of one of the picnic tables. I waited awhile to wake him up but when I finally did he kept yawning and telling me how he had not been able to get a good night sleep in so long because he felt like he always had to be at least a little aware of his surroundings. Each of them also carried a weapon, which they said was to protect them if anything went down. Tim had a hunting knife that was given to him by a man who had befriended him from a local church and Andre had a sheer from a pair of scissors that he had disassembled and turned into a makeshift knife.

OPTICS AND COUNTING

Following the suggestion of Espeland and Stevens, I have paused on the quantification of homelessness in order to understand what it is that numbers do on this

topic. At some points, the numbers have presented a story of insecurity and have justified more funding for policing and public order. At other points, the numbers have told a story of security, claiming the effectiveness of various initiatives that crack down on crime and disorder. Sometimes, as in the case of Austin, Texas, contradictory numerical claims are made at the same time to different ends. The recent reports of economic growth in Austin have also made invisible the poverty that continues to exist within the city and the growing income gap that increases the disparity in quality of life between the rich and poor (Zehr 2015; Tate 2015; Hoft 2015). In addition, quantifying the homeless has made local communities measurable and comparable in a way that allows the federal government to discipline local governments in their (in)ability to manage the homeless problem.

For all of these reasons, it is important to consider reports of the quantification of homelessness as having political intent. But, perhaps more insidious than any of this, one should consider the way in which street counts in particular are produced. Relying as they do on the ability of volunteers to visually recognize someone as homeless, this practice reifies the notion that belonging and not belonging is a matter of appearance. While police policies insist that it is behavior rather than homelessness that is criminalized, the practice of street counting unveils the taken for granted practice of recognizing homelessness by observing bodies in public, no matter what they are doing. This is most apparent in ordinances such as the "no sitting or lying" ordinance, where behaviors as benign as sitting become disorderly behavior when performed by individuals who are read as homeless. Street counts in effect justify profiling, or the act of

recognizing an outsider by visual appearance. It would be naïve to think that this stops at the homeless.

If the numbers from 2013 and 2014[9] representing the decline in homelessness had any accuracy, it is more likely that they revealed the effectiveness of public order initiatives aimed at keeping the homeless out of sight. This is what Don Mitchell refers to as "the annihilation of people by law" (D. Mitchell 1997). But, even when the unhoused are not visible in public, it does not necessarily follow that they cease to exist, as I learned on the MLF run mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. When Mitchell writes of "a geography in which a local prohibition (against sleeping in public, say) becomes a total prohibition for some people" (D. Mitchell 1997, 312), he perhaps underestimates the ability of people to develop a "hidden culture of homelessness" that is both functional and out of sight (Jason Adam Wasserman and Clair 2009). However, as the laws expand, those hidden spaces become fewer and harder to find, and they also become more dangerous for people making home there (Barragán 2015a). The effect of this is the further dehumanization of the conditions of homelessness, both materially and in the public imagination.

The End of Times

I want to return to the woman in tears in the parking lot of the Urban Market. What was crystalized in her encounter with us was the contradictory nature of urban

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[9] In 2015, the ECHO point-in-time count reported another decline, down to 1,877 total. In 2016, ECHO reported the first increase in homelessness, as their preliminary results show a total of 2,197 homeless people (sheltered and unsheltered).

growth and what it means for a city's various inhabitants. While the narrative of progress continues to circulate and stories abound about expanding wealth and prosperity in Austin, the stories told by this woman standing in a parking lot of East Austin reveal a different side of growth. By her account, many of the people she knows in the neighborhood have been displaced by rising costs in rent and property taxes. They have also been displaced from their homes by job loss, drug use, and illness – all connected to structural problems of widespread poverty. What was most devastating in her account was the increase in cost of living that had pushed so many of her friends (and possibly herself) into their cars or the alleys.

Amidst it all, the woman expressed a sense of being invisible to the larger city in which she lived. The invisibility was so palpable to her that one brief stop by a Mobile Loaves and Fishes truck moved her to tears, as she in her own words finally felt that what was happening there would be seen. The number of people we served that night in that parking lot was not inconsequential, and almost every one of them was black. Recent attention has shed light on the fact that as black residents move to the suburbs, Austin's black population is on the decline, dropping by 5.4% between 2000 and 2010 (Tang 2014). This pattern is an anomaly in a city where all other racial or ethnic categories are growing in population. Austin has also made the news for having the nation's second fastest rate of growth for urban poverty, with the number of suburban people in poverty increasing by 140% between 2000 and 2011(Castillo and Taboada 2013; Hoft 2015). As I reflect on my experience with MLF at the Urban Market, my mind cannot help but make links between Austin's shifting demographics of race and poverty and what I witnessed

in the parking lot. If some are moving because they cannot afford to stay, there must be others who cannot afford to move. I wonder, but have yet to find answers for, how many people get lost in these demographic measurements, disappearing into uncounted homelessness.

The woman, whose name I did not even ask, told a story about what growth and progress look like from a different perspective. She has seen the older houses around her vacated and then either rehabilitated or torn down and turned into condos. She has seen the eastern tide of gentrification and the devastation that it brings to the people around her. The buildings might be prettier and on the face of it the neighborhood looks revitalized. But in the spaces not commonly seen her loved ones are hungry and sick and losing their homes. Neither the city nor ECHO have reported statistics related to race and homelessness. My experience of the 2014 point-in-time count suggests that the people, and in particular the women, that I saw on the MLF run described at the beginning of this chapter would not have been counted, along with their children who I did not even see. The woman's feeling of being invisible also suggests little connection to social services.

What is visible about the intersection on which the Urban Market sits (12th and Chicon) is that it has been "a long-time haven for open and obvious drug sales, vagrancy, and prostitution" (Dunbar 2010). This is an example of the double stigma that attaches particularly to black homeless men described by Joanne Passaro in *The Unequal Homeless: Men on the Streets, Women in their Place* (Passaro 1996). Race and gender stereotypes mean that black, homeless men (who are often highly visible at 12th and Chicon) are viewed as failing at masculinity by not being self-sufficient but also

hypermasculine as they are assumed to be violent. This leads to the conclusion that they are “unworthy” of the resources that would alleviate the difficulties caused by extreme poverty (Passaro 1996). My findings indicate that this double stigma is not experienced just by individuals, but by geographic locations as well. 12th and Chicon is viewed as an area in need of correction, evidenced by the 2012 APD Drug Market Intervention Program that targeted both low and high level drug dealers, rather than an area worthy of assistance. Though this story cannot be told in statistics, the woman at Urban Market offered a window into lives that remain “just out of sight.”

Chapter 5: (In)visibility

"Get the fuck off my sidewalk," Marie shouted. Then she looked sheepishly toward the cashier of the pizzeria which was empty of customers except for the two of us. "Shoot… I don't want to get us kicked out of here. But that's what he was yellin' at me."

Marie was recounting a confrontation she recently had with a white, male business owner two doors south of where we were eating lunch. She is a soft-spoken black woman in her late forties who was staying in the emergency shelter for women at the Salvation Army. She got embarrassed when she swore, cried, got angry, or broke her otherwise composed demeanor. Marie and I built a rapport over our interest in wanting to change the conditions of homelessness as well our shared experience with motherhood. She loved looking at pictures of my then almost two year old son and shared several photos of her ten year old son who was living with his paternal grandparents at the time. Marie said she missed him terribly but could not take care of him without a job or apartment so she was happy that he had somewhere to go where he was loved.

As we both ate our pizza, she continued to tell me how the confrontation unfolded. "But I wasn't really sure [that the man was yelling at me] at first you know because I was just standing there and didn't think he was talking to me so I didn't move. I actually was not even standing right in front of the business, like with this club next door, but on the other part of the sidewalk away from the business. But then this man comes up who's talkin' on his cell phone. So, evidently a lot of homeless people hang out there. But he came up to me and goes 'You gotta get away from there, you gotta get away from

there!' So I say 'I'm standin' on the public sidewalk.' And he's like 'get out from in front of my club!' So I moved down a little bit further."

"Wait, so you were standing?" I asked.

"Yeah, I wasn't sitting."

"Because you know there's that ordinance about sitting, but you were not sitting."

"There's an ordinance about ssss..? [chuckles] See? I didn't know that." Marie paused to lock her eyes with mine in a pleading look of disbelief which was extra piercing because of the way the aqua blue of her colored contacts sang against the pink of her blood shot, tear stained eyes.

"Yeah, so I was standing. Not to mention I do not look homeless, okay? My hair was combed, I had some pretty clothes. I was talkin' on the telephone. So I moved down a little bit further, and evidently – and this is the restaurant Valhalla – so I move down a little bit further and he's like "well that's my business too! Keep on movin' keep on movin'. And I'm like this is a public sidewalk. I am not standing in front of your building and I'm not doin' anything. And he goes 'Well I just don't want you here.'"

"Did he say why?"

"No, but after that, I was like oh my gosh, okay. I don't need to be havin' any problems with anybody in Austin. Because if I tell them I'm homeless then they'll call the police out here, and I don't need that kind of hassle. So that's what prompted me to write Ellen [the talk show host]. You know people are saying all these great things about Austin, but in my letter I was like, 'Have you seen the other side'?" Marie had already mailed the letter so I never had a chance to read it.

Marie paused for a few minutes. "But that's pretty outrageous, you know, the mere fact that someone would chase me off a public sidewalk. Like, who are you? So it's been interesting to say the least. I don't know where to start Maggie. Um since I saw you last it's been difficult. I've gotten lost on the bus three times."

"You mean, you're on the bus and you don't know where it's going and you're like…oh shit?"

"Yeah, well I always ask, I'm like 'am I going the right way?' and the bus driver say 'Yeah come in' and then I get there and I don't know what they be talkin' about. Bus drivers don't even know where they be goin'. So I got on one bus looking for a clinic and I passed by the clinic three times and didn't realize that was the clinic I was supposed to go to."

"But you finally got there?"

"I finally got there like four hours later."

"Oh my gosh."

"Um, getting around town is pretty difficult because of my disability. [Marie said she had injured her knee during military service in Iraq, the effects of which were exacerbated by the weight she carried mostly in her upper body.] It's hard for me walking up those hills, so I figured either way I'll catch a bus to catch the bus. So that kinda takes some of the stress off my knee."

"But then you have to wait. Does that add a lot of time?"

"It's okay 'cause I get a early start to wherever I'm goin. But you can catch the bus right up the hill across the street from the Salvation Army. But people stare at you."

"You mean bus riders?"

"Bus riders, bus drivers, passers by. Yeah, while you're sitting there waiting for the bus. 'Cause who legitimately walks around with something like this all day?" As she asked this question she nodded her head toward her bag which looked to me like a small travel bag. Awareness about baggage was common among the people I met, many of them preferring to hide their baggage or get someone else to watch it rather than carrying it downtown and becoming the target of police surveillance.

Figure 6: A Suitcase, Sleeping Bag and Pillow. Tim was watching this for a friend in Northwest Austin while his friend ran errands.

"So it's because you have to carry extra stuff?"

"Yeah that but it's also like a stigma that if they see you walking from that building, just the fact, they'll be like 'It's one o' them homeless people.' And they just have that kind of attitude. It's like embarrassing telling anybody where you live. If you're

like ‘I live at Salvation Army’ they go ‘Oh…’ [Marie makes a condescending expression to demonstrate a look of mild disgust.] Like the other day at the clinic I was waiting to go to the bathroom and I was talking to this girl and she was real nice and bubbly. But then when I told her I lived at the Salvation Army her whole demeanor changed.”

“Was she another patient at the clinic?”

“No! She was the medical assistant there. And her demeanor totally changed.”

“Can you describe that?”

“It was like real, real friendly in the beginning, understanding, cordial and laughing and all that kind of stuff. And when I said I lived there she was like ‘Oh, well do we need to check for anything else on you? You know, like, is anything else bothering you?’ And I was like, ‘No, just what I told you.’”

“What do you think she meant by anything else on you?”

“I don’t know if it’s like, a disease or something, she never really would go into any detail. But once I told her I was involved in a domestic violence situation then the attitude changed again like Oh [this time she demonstrates a sad face].”

“You mean like she felt sorry for you?”

“Yeah, but I don’t want you to feel sorry for me!”

“So it went from like real friendly to having an aversion to you to then pitying you?”

“Yes, exactly! So I’m like going through a surge of emotions right now. Yeah, so the experience on the bus has been interesting to say the least. I can’t say that the bus drivers here are bad, they try to be as helpful as they can, I mean it’s…”

"Do you have a bus pass that you use?"

"No, I used to have one like a daily one whenever my case worker could give us one but she runs out. See that's another issue. It's like every day I have something to do and it's just like she has no more bus passes. So okay, where do I go to where I can find a month's bus pass? Because it's gonna be at least two weeks before I get any money in. So it's just like who do I go to to find a monthly bus pass? And they're like 'go down here' and there's a liiiiiiine this loooonnnnng."

"How long is the line usually, roughly, could you say?"

"Um, you can wait anywhere from an hour to two hours if not longer. So that becomes discouraging, you know. And it's just like I'm becoming prejudiced toward these people cause it's like "oh my gosh, you stink!" And I'm lookin' at it now, though Maggie, and I'm like some of these people are actually doing this by choice! Just lookin at some of their behaviors."

THEORIZING HOMELESS VISIBILITIES

In the excerpt above, Marie discusses (among other things) the several ways that visibility takes shape in her thinking about homelessness – in how she understands other people to be viewing her, how she views herself, and how she views other homeless people. In listening to the recording of our interview, I heard her theorize visibility in a way that captured its complexity which stands in contrast to the discourse around homelessness in the media and social sciences. In this chapter, I draw on Marie's knowledge work represented above to argue that the concept of visibility is

oversimplified in the literature about homelessness which has predominantly been concerned with whether the homeless are visible or invisible. After providing a short survey of how visibility has been constructed regarding the homeless, I discuss the "faces of homelessness" phenomenon within photography as a way to lend visibility to homeless people. I then return to Marie's experiences and the accounts of others to complicate the discursive construction of homeless individuals as simply *objects of* visibility. While Marie struggles with how people look at her, she also feels her position within homelessness provides a valuable perspective on shelter conditions and therefore she also positions herself as a *subject with* visibility.

This chapter also looks at how race and gender matters in the discussion of homeless visibility in Austin, particularly in relation to local news stories about moving the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) because of the types of visible homelessness that it attracts/produces. I conclude with a short discussion of Leslie, who is Austin's "icon of weird" and most visible representation of homelessness (though he was not always homeless) and argue that amidst his visibility there was much that was left invisible about the conditions of his illness and passing. These topics are threaded together through my argument that visibility needs further attention in order to complicate its oversimplification in the discourse and social construction of homelessness.

As the Literature Review in Chapter 2 pointed out, visibility has been a dominant term in the construction of homelessness both in social policy and the social sciences. Claims about homelessness and visibility have emphasized the homeless as *objects of*

visibility, whether they are seen or not seen. When homeless people are constructed as visible, the meaning is a literal one having to do with their presence in public spaces. When homeless people are constructed as invisible, it is meant in a figurative sense claiming that personhood is not seen beyond the stigma associated with homelessness. Either way, the lens of visibility is fixed on those who are homeless, and this lens often has a gendered filter that reifies women as the hidden homeless and men as the visible, unattached, homeless person in need of reform (Wardhaugh 1999; Radley, Hodgetts, and Cullen 2006).

Media representations of homelessness since the 1980s to present frame "the homeless problem" as a problem of visibility, where homelessness is associated with blight (Busch 2015). Prior to the 1970s, homelessness was a problem that was contained and hidden away in Skid Row districts (D. Mitchell 2011; Bahr 1967; Snow and Anderson 1993). With the increase in street homeless, there was also an increase in face to face encounters between the housed and the unhoused, meaning that middle-class and wealthy Americans were faced with and made uncomfortable by the visible poverty that homelessness evinced (Blau 1993). The visibility of the homeless then became a matter of urban policy as city managers tried to restore order and civility to urban space (Herring 2014).

This drive to regain social order led municipalities to strategize ways of getting the homeless "off the street." The desire to make homelessness invisible is evident in "the scores of cities and municipalities in the United States that have enacted anti-homeless laws in the last decade, including ordinances prohibiting 'urban camping,' 'aggressive

panhandling,' and sitting or lying on public sidewalks, often adopted at the behest of commercial interests" (Amster 2008). The pervasiveness of these ordinances has resulted in the common phrase "criminalization of homelessness" where there seems to be little question that ordinances targeting behaviors are actually targeting a select population – that of the visibly homeless. The effect of the criminalization of homelessness has been a drastic reduction in the number of spaces in which homeless people can survive (D. Mitchell 1997; N. Smith 1996b).

Throughout the literature, visibility is assumed to be a defining feature of homelessness. Those who recognize that some people who experience homelessness are not visible make the distinction between the hidden homeless and the visibly homeless. However, the concept of the visibly homeless is often used as a stand in term to designate all unsheltered homeless individuals, usually men (meaning those who are not using night shelters or staying temporarily with friends/family or in hotels). But the referent of the term visibly homeless is slippery. Jason Wasserman and Jeffrey Clair (2009) argue that "on the margins of homelessness" there are numerous homeless people who are not visible because they have created highly functioning camps that are hidden from the public, including researchers, journalists and city officials. They argue that the absence of this population from the narrative of homelessness exaggerates the stigma of dysfunction that characterizes the homeless. This absence also perpetuates stereotypes about what markers are used to identify the visibly homeless.

From the vantage points of those who make privacy in homelessness, new visibilities become available to those researchers who spend time with or amongst them.

Using ethnographic techniques, Wasserman and Clair witnessed the creative ways in which some homeless people carved out a relatively comfortable existence – a knowledge the reveals the gap between the medicalized model of social services and the perspectives of relatively functional homeless people who avoid help (2009, 225). In her ethnographic study of "hobos, hustlers and backsliders" which she began in the mid-1990s, Teresa Gowan (2010) gained a new mental map of her city of San Francisco by learning where people went when they wanted to escape visiblity. She wrote:

> My new San Francisco was the city's remaining blocks of traditional skid row character, vacant lots, back alleys, wasteland alongside freeways and railway tracks, (rare) abandoned buildings, a few parks, and those poor residential neighborhoods too overwhelmed with existing problems to react strongly to the presence of homeless people. If not exactly safe spaces, these liminal areas represented some measure of escape from harassment, places where visible homelessness was less likely to be perceived as a criminal offense (12-13).

"AM I INVISIBLE?"

On the flip side of the discussion of the visibility of the homeless problem has been the phenomenon of making homeless individuals visible in light of their social invisibility. At first, it feels contradictory that a population whose visibility is the problem can also be considered invisible – but the conceptualization of

(in)visibility provided by Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1995 [1952]), which was discussed in detail in the Introduction, clarifies the point. The visibility of stereotypes that attach to an identity make invisible the person to whom the stereotype is attached.

This tension between invisibility and visibility can be seen in the following public engagement with homelessness. In the spring of 2014, in a church near the ARCH, a local video artist named Roni Chelben organized an event in which she collaborated with residents of the ARCH who were in the case management program to put on a play/video/interactive performance. The event was so popular that they held it a second time outside of city hall. Named *Am I Invisible*, the piece contained performances where people who experience homelessness got to express their feelings about being ignored by passersby and being treated like criminals by police. While there were passing mentions of this form of invisibility - the averted eye contact on the street form of invisibility – there were also many moments in the play that referenced the pressures of hypervisiblity. In some ways, invisibility was a desired achievement, in particular when looking for a place to sleep at night. A short reenactment between two homeless men and two cops conveyed an attempt at getting a night of sleep in a park being interrupted by one cop's shining of a flashlight and nudging with a night stick while the other cop hollered "no sitting, sleeping, blinking, standing, walking, talking…Just move it along!"

There were also frustrations with what I think of as "care theater." To understand this concept I borrow from the idea of "security theater" where certain ritualized countermeasures become spectacles for the sake of giving the appearance of security

(Browne 2015; Walsh 2015). There was a sentiment expressed by the interactive audience of “Am I Invisible” that suggested that the city and its various representatives tried to give the appearance of caring about homelessness while falling short of changing the conditions that cause it. This is seen in the following example from the discussion portion of the event that followed the performance where members of the audience, many of whom were part of the homeless community, voiced their reactions to the play and video works.

A young, white woman, with reddish blonde hair and a sunburnt face dressed in cut-off jeans and a striped bikini swim top stood up and yelled “What I want to know is when are they gonna’ start doing something to really fix the problem. They think they can just throw scraps at us over there by the church of the bridge like we’re some kind of stray animals…like stray cats. And then nothing ever really changes!” Before she could finish what she was saying, the crowd erupted in applause and “Yeah’s” and “That’s right’s.” This sense that the services provided to the homeless by various organizations are both objectifying (“like we’re some kind of stray animals”) and ineffective (“nothing ever really changes”) produced the loudest and most unanimous response from the audience of any part of the performance and interactive component. This complicated the suggestion that invisibility was an accurate description for what homeless people experience.

But Roni Chelben is not alone in wanting to address the perceived social invisibility of the homeless. A current trend to combat this particular sense of invisibility is the “giving a face to homelessness” phenomenon in journalistic and

fine art photography. The most famous recent example is Andres Serrano's *Residents of New York* (2014) series. This public art project was made to "give a dignified face to a group of people often ignored and marginalized in society" (More Art 2014). Serrano placed prints of his homeless subjects on the walls of a Greenwich Village subway stop, the Washington Square West Fourth Street Station, where train riders would normally see advertisements. As one writer wrote for *Time*, the homeless are "another visual element of urban life [that] is just as familiar, and just as often overlooked [as advertisements]" (Grow 2014). Some critics responded to Serrano's work by claiming it as yet another in a series of projects aimed at shock appeal.

Where previously he shocked viewers by photographing a submerged statuette of a crucified Jesus in a container of the artist's urine, here he confronted subway riders forcing them to "see street kids where they expect to find stars of the latest Hollywood film, rags where they expect to see trendy fashions" (Gopnik and Viveros-Faune 2014). In an interview, Serrano stated that he "really wanted to go into the streets and photograph the homeless the way I found them on the street" (Leipzig 2014). The problem here is that what you look for is what you get. Almost all of Serrano's portraits represent people sitting on the sidewalk, leaned up against a building, looking at the camera with solemn faces. They therefore reify the stereotypical images that people carry about the homeless.

In addition to Serrano's project, there is the example of the Dutch photographer Jan Banning who published portraits of 42 homeless people in Georgia, South Carolina

and Mississippi in a book titled *Down and Out in the South* (Swift 2013). Despite his "history of documenting the forgotten pockets of society" interviews with Banning captured his reluctance to "take on the project because he felt the often-ignored population was paradoxically ubiquitous in the world of documentary photography" (Rosenberg 2013). Banning overcame his ethical concerns about photographing the homeless by achieving some level of intimacy with them. He stated that he did not want to "have them as animals in a safari park but to have a relation with them, to establish confidence and intimacy" (Rosenberg 2013). In order to achieve this intimacy Banning spent 30 minutes with each person or couple who was photographed interviewing them about how they came to be homeless and then spent about 15 minutes taking their portraits. Given the content of the interview, the portraits are unsurprisingly stark, each person looking forward at the camera, staring blankly with no expression – maybe the occasional hint of a smile.

Because Banning's subjects are photographed off the street and in the studio, and they stare directly at the camera, they are read by critics as being more active and less stereotypical than images such as those produced by Serrano. One critic noted that the "detailed images present real people – not anonymous, hopeless cases — many of whom hold on to dignity and self-esteem with makeup, jewelry, and careful grooming" (Feaster 2015). Another similar example can be seen in the photographs of *Hard Ground* (O'Brien and Waits 2011) where studio shots of homeless people taken by Michael O'Brien appear alongside poetry written by Tom Waits. O'Brien used his experience as a freelance photographer for *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Esquire* and the *New York Times*, to capture

the humanity of homeless Americans, including some in Austin. Like Banning's images, O'Brien's black and white photographs represent people staring straight into the camera, often expressionless with the detail of every pore, freckle, wrinkle and burn depicted with perfect clarity.

In seeking to give dignity to homeless individuals photographers like O'Brien and Banning focus the lens on the details of the individual, often in the form of a close up with the eyes looking directly at the camera. Beyond eye contact, part of what lends dignity in the images is that the people become sterilized by removing the contexts of homelessness that would otherwise surround them. This style of photographing the homeless indirectly states that it is the clutter and dirt associated with homelessness that prevent recognition of shared humanity, and that without the dirt viewers would be able to see past the condition of homelessness to the humanity that is, seemingly, located in the eyes. My purpose here is not to critique this form of imaging and personalizing homelessness. But I do want to critique the limited scope through which visibility gets addressed in this response and the way it enters cultural circulation. The question becomes where one looks when it comes to thinking about the problem of homelessness. And these images, while inspired by compassion on the part of the photographers, still lead the viewer to an affirmation of stereotypes associated with individual pathology leading to homelessness. This is captured by a review of O'Brien's book in the *Tampa Bay Times,* in which the writer states:

> …over the following months, he pointed his Nikon again and again, photographing homeless John Madden asleep on an ocean of empty

> whiskey bottles, lighting a cigarette, combing his filthy hair, walking defiantly out of jail and finally lying dead in a flag-draped coffin. Before he was a homeless drunk, he had been a soldier who served his country. He'd had a mother who loved him, four beautiful sisters, a wife, three daughters. Then he developed a taste for cheap whiskey (Klinkenberg 2011).

The quote above is no different than the social service and legal systems, which work together to conceptualize homelessness as a failure of the individual that can be overcome through rehabilitation. Therefore, the lens is still turned on the individual as the site of the problem. In "face of homelessness" photographs, the weathering effects of excessive exposure to the sun and wind become aestheticized details that suggest the roughness of life on the streets. Somewhere behind the lines and beneath the layers of tattered cloth are the eyes of the pictured that remind the viewer that each homeless individual is a person. While this has the potential to invoke a sense of shared humanity, it also reifies the site of failure at the level of the individual. The visualization of homelessness is individualized just as it is in the rehabilitative model that aims to cure homelessness one client at a time.

This individualization has been critiqued as a "medical model of homeless service provision, one which fundamentally views individual ''clients'' as passive objects in need of resocialization in the form of treatment" (Jason A. Wasserman and Clair 2011, 35). "Faces of homelessness" projects often reproduce the very stereotypes about homelessness that their focus on invisibility tries to combat. Further, their intention of

“providing dignity to the homeless” assumes that homelessness itself is inherently undignified. Rather than instilling dignity, the photographs feel instead like Roland Barthes’ description of objectification through photography, where in the photographic product he saw himself as “truly becoming a specter” feeling “neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object” (Barthes 1982, 14). For Barthes, it was not so much having his photograph taken that was the problem, but the “artifice of printing” where through the print, he states, “they turn me, ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions” (Barthes 1982, 14–15).

The question I am implicitly raising is whether the aforementioned photographs constitute an oppositional gaze through the photographer’s decision to ask or allow the depicted to look directly into the camera. This is perhaps the case to an extent, as the looks could be read as “the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it” (hooks 1992, 116). But for the reasons mentioned above, I find that they fall short of being disruptive to a social order that has fetishized the visibility of the homeless. In short, the people in these photographs might look back, but they do not talk back. “Talking back,” Simone Browne states, “is one way of challenging surveillance and its imposition of norms” (Browne 2015, 62). What is missing is a critique of the normalization of the homeless as objects to be looked at in the first place.

I make that judgment in contrast to another example of an oppositional gaze, which Browne identified in the photographic series titled *Pan’s Opticon* (2008), by Robin

Rhode. In the series of black and white photographs, Rhode depicts "a smartly dressed figure" that is turned away from the viewer, facing a corner where two concrete walls meet. There are "stenciled circumferences of incomplete circles of black spray paint [that] seemingly emanate from his eyes onto the wall's surface" (Browne 2015, 59). The circles that progressively fill the walls throughout the series and then recede to a pair of holes that look like a bleeding puncture appear to be drawn by a caliper that extends from each of the figures eyes. Browne reads this depiction as a black subject that is "confronting and returning unverified gazes" through an "ocular interrogation [that] confronts the Panopticon and the architecture of surveillance" (Browne 2015, 59). This is an example of a photographic project that disrupts the social order of looking and claims for its subject "the right to look."[10]

"If only they could see [what I see]"

It is on the topic of claiming the right to look that I return to Marie's testimony at the start of this chapter. Her words are central to my discussion of visibility not just because she was aware of the stigma of being visibly homeless, but also because of what she claimed her position in homelessness allowed her to see. She had a recurring phrase she would utter: "If only people could see what was going on inside there, Maggie. If only they could see." She said this any time she was describing what she felt were the deplorable conditions inside the Salvation Army's downtown shelter. So while Marie was processing the shock of becoming hypervisible as a homeless person, she was also

[10] Here I am alluding to Nicholas Mirzoeff's (Mirzoeff 2011) concept of countervisuality, which I discuss at length in the conclusion.

struggling with the invisibility of the conditions to which shelter residents were subjected. "I mean if they would just go in there and check I'm sure they'd find all kinds of health code violations" was another phrase I heard often. Marie had a very nice phone that, while she was unsure how she was going to afford to keep it, she was also using it to document visual evidence of what she felt was the maltreatment of the shelter system. She texted me some of the photos she took, including one of a very dirty orange traffic cone sitting on top of a working water fountain and two of different meals she was served (she said she could rarely eat the meals there) that both looked like a tray filled with greyish brown gelatinous globs of unrecognizable food.

When Marie showed me a picture of the food she said: "They think because we're homeless we'll eat anything, but I can't do it. I'd rather starve than eat that stuff. I mean, I don't even know what half of it is and the other half is just… it's like they must take all the leftovers from the week and throw them in a pot together and call it Thursday Surprise." She also said that the only time the meals were edible and the place was clean was when an officer from headquarters was coming for the quarterly visit. "Otherwise, it's just depressing in there."

Marie was new to homelessness. During our meetings I would often sit speechless, sometimes with a hand touching hers from across the table, as tears flowed down her cheeks while she explained the realities of her new life. She first introduced herself to me one Saturday at the "Bridge of Angels," which is a worship and meal service held downtown on Saturday mornings for the homeless community under a raised section of Interstate 35. The service is funded by the ministry of an undordained minister

who goes by the name of Pastor George Crisp. Aside from a sermon and a meal, the group often has musical performers and parishioners who offer healing blessings. I caught Marie's attention because I was taking photographs of a row of backpacks that were holding a place in the food line. I heard her voice from behind me when she asked straightforward, "Why are you taking pictures?" I turned around and self-consciously began explaining that I was a student working on a project but she quickly interjected to offer "because hey, if you're wanting to know more about homelessness, I've got a lot to say." She showed me her Texas A & M sweatshirt and said that since she had recently been a college student herself she wanted to be supportive of a project for another student.

Figure 7: Marie at Hut's Hamburgers in downtown Austin

I took her number that day and later arranged to meet her the following day for lunch at Hut's Hamburgers. She said that some women in the shelter told her that Hut's served the best burgers and since I was paying she was hoping to try it out. During our lunch, she described how she came to Austin and why she was homeless. Despite the emotionality with which she discussed her transition into homelessness, there was a striking numbness that came over her face when she talked about the circumstances through which she came to Austin from Boerne, Texas, where she had been renting an apartment with her then boyfriend. Boerne has a population of about 10,000 and is located 2 hours southeast of Austin. Marie had gotten into legal trouble there following a domestic dispute. Even though her ex-boyfriend (the relationship had ended by the time Marie moved to Austin) was in jail for assaulting her she also faced charges of assault for her role in the dispute.

According to Marie's description, the police arrived to a bloody scene where she was being overpowered by her then boyfriend who was slamming her head into the cement sidewalk in front of their home. But Marie was also culpable because she had a knife in her hand which she had used to stab him in the arm in self-defense. She said she was using Austin as a place to start over no matter how her court case turned out. She never wanted to go back to her prior home because there were too many bad memories there. Instead, she wanted to use God's grace that she believed let her live through the night of the assault as a source for "starting fresh." She had heard people were doing really well in Austin and she thought there would be a lot of opportunities for her in the

city once she got her court case resolved (it is still pending) and an apartment secured (Marie is still staying at the Salvation Army).

"I JUST CAN'T STAND THE WAY THEY LOOK AT ME"

During her first weeks in Austin, Marie experienced the consequences of being visibly perceptible as a homeless black woman standing in front of a club in Austin's entertainment district at the same time that she was struggling with how she viewed the homeless people that surrounded her. She talked frequently about not being able to stand the way it felt to be looked at as a homeless person and that she was not like the rest of them. Yet it is evident in the passage above that at the time Marie had not fully identified as homeless because she often referred to "homeless people" with the pronouns "they" or "them." In contrast, Tim who, after living unsheltered for over twenty years, sometimes proudly referred to himself as "the real homeless." This distancing was a response to Marie's feeling of being stigmatized by her visible association to the Salvation Army shelter. Erving Goffman defined stigma as "an undesired differentness" that occurs when a person "possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him" (E. Goffman 1986, 5). Stigma is experienced either through the "pain of being objects of curiosity and negative attention" such as verbal insults or through avoidance and "attention deprivation" such as averting eyes (Snow and Anderson 1993, 199).

Marie had yet to panhandle or ask for money from strangers because to let people know she was homeless made her afraid that people would assume she was mentally ill, a

label that she was particularly sensitive to because she had just started taking medication for depression. The stigma associated with mental illness sometimes prevents shelter users from receiving care for psychological conditions even when treatment might increase quality of life (R. R. Desjarlais 1997). Distancing from stigma is not always desired, however, especially for people who do engage in panhandling. There is an implicit understanding that passers-by are more likely to give money if they see signs of "poverty, need and despondency, such as a sullen pitch, dirty skin and hair, ragged clothes, or a protruding stomach" (R. R. Desjarlais 1997, 213). Tim, who showed less of an avoidance of being labeled homeless, did express an avoidance of the stigma of dirtiness often associated with homelessness. He had two ball caps, one clean and one dirty, which he changed in and out of based on context. When he was going to fly signs he used his dirty hat and when he knew I was going to come for one of our conversations, he "cleaned up" by putting on a clean t-shirt and wearing his clean hat. When he wanted to look even cleaner, for something such as a visiting a social service agency, he would leave both of his hats in his bag, put on a polo shirt, and take a "bird bath" by rinsing his hair in the sink of a nearby restroom.

Aside from the distancing language of "they" and "them," Marie found ways to manage the stigma of having to exit the shelter in order to start her day which gave her some control over her own visibility. Marie paid particular attention to her dress as well as her hair. She brought two wigs with her to Austin that she wore most of the times that I saw her, one was shoulder length and wavy and one was a straight hairdo that shaped her face. She also said she tried to wear clothes that were "pretty" and "conservative" so that

she would not look like what she thought of when she pictured a stereotypical homeless woman downtown – which she described as either wearing loose and dirty clothes or wearing revealing clothes that make women look like prostitutes. She said she wanted to look “presentable.” Services that provided clothes were at the top of her list of places to learn about as she continued mapping out her resource options.

In addition to clothes, Marie was very concerned about her bags. Heather, a new friend of hers from the shelter, had recently given her a computer bag that Marie could carry over her shoulder rather than continuing to use the bag that she felt looked too much like luggage. The computer bag made Marie feel less self-conscious because she felt her bag fit in with the bags people carry when they are in the downtown area for work. Other participants mentioned bags as well, including Tim who told me “I never go downtown with my duffel bag and I try not to bring my backpack either. Sometimes the backpack is okay if I can dress nice but if I take this one (pointing to his duffel bag) those cops spot me right away. They say, ‘Oh, there’s Tim,” and they pick me up and take me in.” During my research I met several people who paired up in part for the purpose of watching each other’s bags while one would leave the area.

Marie’s experience was not all about being looked, however. As mentioned previously, she felt her time at the shelter gave her new insight into the conditions of a homeless shelter that very few people have the opportunity to see. In some ways, Marie viewed her new perspective as one of privilege. In trying to make sense of her newfound social location, Marie suggested that God was putting her in this challenging position so she could see what really goes on in shelters but also to challenge her to become what she

felt was a better person (one who does not judge others). She said she felt God had put me in her path that day under the bridge so that I could tell the story of what she was seeing in both the shelter and herself. “I really believe it’s true, Maggie, that God puts the right people in the right place at the right time. And I guess this is just where he wants me right now so I can see all this, what these people go through, and really it’s making me a better person too. I still have a lot of my prejudice but not for some of the people, you know. Some are really trying and I can see that.”

“An Embarrassment to the City”

Given that Marie does not carry the traditional signs of homelessness, she felt that she was singled out by the owner of Valhalla (which was referenced at the beginning of this chapter) because she was a black woman standing on the sidewalk in the vicinity of Austin’s main day resource center, the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH). “It’s got to be a race thing,” she said, “because Valhalla is a racist term you know. It’s the name of a skinhead group so he just must not like black people.” I had to google Valhalla after she told me that, and when I saw that Valhalla does indeed have a historical connection to white supremacist groups I was surprised at the lack of protest to the presence of a club called Valhalla in such a prominent place in Austin’s entertainment district, particularly given the recent attention to the decline in Austin’s black population. While the overall population of Austin grew 20.4% between the years 2000-2010, the number of black residents declined by 5.4% during those years (Tang 2014). According to Austin’s Planning and Zoning Department, “just a few decades ago African Americans

made-up around 15% of the city's population and just a few decades from now African Americans could represent a mere 5% of the city's population" (The Official Website of the City of Austin 2016). Despite its dwindling representation in the population of Austin at large, blacks are overrepresented amongst the homeless population. This is evidenced by the concentration of Austin's black residents on the sidewalk and parking lot in front of the ARCH. The racial disparity in homelessness is a result of a long history of racial inequality in Austin (Tate 2015) and more recent stages of gentrification in historically black neighborhoods that displaced many residents (Tretter 2013). However, how the ARCH is discussed in the news is disarticulated from discussions of racial inequality in the city.

That the ARCH is perceived as a problem for the appearance of the city can be seen in numerous local news stories and in the comments that follow them online. Many of these comments look like the following statement on a January 25th, 2016, reddit thread discussing the increased visibility of the homeless downtown: "I noticed the spread out around ARCH has about tripled in size. They've taken over about a block in each direction. Every curb, every stair, every parking lot is full of them. I wonder what's caused either the increase in numbers or increase in visibility. Did some condos pave over hobo camps in green areas?" (amelia_sucks 2016).

One concern with the location of the ARCH being in the center of the entertainment district downtown is the belief that the crowd outside of the shelter attracts violent crime. A story by NBCs Austin affiliate, KXAN, about a shooting outside of the ARCH reads: "While a shooting is rare, Comm. Cochran said the ARCH is the number

one spot for assaults across the entire city" (Bien 2015). Commander Cochran is further quoted as saying "We can arrest these people for low misdemeanors like Class C's — sitting on the sidewalk or something, and all it does is tie up the court system…You can't police your way out of this. It's really getting homes for these people" (Bien 2015). This statement reveals a shift in the city's logic for managing the visibility of homelessness. While previously the city had focused on community court as a path to rehabilitation for the chronically homeless, stakeholders now focus on Housing First, a policy that I discuss at length in the Conclusion of the dissertation.

In the first comment to the online story mentioned above, Texas 1836 stated: "This is another reason to MOVE the ARCH/salvation army out of the entertainment district, it's an embarrassment to the city." This perspective suggests that the centrality of the ARCH in downtown, Austin, makes the city look bad – though to who is unclear. But many in Austin agree that the ARCH should be moved. Business owners and police officers alike have proposed that moving the collection of homeless services that are downtown, including the ARCH, to a campus away from the center of the city would reduce criminal activity downtown and increase the safety of everyone else who goes there (Kanin 2012).

A reporter from Fox 7 News quoted Austin Police Association President Ken Casaday as saying that wherever the ARCH is moved, "it needs to be a place that maybe we could fence in and keep the bad people out and keep the people that really need the help in" (Claiborne 2015). The police, obviously, have difficulty in determining which category people belong to, which was phrased as a problem of visibility by Commander

Cochran, who stated to a reporter for ABCs Austin affiliate KVUE, "If a person is homeless or a person is a criminal transient; they have the same type of appearance, we have to be careful" (J. Lee 2015).

"Designed to be open and accessible"

Because of its prominence in the city's discussion around homelessness, the ARCH plays an important role in a consideration of homelessness and visibility in the city. The visual appearance of the ARCH got a lot of attention when it was first constructed. It was an innovative design when it opened in 2004 because in order to stay under budget the architects designed it to be built with minimal materials. The design won awards in 2004 and 2005 from the Austin chapter of the American Institute of Architects in recognition of its "open and accessible" design and its innovation in environmental sustainability with a 13,000 gallon rainwater collection system and a solar hot-water heater.

Whatever innovation the design has on its face is lost when one enters the building. The ARCH is an uncomfortable and dull building. The surfaces are dominated by cement and metal rails with hard, dark blue plastic chairs along the perimeter of the first floor. It is drab, institutional, and artificially lit. Though much of the building is made of windows, they are so heavily shaded that little light gets in and there is little visibility either looking into or out of the building. While this shading prevents the building from heating up too much in the summer, it also lacks the natural lighting for which the design was recognized. The acclaim that "the building spaces allow light inside

and create visual connections between floors" appears to be more a matter of visual surveillance. As a side note, the rain water collection system and the solar water heating system only worked intermittently and the building has been plagued with maintenance problems (Ball 2011b).

There is one space in the building, however, that has a breathtaking view. My first evening volunteering for the dinner service I stood in awe at the outer wall of the dining hall, which is almost entirely made of glass with a panoramic view of the downtown skyline. As I looked out the window I thought about the real estate value of that building and I wondered how long it would be devoted to a place to shelter the homeless. Victor, one of the shelter residents who worked in the diner as a dishwasher, walked up next to me and said "It's a really good view, huh? It's funny that they waste it on us. You can even see that spot where the man jumped the other day from the Frost Tower."

It is still unclear whether the location of the ARCH will be moved, and many say it likely will not as the city owns the building and the creation of a homeless services campus would require several other organizations to move as well. However, rumors keep surfacing about the city purchasing a plot of land near del Valle (a suburb east of Austin) for a homeless services campus similar to the Haven of Hope in San Antonio. Some of these appeared in online comments or reddit threads in response to news stories related to homelessness and I give them little weight. However, in October of 2015, I spoke on a panel organized by The Collective Austin entitled "A People's History of Austin," and during the question and answer session a woman who lives in del Valle stated that it was one of the central topics of concern at her previous neighborhood

association meeting. While this is all speculation, it alludes to the sense that there is a perception of actions being taken behind closed doors, out of the sight of the many people who the move would affect.

The push to move the ARCH is a companion to the movement to clean up Waller Creek because the entertainment district runs in between the two spaces. The project to improve the creek included a tunnel that closed off a large section of Waterloo Park in 2011. Red, who I met in Waterloo Park during the summer of 2014 when he rode up on a teal cruising bicycle in the middle of one of my conversational interviews with Tim and Andre. He openly stated that the bike was stolen before he added to our conversation about the park before the construction began. He described those years as his glory days when he could sleep rough in the now closed off section of the park without having to worry about police. His red hair and white beard were long and faded by age and I frequently saw him riding through the park wearing a knit black cap even though it was usually 80 or 90 degrees and sunny. He and Tim described a large wooden structure that they could sit perched on top of which gave them a full view of the park. It was beautiful, Red said, and nobody messed with them.

Red compared the days when his sight was unrestricted by construction fencing and equipment to his more recent stifled feeling of always being watched under the overpasses east of the park where he was spending more of his time. “You always have to be on the move,” he said, “because otherwise people just look at you and think you’re a lazy bum and they get pissed when they see you. But if you move around then the same people don’t see you all the time. They might see you in one spot for a couple weeks but

then if you go somewhere else they think you maybe got a job or somethin' so if you stay away for a little while and you come back then they think 'Well, at least he's tryin'."

Currently, only a small fraction of Waterloo Park is open while the majority is fenced off for construction. Obscured by green fence windscreen, the construction process is out of sight to a curious researcher except for the large earth-moving equipment that protrudes above the fence line. The project was originally planned to be finished in the fall of 2014, which was then moved to 2015, but has yet to be finished. The most recent problem, called the "Capitol View Corridor snag," stems from a longstanding regulation that protects 30 viewing corridors of the Capitol of Texas building (Sadeghi 2015). The designers and engineers of the project erred by five feet in planning the water intake facility which required the city to invest another $6 million in the project to redesign it within regulation and delayed its opening for at least a year. While it was initially supposed to be a $25 million project the city has now invested over $150 million (Prazan 2015).

VISIBILITY IS COMPLICATED

The complicated nature of (in)visibility, which I understand to represent the dialectics of visibility and invisibility, is not a fixed binary but is instead relational and contextual. Social relations emerge through visibility, according to Andrea Mubi Brighenti, as the field of visibility shapes "relationships between seeing and being seen or, more generally, between noticing and being noticed"… and "one can only become a subject *within* such relationships" (A. M. Brighenti 2010, 39). This is not just about

relationships between people, however, because “visibility can be attributed to sites, subjects, events, and rhythms,” the interplay of which produce “ordered, but also changing and always partially indeterminate, effects” (A. M. Brighenti 2010, 39). Further, visibility has the potential to be either empowering or disempowering as it can at the same time produce the benefits of recognition yet also produce the conditions of control (Brighenti 2010).

In their analysis of the Homeless Hotspot Project (HHP) at the 2012 South by Southwest Interactive Festival, Koepfler, Mascaro and Jaeger write that “the social construct of (in)visibility has two faces which complicate the debate. Visibility can be empowering and at the same time disempowering” (Koepfler, Mascaro, and Jaeger 2014). For the Homeless Hotspot Project, BBH Labs had homeless men carry mobile wireless routers. Each person was selected in collaboration with Front Steps, the company that manages the ARCH. During their hotspot service, each wore a T-shirt that read:

“I’M [FIRST NAME],

A 4G HOTSPOT

SMS HH [FIRST NAME]

TO 25827 FOR ACCESS

www.homelesshotspots.org

This was meant to address two problems: first, it would improve the quality of cellular service during an event that has traditionally overtaxed the wireless infrastructure leading to poor service, and second, the incorporation of homeless men into the infrastructure would raise awareness about the homeless problem in Austin (Radia 2012).

The “charitable experiment” was supposedly a means to greater visibility. However, the project received its own visibility in the form of much criticism that claimed HHP was exploitative and dehumanizing (Memmott 2012). This is one example of the ambiguity of visibility.

For the homeless, visibility has often led to social control (Blau 1993; D. Mitchell 1997; D. Mitchell 2011; Herring 2014). As is stated in “Chapter 4: Who Counts?” and “Chapter 7: Comfortable While Homeless,” homeless people in Austin have been subjected to high levels of surveillance, both for the purpose of “cleaning up” the city’s urban spaces as well as for attempting to know and assess the homeless problem. Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore point out that “with surveillance often comes the danger for those bodies caught up in silent, sometimes secretive aggregates”(2009, 12). Knowledge about homelessness is often told in the aggregate, especially through the increased reliance on the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that takes information from people at shelter or social service intake to create an aggregate picture of what homelessness looks like at local and national levels. The homeless also get aggregated through medical institutions and criminal and community courts, all of which tend to focus on the aggregate of the “chronically homeless” as the most problematic and draining to the system.

For the purposes of counting the homeless, there are two aggregates; the sheltered and the unsheltered. As I discuss in the previous chapter, the count of unsheltered homeless had been on the decline in recent years, which was then cited in several stories as evidence that Austin is moving in the right direction toward ending homelessness

(Diaz 2014; Theis 2014; R. Murphy and MacLaggan 2013; Mahoney 2013). The point in time count at the beginning of 2016 showed a 20% increase in the number of homeless people counted. The Executive Director of Caritas, Jo Kathryn Quinn, attempted to ease discouragement around this increase by suggesting that the number counted may not represent an actual increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Austin when she blogged two points: "External factors like weather can impact the number of individuals identified as homeless. This year's count was cold, increasing the number of people in shelter," and "There were significantly more volunteers this year helping with the PIT count, so it is difficult to know if the number of people experiencing homelessness is up, or if the counting was just more accurate."

Silent aggregates, by which I am thinking of counts that have less visibility, might be seen in the number of premature deaths caused by unsheltered life, which is not mentioned in Austin's story of success and which might have remained in relative darkness were it not for the investigation of James Barragán in his story for the *Austin-American Statesman,* which I discuss in the Introduction. This silence is part of a larger form of social abandonment that Henry Giroux calls the "politics of disposability." He argues that this abandonment "eliminates democracy through a thousand cuts" as a result of "an ideology, a mode of governance, and a set of policies that embrace a pathological individualism, a distorted notion of freedom, and a willingness both to employ state violence to suppress dissent and to abandon those suffering from a collection of social problems" (Giroux 2016).

Barragán's story, "Casualties of the Streets," reflects this politics of disposability because he had to dig through the medical examiner's archives in order to recover the evidence of those deaths that occurred "just out of sight." Deaths of the homeless often go unreported and once exposed appear shocking. For example, what one learns from "Casualties…" is that while 86 percent of Travis County residents [housed] died of natural causes during the 2013 and 2014, only 29 percent of the homeless included in the analysis did. That statistic means that homelessness significantly shortens lifespan. While underrepresented in natural deaths, homeless Austinites are overrepresented in the categories of homicide, suicide and accidents. A good portion of those accidents are homeless pedestrians hit by cars – a problem that is reportedly so bad that "APD wants homeless pedestrians [to be] more visible for safety's sake" (KLBJ Newsroom 2015).

Not mentioned in "Casualties of the Streets" is a phenomenon called "bum bashing" which is physical abuse that is inflicted on someone who is homeless. The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) released a study in 2012 that reported that 312 homeless people had been killed due to bum bashing in the decade prior (Bunds, Newman, and Giardina 2015, 272). NCH also reported that the numbers were likely an underestimation as "it is more difficult to know the actual number of homeless people who are killed (because many homeless people do not have immediate family members or friends to report them missing)" (Bunds, Newman, and Giardina 2015, 273). While I argue in "Chapter 8: Knowin' Each Other" that homeless friendships are more prevalent and meaningful than is often assumed, it is also unlikely that friends would expose themselves to the authorities in order to report someone missing.

Even Austin's most visible representation of homelessness, Leslie Cochran, left behind a lot of mystery surrounding his death in March of 2012. Leslie was sometimes unsheltered and other times lived in state funded homes or with friends, but he will long be remembered as "Austin's most famous homeless person" (Benz 2012). Leslie became an icon of Austin's weirdness through his performance of transgender identity, which almost always included the pairing of fake breasts and a revealing thong. Amidst fears that the growth of Austin is making it too much like Dallas, Leslie's death produced an outpouring of people mourning not just of Leslie but also the "old Austin." Mayor Lee Leffingwell declared March 8 "Leslie Cochran Day" to commemorate the "indelible image" that he provided for the city in its "Keep Austin Weird" campaign (J. Schwartz 2012). His obituary in the *Austin American-Statesman* stated that with his passing, "Austin just got a lot less weird" (Beach 2012).

Despite this level of visibility, the specifics of Leslie Cochran's death are still obscured in mystery. On October 23, 2009, after being found unconscious at 3 a.m. near the intersection of Interstate 35 and Oltorf, Cochran reported that he had been attacked by a group of people after talking to them about the dangers of drug use (News 8 Austin 2009). In an interview with KVUE News he stated that "I was talking to some people who were in the process of getting some crack, and I suggested to them that crack will just make you stupid, and the guy in front of me took offense, and I was attacked from the back and the front" (KVUE News 2009). Following his death in 2012, a KUT Austin story reported that the 2009 incident was "a debilitating seizure which sent him to the hospital and into a coma" (Dunbar 2012). At the time of the incident, Cochran's report of

assault became understood as an act of confusion due to the injuries to his brain (KVUE News 2009).

My purpose here is not to discuss the truth of Cochran's report or whether the attack was a figment produced by injury and confusion. Instead, I want to point out that a person who apparently meant so much to the Austin community that *Culture Map Austin* remembered him as "our beloved Leslie Cochran" (Faina 2012) also left the conditions of his death, which occurred after a decline in health following the 2009 incident, in a state of mystery and conjecture. Whatever happened to Leslie that night occurred and remained "just out of sight," a fate more similar to Austin's hyper(in)visible homeless black population which I discuss at greater length in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

During my first interview with Marie, she asked me to make sure I checked back with her after several months so that she could update me on where she was. She said to give her about six months and she would surely be out of the Salvation Army by then. While Marie and I stopped meeting for lunch three months after we met because she got a job and her schedule changed, I did maintain a connection with her through text messaging. The last time I heard from her was in November of 2015, which is the longest I have gone without hearing from her. In November, she sent me a picture of her and a friend standing on 6th Street. She had braided extensions in her hair that were dark brown and waist length with blonde tips. She said she no longer had a job and that getting out of the shelter was harder than she thought. I called her to check in so she could talk more if

she wanted. We had a brief conversation in which she said, "I don't know Maggie, I don't know why God's keepin' me here. I guess he thinks there's more I gotta' see. I hope not, but it seems like there must be."

While social scientific and popular literature on homelessness has managed to paint a more complex picture than the early images of bums, hobos and bag ladies (Russell 2014; Snow and Anderson 1993; Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000), the discourse is still too fixated on the homeless as *objects of* visibility. I began this project from that perspective, as I constructed them as aesthetic disruptions, and the effects of that framing remain in my chapters. That the homeless are rarely depicted as *subjects with* visibility is captured in the following description in the introduction to *Open Our Eyes: Seeing the Invisible People of Homelessness* (Hendricks and Brogan 2010): "A woman sits on the sidewalk with a cardboard sign, her hair stringy and her clothes disheveled. A backpack sits next to her with all her belongings. *Her eyes are vacant* and she watches as people pass by, ignoring her" (10, emphasis added).

Open Our Eyes comes from a place of wanting to change attitudes about the homeless, of wanting people to see the plight of many and stir in readers a desire to do something about it. But the binary of visibility and invisibility is too constraining – in this passage the choice of language undoes its own primary objective. In wanting to highlight this woman's subjectivity – her visible "thereness" – the description simultaneously deprives her of perspective by having the reader imagine her eyes as vacant. Though it may just be a matter of description, the language limits the authors' wish to construct

meaningful visibility because the vacancy of her eyes suggests that her body is uninhabited, that there is no subject there.

Avery Gordon begins *Ghostly Matters* (1997) with a line from Patricia Williams's *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (P. J. Williams 1992): "That life is complicated is a fact of great analytical importance" (1997, 3). This statement, Gordon claims, is "perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time" (1997, 3). While a seemingly simple phrase, it presents social scientists with a very challenging task: to research and write about power and personhood without reducing either to oversimplified conceptual abstractions. This is harder than it sounds, and while *Ghostly Matters* proposes a paradigmatic shift that is beyond the means of this dissertation, I have taken seriously its intention of "conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" (Gordon 1997, 5).

To that aim, I chose to focus this chapter's attention on the concept of visibility, which is one of the most taken for granted concepts related to homelessness. The ways in which the homeless get described as either too visible or invisible remove the possibility for subtlety in relation to being or not being visible and have limited the opportunities through which the homeless might be seen as having complex personhood with a unique and valid perspective. Additionally, the use of statistics or aggregates to make homelessness visible produces the conditions through which the homeless become a disposable population, regulated in some ways and ignored in others. I have unpacked visibility beyond the invisible/visible binary as a way to set up the following chapters that

focus on comfortability while homeless and friendship within homelessness. Each of these concepts is theorized by research participants and each has its own relationship to (in)visibility that allows me to further explore the complexity of the term. In the next chapter, "Comfortable While Homeless," I draw on the perspectives of two homeless research participants, Howard and Andre, as well as ethnographic photography taken during field work, to normalize the possibility for comfort in the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 6: Comfortable While Homeless

"You know what it is?" Howard asked rhetorically as he filled the pause that followed with an angry stare. "They're trying to take away our comfortability." He spoke these words as he leaned back in his chair to lift his tennis-shoed feet on the table, one crossed over the other. Howard comes every week to the Art from the Streets studio, where I was working as a volunteer, but he hadn't touched his painting once that day. He seemed to have a lot on his mind.

Howard had short hair that was more black than grey, so he sometimes looked younger than his age. His teeth were crooked and spaciously spread, and though it's not obvious by looking, he told me the decay was so bad that he was worried he'd lose them all within a few years. Howard said he has experienced homelessness on and off, mostly on, for more than twenty years. He didn't remember exactly how long and seemed to have no interest in describing how he had arrived there. What he described instead was his desire to have his own place where he could listen to music, put his feet up and spend his days painting to the rhythm of jazz. Those descriptions happened on days when he seemed a little more optimistic than usual.

During our exchanges Howard was often in a somber mood and had clear and poignant descriptions of his difficult relationship with the city. He claimed that his secret to surviving life on the streets was his ability to "stay out of trouble." I came to learn that by trouble he primarily meant altercations with the police, which were avoided through what he described as his own good behavior. In relation to the police force he expressed

frustration that despite his stated efforts at behaving properly, he still had several unpaid citations for which he would likely be jailed the next time he got stopped by the cops. This was a common concern that almost all of my research participants faced, including a few who did spend time in jail for unpaid citations during the course of my research. The concern will likely become even greater in the coming year during the 2016 Great Texas Warrant Roundup, which is a combined effort to "to actively locate individuals with outstanding arrest warrants" (City of Austin 2016). As of March 5, 2016, law enforcement agencies across Texas will be "concentrating their efforts to enforce court orders" related to delinquent traffic, misdemeanor (Class C) citations, or delinquent parking citations" (City of Austin 2016). Citations that disproportionately affect the homeless are included in the Class C Misdemeanor category, including "no sitting or lying," "public intoxication," and "criminal trespassing."

On this particular afternoon in the Art from the Streets studio, Howard interjected his statement about comfortability into a conversation I was having with Cathy about her anxiety over her current legal troubles. She was worried she wasn't going to be able to finish her painting because she would likely be doing jail time in the near future. Cathy was a middle-aged, heavy-set white woman with brown, straight hair and round, red cheeks. She had a court case the following day where she would face the consequences of repeatedly driving without a valid license. Howard overheard her anxious remarks and showed compassion for Cathy's circumstances by offering his theory about comfortability – the police are trying to take it away.

POLICING COMFORT

The title of this chapter, "Comfortable While Homeless," is a nod to the term "driving while black," which is in turn a play on the phrase "driving while intoxicated." The expression "driving while black" recognizes that police officers are more likely to pull over a car if they see that the driver is black, and therefore it may as well be considered a crime to drive while black. By playing on this phrase, I mean to point out that the comfort of homeless people in public is policed to the extent that it has become a criminalized act. Part of the outcry over the visibility of homeless people in Austin is the idea that homeless bodies are becoming too comfortable, taking up too much space on the sidewalk and blocking entryways to stores (Ball 2011; Smith 2016; Pyle 2001).

While Howard's expression, "they're trying to take away our comfortability" appears to be just a straightforward statement, the policing of comfort reveals a lot about the punitive management of the homeless population in Austin and beyond. The comfort of shoppers, tourists and homeowners is used as a justification for passing ordinances that limit exposure to the urban poor. These ordinances come at a price, which is experienced by those people whose ability to become comfortable is constrained by laws that make their comfort a crime. Because the discourse around managing homelessness in urban spaces revolves around the comfort of housed consumers, the comfort of those experiencing homelessness falls off the terrain of discussion. This exchange with Howard, along with other experiences I had during ethnographic research in part of Austin's homeless community, led me to ask how the discourse of homelessness might

change if the comfort of those who experience it were placed at the center of the conversation.

This chapter builds on Howard's thinking about comfortability and the theoretical concept of the stranger to contextualize the policing of homeless visibility. I also use the perspective of another research participant, Andre, to discuss both his understanding of the homeless as targets of surveillance as well as his practices that push back against the criminalization of comfort that he experiences. Taking Andre's lead in claiming comfort despite the conditions that minimize it, I draw on ethnographic photography to locate the persistence of comfort in the everyday actions of other homeless people in Austin. Andre's perspective provides insight into the constraints as well as the possibilities for finding comfort in a social position of homelessness, which is constructed as antithetical to comfort. Finally, I discuss the history of the concept of comfort to better understand why comfort and homelessness have become oppositional terms.

THE STRANGER

The material deprivation of homelessness combined with the various forms of criminalization that amplify the difficulty of living without housing construct homelessness as extreme discomfort and despair. The idea of living with such depravation places the homeless in a conceptual class of their own – largely unimaginable for those who are securely housed. In the minds of the housed the sometimes assumed and sometimes real unimaginable conditions of living on the streets creates a gap in understanding so wide that it breeds fear. As a mental category, the

homeless becomes akin to an animal that lurks in the shadows of the otherwise civilized and beautified urban streets. The homeless figure is among the cast of Zygmunt Bauman's strangers who do not "fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map" and by their very presence they "prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying…they pollute the joy with anxiety" (Bauman 1997, 17).

While much important work addresses the many difficulties of living on the figurative and literal streets, the photographs in this chapter reveal the existence of comfort that also makes up the experience of homelessness. I emphasize comfort to complicate the meaning of homelessness and write against the dehumanization that defines homelessness both culturally and materially. I also emphasize comfort because the ways that unhoused people in my study used public space complicate the neat binary of public versus private that dominates much of the literature. Public space in neoliberal urbanization is said to be shaped by the needs of capital and is therefore organized toward consumption (Zukin 1980) and the democratic ideal of urban space is increasingly threatened by privatization and social control (Zukin 1996). As David Harvey states, "quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money" (Harvey 2008, 31). In a culture such as this comfort must be bought and enjoyed in privately owned spaces. Without the means to purchase comfort, one would be left with only discomfort. Yet, as Ash Amin (2015) argues, urban space must be understood beyond dualisms such as public versus private. As such, analyses of urban locations should think outside the historical themes of civility and civic responsibility between strangers and sites of political formation. The relationships presented in the story of comfort to follow, both

human to human and human to space, speak to Amin's suggestion that writing about urban space should "disturb the reduction of public spaces in received wisdom to jousts of civility and incivility or democracy and dystopia" (Amin 2015, 247).

Writing nearly two decades ago in *Public Culture*, Samira Kawash (1998) theorized the homeless body as a threat to the public because it disrupts the private/public divide. Because the homeless do not have access to private space they are always potentially part of the public landscape. Yet, they are not a legitimate part of the public space because they are forced to tend to bodily processes that are only legitimately performed in the private space of the home. Therefore, according to Kawash, policies that control the homeless are "not limited to the immediate goal of solving the problem of homelessness by eliminating the homeless. This 'war on the homeless' must also be seen as a mechanism for constituting and securing a public, establishing the boundaries of inclusion, and producing an abject body against which the proper, public body of the citizen can stand" (1998: 325). The homeless body does the symbolic work of constructing the outside of the ontology of the public. It is because the unhoused bring the material body, and its biological processes, into view that that they are seen as a threat to the more abstract notion of the public body. They disobey rules for the proper use of public space because they lack the private spaces in which bodily processes are supposed to take place.

This abjection suggests that in response to these policies, the unhoused are either always on the move or find ways to appear to have disappeared. Such a moment is

described by Kawash (Kawash 1998) when she encounters a homeless body on the train contorting so as to appear almost invisible:

> The sweep of my gaze snags on something unexpected, although not unusual. In the seat beside the door, a seat barely wide enough for one and a half riders to sit down, lies a body. *Lies* isn't really the word; this person is folded up, fakir style, somehow managing a horizontal position in a space explicitly demanding the vertical. The knees are shoved up to the face, and two sneaker-clad feet are folded and twisted to fit around the bars at the end…. I see what the others on the train see, a body folded impossibly small… (319).

THE ANNIHILATION OF SPACE BY LAW

The expanding limitation to public space that people experiencing homelessness face has been the subject of much social scientific research. Don Mitchell (D. Mitchell 1997) defines this process as the "annihilation of space by law" resulting in the criminalization of almost every aspect of making home in public space. Mitchell sites numerous laws passed in various cities throughout the 1990s that increasingly controlled "behavior and space such that homeless people simply cannot do what they need to do in order to survive without breaking laws" (D. Mitchell 1997, 307) The effects of expanding laws that manage the behavior of the homeless are that streets and sidewalks are minimized in their habitable spaces (N. Smith 1996b), thereby increasing the necessity for peripheral or liminal spaces (DeVerteuil 2006).

Evidence of the restrictions to public space can be seen in the many design styles for public benches that are aimed specifically at either excluding the unhoused entirely or limiting the time an unhoused person might stay in a particular place. These include "benches with vertical slats between each seat, individual bucket seats, large armrests between seats, and wall railings which enable leaning but not sitting or lying, among many other designs" (Rosenberger 2014). In addition, there are instances of spikes being installed outside of buildings to prevent the homeless from sitting down (Andreou 2015) or cages built to block access to heating vents that could provide warmth during very cold nights (Dearden 2014). In Austin, four benches were removed from an area in downtown near the corner of 6th Street and Brazos because business owners in the area argued that the benches were attracting homeless people (Wear 2012).

During my conversation with Howard, I took his statement about being deprived of the right to comfort as an opportunity to ask him about the "no sitting or lying ordinance" that the Austin city council implemented during the 2000s. In response, he raised his eyebrows, lowered his forehead which was creased with lines of perplexity, and asked: "The what?" I described the city code that made it illegal to sit or lie down on the sidewalk, expecting that his reaction would be the same as mine was at first… some sort of expression of disbelief and maybe anger. But Howard gave me a "hmmm…," shrugged his shoulders and said "nah, I never heard o' that one."

Even though he had never heard of it, the content of the ordinance appeared to be of no surprise to Howard. It was as though I had just revealed to him that the sky was blue. But "sitting or lying" clearly was not what caused him the most trouble. According

to Howard, the majority of his citations had been for jaywalking. In other words, homeless management expands well beyond ordinances that are specified for what has become thought of distinctly as homeless behavior. My conversation with Howard on comfortability ended there as we returned to Cathy's anxious and tentative rehearsal of her rights as an unhoused driver.

I learned through later conversations with other informants that trips to jail similar to the one Howard was anticipating consisted most often of a three to six hour stay in a space they called "blue chairs." Andre, Tim and Slim all described a process where people who had been picked up for misdemeanors were processed through finger-printing, given tattoo checks and then put in a room filled with heavy, plastic blue chairs rather than a cell. Supposedly, each person in blue chairs is allowed to take up only one chair, making it impossible to lie down. Tim complained that the temperature is kept too cool in the room and it can be really uncomfortable without a jacket or sweatshirt. The number of people in blue chairs varied, they said, with as few as 5 or 6 people or as many as 300 (this seemed like such a high number that I took it to be a figure of speech). They each had different descriptions for when the high range occurs, including Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, during the weekends, and when visitors come for events like Formula One, or the upcoming Pecan Fest, when, as Andre said, "they don't want us bothering them."

FINDING COMFORT

While the annihilation of space by both law and design is a dominant force in how the unhoused can conduct life in public space, I witnessed a range of ways that people experiencing homelessness do make use public space for their own comfort – that they do not always fold up impossibly small. Based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in spaces throughout Austin where homeless people make use of public or publicly funded space, my research found the notion of comfort to be a much more central role in their lives than current research would suggest.

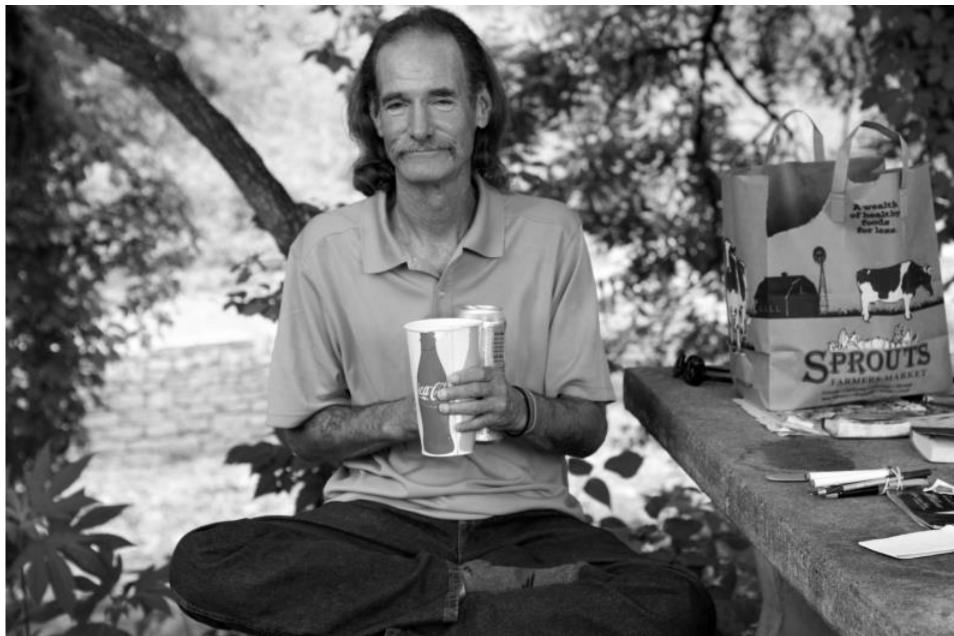

Figure 8: Tim at Waterloo Park

Tim is one example of a person who slept rough yet whose daily activities centered around his desire to be comfortable. He had moved to Austin from California

during the 1990s and had been homeless for most of the time since. His brown and grey hair was grown just past his shoulders and he usually kept it in a ponytail that curled at the nape of his neck. He was usually cleanly shaved except for a thick mustache that covered over his upper lip. When I arrived for our first of many conversational interviews, Tim was sitting at his usual concrete park bench with his shoes off and his legs crossed in a yoga-like posture. Sitting this way was what made him comfortable, he said, so he continued to do so even though he had recently received a ticket for it. He uncrossed his legs to describe the incident to me, as if he needed to ground his feet in order to tell it.

> I got a ticket for, 'cause I took my tennis shoes off. And they gave me a ticket sayin' I was camping. I had my tennis shoes off in the park, mindin' my OWN BUSINESS readin' a book. I had… I take my tennis shoes off so I could get some air 'cause it was hot. They gave me a ticket! Camping! I had my tennis shoes off!... But you gotta deal with it…

Figure 9: Andre and Ernest in Waterloo Park

Andre, who was sitting across from Tim during this particular interview, quickly offered his understanding of the discriminatory nature of policing – as well as an example of his refusal to "deal with it."

> I mean, it's not illegal. It's discretionary to the officer. If he's takin' you bein' a eye sore, a vagrant, he'll give you a ticket. It's up to the officer's own discretion. I mean 'cause I sit over there by Riverside, I might have a six pack with me in a bag and a [police officer] roll up and [the officer] say "you got anything open?" and I say "no sir." I asked him, I say "Sir, are you a peace officer?" And he said "well yeah." And I said, "Well you're disturbing my peace, 'cause I'm not doin' anything wrong sittin' by the lake here.

Andre is a black man in his late fifties who claimed his stay in the park was a short term result of a break up with his wife. However, Andre and Tim had apparently known each other for over twenty-five years because, as they said, "they grew up together" in the park. Andre claimed to work fairly regularly doing odd jobs, but when he was not working he was usually in the park, which he liked because it was so peaceful and his "family" was there. He said he found a nice spot to sleep on the third floor of the parking garage across the street from the park where he could sleep more peacefully. The garage had airflow that allowed Andre to be cooled by the breeze, which he illustrated for me by making little waves with his hand like it was wind blowing across his face.

KNOWING SURVEILLANCE

As poor, black men, Howard and Andre both offer a lived knowledge of the ways that surveillance is targeted toward bodies that get marked as hypervisible and problematic to public safety. Both Howard and Andre desire to take up public space in ways associated with comfort, and that they have cogent arguments for why that becomes difficult. The comfort of black men in public space is not often at the top of public imagination, nor is it often part of the generalized sociological imagination. What some highly publicized sociologists have taught us about black men in public is the discomfort they produce in others through their desire for respect. Referred to as the "code of the streets," Elijah Anderson (Anderson 1994) explained to readers of *The Atlantic* what

> amounts to a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, including violence. The rules prescribe both a proper comportment and a

> proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so allow those who are inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way.

While Anderson conducted research for his book *Code of the Street* (Anderson 2000) during 1990s, Alice Goffman has recently received a great deal of attention for her research on poor, black urban men in her book *On the Run* (A. Goffman 2014). In her words, black men are described as "getting arrested and coming home on bail and visiting their probation officers. They got into fights; their cars were stolen or seized by the police. It was all confusion and chaos" (A. Goffman 2014, 225).

Because violence is the dominant way that black men's use of public space is imagined, those who are put in charge of public safety have developed systems of surveillance that regulate the movement and behavior of black men. John Fiske (Fiske 1998) argues that "because the Black man is the focus of white fear and is made to embody all that appears to threaten the social order, he has to be always watched" (Fiske 1998, 71). Simone Browne (Browne 2012) refers to this as the "compulsory visibility of the racial subject," which can be traced back to transatlantic slavery when slave owners developed a range of practices that allowed them to keep account of their enslaved subjects (73). Due to this history of compulsory visibility, "black men are acutely aware that surveillance is discriminatory" (Fiske 1998, 71).

Howard and Andre are therefore caught in a long history of discriminatory surveillance that demands of them to forsake their own comfort for the comfort of others. And they know it. Yet they often refuse to do so and verbalize the ways they actively

seek peace and comfort. Similarly, anybody who is read as being homeless is placed under heightened surveillance for their potential threat to the comfort and safety of others. Yet like Andre and Howard, many of the other unhoused people that I encountered during my research also found ways to resist the imperative to "stay out of trouble" by forfeiting comfort or pleasure. Those examples will be discussed through an analysis of the photographs below.

PHOTOGRAPHING COMFORT

I used my camera to document these moments with permission from the photographed. Some respondents preferred not to be photographed at all (and so I did not), others asked that their faces be omitted from the photographs, and others were eager to have their photographs taken possibly because they liked the attention, or as Andre verbalized it, the camera made him feel like a star.

Figure 10: Steve Lying and Listening to Radio Near Church under the Bridge

The most obvious form of finding comfort on the streets or sidewalks was simply the act of lying down, often with the additional support of a bag or a blanket. This is probably what most people think of when homelessness comes to mind, yet this is also the form of comfort that is the most constrained by law. Given the recent Public Order Initiative the streets downtown were relatively empty of the stereotypical homeless body lying on the sidewalk.

Figure 11: Clarence Resting Feet on Wheelchair Near Bridge of Angels

However, at specific times and locations there seemed to be a lift on the ordinance that has made lying on the sidewalk unlawful. The sidewalk just in front of the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) was one such space, though a person had to be alert or at least able to be roused or security staff would call emergency medical services. Respondents also expressed a relative freedom to lie down in the spaces beneath highway overpasses, but only if the area was kept free of garbage and debris. The most common time that I saw people lying down on the sidewalk was on Saturday and Sunday mornings in the area under and around a small section of Interstate 35 between Sixth and Seventh Streets. On these days two different church organizations hold sermons, serve food, and sometimes offer clothes, haircuts and foot grooming.

Figure 12: Penny Waiting for Supplies Near Church under the Bridge

Often finding these spaces and times of rest were intentionally timed by people who had come to know the landscape of homeless management within which they lived. Penny, pictured here sitting wrapped up in a comforter beneath Interstate 35 and 7th Street, said that Sunday morning was the only time during the week she dared to come to do the downtown area. She only came there because she needed to restock supplies, which her friends were doing for her while rested and ate a plate of food. Penny was suffering from liver cancer and getting around the city was too difficult for her with all the walking and standing around waiting for buses. Her body just couldn't do it, she said, because her legs ached too much and they had swollen to twice the size they should have been. For most of the week Penny stayed in one of the city's greenspaces where she could lay down with a lesser fear of being confronted by police and getting a citation.

Figure 13: Danny with Dog at Spicewood Springs and McNeil

Danny also found weekend mornings to be a time when he could lie on the sidewalk without worry, though he did not do so downtown because that felt too risky for him. Instead he stayed within a small range of an intersection in northwest Austin where he had close access to a convenience store to buy alcohol, a What-a-Burger where he used the restroom, and a church that handed out clothes and grocery store gift cards on Sunday mornings. Danny went missing for a week and when he returned he had a cast on his leg. When I asked him what happened he said he had drank too much and fallen from the top of the angled cement slab that secures the overpass. He was lying down up there one night after partying with some of his friends and when he tried to get up to pee he tripped and broke his leg falling to the bottom. There were two weeks following his return when Danny had no choice but to lie down on the sidewalk beneath the overpass during the weekdays because the angle made it too difficult for him to walk up with a

cast. By the end of those two weeks he had been picked up by the police. When I saw him next, several weeks later, he had his cast off but his leg had still not healed enough for him to walk up the cement embankment out of sight.

Aside from spaces and times for lying down, I also witnessed many occasions of people finding comfort in each other. This comfort came in the form of embraces, hugs and bodies resting on each other. I found this moment where two people rested in front of the ARCH to be particularly evocative because of the symmetrical shape their bodies made together as they blocked the brightness of the sun by cocooning themselves under a thin, blue flannel blanket.[11]

[11] This is the only picture that I took without permission because I did not want to bother them during what looked like a midday nap. I include it here as a representation of tenderness, along with the two images that follow.

Figure 14: Two People Lying Down in Front of the ARCH

Figure 15: Ernest and Andre Hugging After Laughing So Hard They Made Each Other Cry

Figure 16: Slim Hugging His Friend Patrice Outside of the ARCH

Of all the people I met during my research, Slim was probably the most emotive. He gave hugs and wanted hugs and talked openly about suicide attempts and the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his dad. He spoke about never fitting in because he was skinny and very tall and all the other members of his family were stout, which is how he got the nickname Slim. Because of his depression, Slim was almost always seeking comfort. He often turned to street drugs such as meth and K-2 (a synthetic drug meant to emulate marijuana). But there were periods of sobriety when he also turned to the comfort of the Bible. He was learning to read for the first time in his life and he was determined to be literate by his next birthday when he would turn fifty. Slim said he could not read more than a page at a time, but holding the Bible was more than just reading, it was an act that reminded him he was never alone.

Figure 17: Slim Reading His Bible During Church under the Bridge

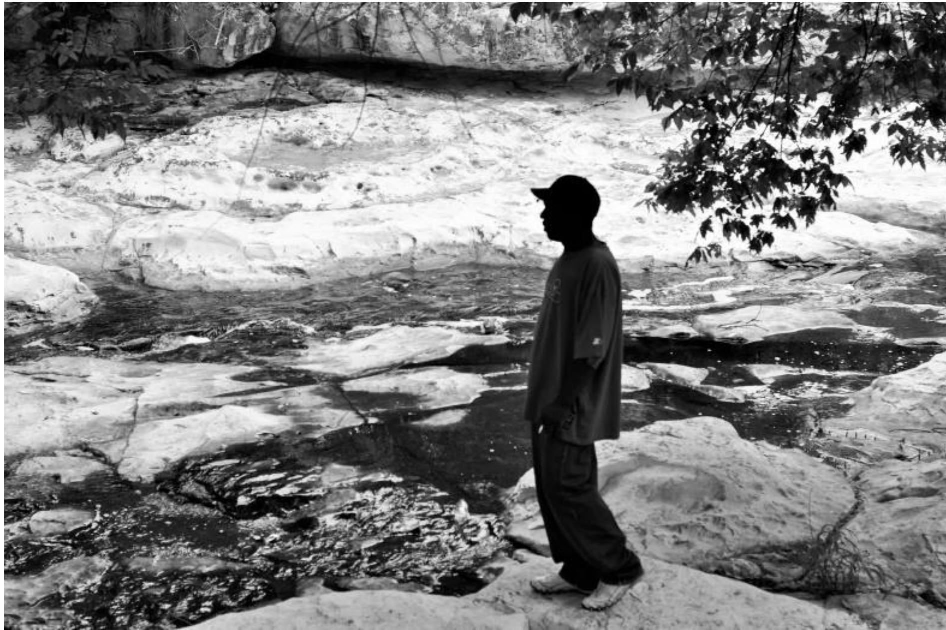

Figure 18: Andre at "His Spot" by Waller Creek

During a tour of the spaces downtown that Andre frequents, he took me to a secluded area along a small creek that cuts down the eastern side of downtown. "It's so

peaceful here. Everybody know this my spot," he said as he pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and took a long inhale. We walked along the rock bed watching the water trickle past when a small boat came into view. The boat was no larger than my hand and was made from twigs and a tiny piece of cloth for a sail. We watched it for a long time until finally Andre chuckled and said, "It's funny. The things people do when they're bored."

Figure 19: Small Hand-made Paper and Wooden Boat Sailing on Waller Creek

Figure 20: Donna with Colorful Bracelets and Bright Blue Nail Polish

Another form of comfort I found was in the pleasure of adornment. Donna, pictured here with an abundance of bracelets, had been unhoused in Austin for only three months. She moved to Austin from Oklahoma, where she had lost custody of her five year old daughter. Her daughter was currently living in Austin with family members of Donna's ex-husband. Because of the cost of living in the area, Donna was unable to find an apartment to rent but said she was trying to save enough money to get a place so she could at least gain visitation rights to see her daughter. In the meantime, she had been collecting bracelets from people she was meeting in the unhoused community, who she considered to be her new family. Each one reminded her of someone she met, she said. Plus, as she phrased it after I complimented her baby blue nail polish, "Just because I'm

homeless don’t mean I can’t have style, you know. I want to keep my sense of flair even though I’m out here and the livin’ is rough. I still gotta’ be me.”

Figure 21: Gail Wearing Plastic Red Firefighter Hat

Donna’s comfort to stand out with her own sense of flair reminded me of other exchanges I had with people during my research who were comfortable or even playful in

their embodiments of homelessness. I thought of Gail, who had bounded into the park one afternoon with a bright red, plastic toy firefighter hat on top of her head. She said she found it in one of the boxes of clothes donations that a church from Lubbock holds once a month outside of the ARCH and that she had been having fun all day wearing it to make people laugh. Some passersby even asked to have their picture taken with her, she exclaimed as she smiled brightly for the camera in my hand.

Figure 22: Rapping Outside of the ARCH

I also thought of a heavily tattooed man whose name I never got because our contact was only brief. He was rapping partially coherent lyrics about how hard it was to live on the streets but he still thought of the city as his hometown. During a later interview with Marie, she showed me a picture of this same man after she met him one day. He told her the story of how he had recently become homeless after his mother

passed away and his grief brought him into an abusive cycle of methamphetamine use. On the day I met him he was performing his rap with his hand held up in the longhorn sign, a symbol used to represent allegiance to the university, and particularly the football team. He told me that his tattoos and his raps were all about expressing himself and also to offer entertainment for the people because there was too much sadness around the building otherwise.

Figure 23: A Domino Game Setup Outside of the ARCH

Playing games was also a way that several people I met made themselves comfortable. Killing idle time seemed to be a regular problem, particularly finding ways that would not attract police attention. Aside from card games, reading popular magazines, and listening to headphones; which were all fairly common forms of entertainment; I was most impressed by an informal domino tournament that took place

on the weekends outside of the ARCH. The security guard on staff was frequently front row amongst the onlookers who watched the games. A cardboard box resting on top of a plastic garbage can was used as the game board and was quickly filled up with names and X's to keep score.

Figure 24: J.J. in his "Living Room" at Spicewood Springs and McNeil

Of all the people I met during my research, JJ struck me as the most committed to living a life of comfort in the traditional sense. As a former bull rider, JJ had hurt his back badly enough that the injuries progressively prevented him from doing the physical labor of construction work, which was how he made money following his career in rodeos. He had been receiving a disability check that was enough to cover the cost of his house in a rural area outside of Austin until he lost it to a fire that was started by the embers of a spent cigarette. He said the fire was what landed him on the streets and had since been

using his checks to spend a week or so in a hotel room to sleep on a real bed and let his back recover from sleeping rough. JJ spent his days flying signs until he had enough money to buy a case of beer, which he kept cool in a cooler as he drank them until he ran out, at which point he would return to the corner with his sign. When he was not flying signs, he spent a good deal of time lounging under the overpass where he had set up a small living space with an ottoman, dresser, duffel bag stuffed to the size and firmness of a chair, and an assortment of various snack foods.

COMFORT

To look at the cultural history of the term comfort one finds a history of the emergence of the Western modern home. In *The Age of Comfort* (DeJean 2009), cultural historian Joan DeJean historicizes the term comfort as a modern ideal emerging concurrently with the changing design of the modern home in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Paris. In her cultural history, DeJean elucidates how the new understandings of comfort developed alongside the e merging definitions of privacy and individualism that were brought about by the formation of modern consumer culture. New spaces of privacy, such as the livingroom and bedroom, were filled with objects of comfort; most significantly the couch.

Bill Bryson noted a similar shift in the design of houses in England. The medival hall, in which all domestic living was done and provided no comfort as it was a "single large, mostly bare, and always smoky chamber" (Bryson 2011, 51). Bryson argues that farming technology during the eighteenth century allowed farmers to begin settling the

land and accumulating wealth. This change in the economic structure of England created the conditions for the emergence of comfort as a commodity. This happened through changes in building styles that shifted from the medival hall to the many-roomed home filled with newly designed furniture meant for bodies to sit or lie down in physical comfort.

Historian John Crowley (Crowley 2003) also marks a binary between medival and modern definitions of comfort. He notes that the English word for comfort derives from the medival French *conforter*, which means to offer physical or emotional support. Crowley's analysis of books of courtesy convey that comfort was a gendered term as it was primarily an experience for men who upon returning from outside affairs required "clean clothes, a well-appointed bed, a fire, and someone to serve him these ammenities" (Crowley 2003, 5). This medival meaning of comfort was primarily a means to avoid the discomfort of filth (2003). Crowley also notes that the modern Anglo-American definition of comfort emphasized the physical over the emotional and became a disposition that needed to be taught and learned. Physical comfort, or the "self-conscious satisfaction with the relationship between one's body and its immediate physical environment" became an aspect of material culture that marked the distinction between that which was modern and that which was traditional and needed improvement (Crowley 1999, 750)

This history reveals that comfort is a commodified aspect of the private realm and is not often associated with public culture outside of consumption. The equation of comfort with home normalizes the assumption that those who are unhoused are and ought

to be living outside of the realm of comfortability. My analysis stresses that thinking about comfort requires a reckoning with the dehumanization of the unhoused at the levels of culture, policy and scholarship. That homelessness should and sometimes does include comfort contradicts the cultural understanding of the unhoused as the extreme end of deprivation. On the one hand, Howard's emphasis on limited comfortability speaks to a series of broader questions related to urban mobility, such as which bodies are allowed to reside, linger and be visible in public space and which are not. On the other, the many instances of lingering or comfort that emerged during my research suggest that neither laws nor designs can fully eliminate comfort from the lives of the unhoused.

Comfortability is at the heart of both why homelessness is seen as such a problem for urban growth as well as how we have come to understand homelessness itself. Homeless people are seen to infringe on the commodity of comfort of those populations that bring money to a local economy – tourists, small business owners/employees, and residents who can afford the high property values of the urban core. At the same time, homelessness is understood as being outside the bounds of a comfortable life. The unhoused are at the end of a spectrum commonly referred to as "the needy" and it is the bare necessities of life that they are seen as being in need of.

The usefulness of taking comfortability seriously is that it reveals an unspoken strategy that many cities employ to end the problem of homelessness: to make it just so difficult, painful, or uncomfortable to make home in public space that people would do anything to avoid it. This stems from a long-standing tension about choice in homeless management. On the one hand homelessness is a mode of existence that is assumed to be

not a choice, yet often the choice to live on the streets is used to justify the lack of resources within the human services network. If making home in public space as a mode of existence were allowed a certain degree of comfort, the fear seems to be that more people would choose it. The nostalgic descriptions of tramp life support this notion that freedom from the constraints of housed society has some alluring potential.

Places of rest are important to people who conduct life in public spaces, whether or not they have a private dwelling to return to at night. But these modes of sitting are not all that Howard was referring to in our exchange described above. He was also referring to modes of walking, which is a regulated embodied practice as well which speaks to the expansiveness of homeless management techniques. Howard's desire to maintain his right to comfort, as well as the persistence of comfort within the lives of the homeless people I spoke with, attuned me to the moments when the unhoused resist this pressure to disappear. While perhaps not fully aware of the names or specifics of all ordinances, many of the unhoused that I interviewed over the course of my research were keenly aware that their bodies are under watchful surveillance as they move through or rest within public spaces. Yet, the photographs above deptict several instances where people refused to fold up impossibly small, where they claimed space in ways that invoked the many meanings of the word comfort.

CONCLUSION

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed 2004), Sara Ahmed argues that words are sticky and that they take on various meanings over time. Rather than seeing

words as shedding meaning as they acquire new ones, Ahmed's claim is that sticky words carry all the meanings that have attached to them. Thinking of comfort this way allows the depth of the meaning of the word comfort to unfold. While historians of the word comfort mark a distinction between the medival and modern uses of the word, an engagement with comfort in relation to homelessness reveals that distinction to be false. That the meaning of comfort is concurrent with the emergence of consumer culture is meaningful, yet the respondents in my study show the importance and humanization of realizing that comfort happens outside of or despite the domination of consumer culture in urban space.

In addition, the discursive construction of the homeless as the stranger or outsider tells of the lingering relevance of the medival association between discomfort and that of dirt or filth, as noted by John Crowley in *The Invention of Comfort* (Crowley 1999). In his development of the idea of the stranger, Bauman drew heavily on Mary Douglas' book *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 2002). As a sign of disorder, the modern stranger was likened to dirt. Quoting Douglas, he writes that "dirt offends order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment…Uncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (Douglas in Bauman 1997: 7).

While the medival concern with discomfort in relation to filth was an issue primarily confined to the home, it was during the transition to the modern period that filth in the public became a matter of crisis. According to David Barnes (Barnes 2005), it was the particular material, political and cultural conditions specific to late-nineteenth century

Europe that made filth a matter of public concern. Barnes claims that it was during this period that the urban bourgoisie in London and Paris protested when the presence of excrement in the city became too revolting. He also claims, however, that this protesting was a result not of an aversion based on health concerns, but instead filth became "emblamatic of decay, disease, and the dangerous classes" (Barnes 2005, 123)

This understanding of comfort as the avoidance of exposure to filth puts comfort and class conflict at the center of the discourse around homeless management. It reveals that while the public space is claimed to be available to everyone, the behavior and people that are regulated within it is specific to the modern middle-class ideals of the modern private sphere. Attention to the moments where people experiencing homelessness live in or with comfort is important because it undoes the current understanding of homelessness as being akin to Georgio Agamben's (Agamben 1998) "bare life" that is both destroyed and stripped of political significance. This analysis of comfort politicizes the act of being homeless and at the same time visibly comfortalbe, where comfort itself is a mode of resistance. Rather than fighting for their right to public space in formally political arenas such as city hall or the voting booth, I witnessed claims to urban space that were based in the mundane ways that people inserted themselves into the broader spatial and temporal arrangement of the city – an arrangement that is not designed for them yet one that they exist within.

Chapter 7: We Been Knowin' Each Other

Figure 25: A View from Tim's Spot at Spicewood Springs and McNeil in Northwest Austin

The setting sun was turning the horizon pink and orange as I began putting my camera away to head home. "Could you stay for just a little while longer?" Tim asked in a straightforward tone. He had never asked this before so I obliged.

"For a little bit," I said as I worried about my still nursing and potentially hungry toddler at home. More than likely there was enough milk in reserve for him, but as night drew near it was my disposition to become increasingly worried about his wellbeing.

"It's always so lonely out here. If I could have one more Twisted Tea, now that would set me right."

"Where's Andre?" I asked. "Isn't he supposed to be out here with you?"

"That nigger, Andre. I ain't talking to him right now. He stole from me. He's a thief. He better not come up here or I'll stab him with my knife." Tim was in no mood for my prying questions and I was in no mood to hear more.

It was the third time he used the "N word," twice in my presence and once I was told he used it in reference to my son. My feelings toward Tim were getting complicated. We walked quietly to the convenience store located catty-corner from the cement slab under the highway where Tim had been staying for about a week. At the counter he asked, "Could you get this for me? I got nothin' left."

"Sure, Tim. I got it." I always felt torn about buying Tim alcohol. With a recovering alcoholic for a father, I knew that I wasn't helping Tim in the bigger picture by getting him something to drink – if in fact I was there to help. Yet, the language of recovery felt patronizing when I thought about applying it to Tim. And anyway, sometimes I wanted a drink too.

"It's expensive to live out here like this. But I'll get you back. Everybody think it cost nothin' to be homeless, but it does. If you want any kind of life it does. Prob'ly costs about ten dollars a day I'd say if you want to eat and have a drink and maybe a smoke."

"Yeah, I hear you. It all adds up fast. But you're right, people probably don't realize."

"I'll get you back though," he continued while still standing at the checkout. "I appreciate it. I sure would like a smoke, though. You think you could get me a pack of cigarettes too? That nigger Andre [that's four times] was supposed to bring some back for me. I'll pay you back, I promise I will."

"You don't have to pay me back, Tim. I told you, you're helping me out by letting me talk to you, so I'm happy to get you some smokes." I wasn't really happy though. I was still angry at him for his language toward Andre and I wanted to leave but felt addled by a self-critical voice that kept telling me how privileged I was to be able to leave. I wanted to like Tim, and most of the time I did. I wanted to like him even after he told me that he was sent to prison in the 1990s for shooting a man point blank outside of his apartment building. The man, apparently, had threatened Tim's mother during a marijuana deal and Tim was not going to stand for anyone threatening his mother.

HOMELESS FRIENDSHIPS

Sometimes I felt afraid of Tim. Other times I wanted to take care of him. I also felt a sense of protection from him, which he expressed when he told me that I might meet some scary people during the research process with him but that he wasn't going to let anyone hurt me. And on "good days" his dry humor made me almost fall on the ground laughing. What kept me there that night, to stay just a little longer, was more than a sense of guilt or even an ethnographic interest in longer observation. I stayed because over the previous months I had grown to care about Tim and consider him a friend – and he called me one as well. To spare him a little bit of loneliness felt like the least I could do. And yet I still sat with my anger. And Tim still sat with his anger toward Andre. In that moment I realized something quite obvious, friendship in the context of homelessness is just as complicated as friendship in other contexts. There are attachments that hold people together and hurt feelings that push people apart. The literature on

friendship among the homeless does this complexity a real disservice as social support is more meaningful than is commonly understood (Sterk-Elifson and Elifson 1992).

For all the ink spent and words written about whether "we" (as social scientists and as housed citizens) really know the homeless, little has been made of the ways that homeless people know each other and the friendships that form between homeless and non-homeless people (Stablein 2011). People experiencing homelessness are assumed to be isolated, unattached, disconnected from social networks, and generally outcasts from the types of relationships that fall under the umbrella of friendship (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). The relationship between two homeless men who were my key participants – Tim and Andre – painted a picture of an ambivalent friendship that under conventional terms might not signify much in terms of relationships writ large. But having spent a significant of time observing their relationship and developing a relationship with each of them, I interpret their friendship differently. While I recognize the reality of the frustrations they had with each other, and the social conditions that caused these frustrations, I also saw in their relationship an endurance that I found to be meaningful.

This chapter uses Tim, who served as my research gatekeeper to other homeless people in Austin, as its central storytelling figure. By engaging in field observation and conversational interviews with Tim during the spring, summer and fall of 2014, I gained insight into the relationships that he developed with the people around him. He had a primary connection with a black man named Andre, who was a key figure in the previous chapter. Tim also had a secondary set of affiliations with a group of white men in

northwest Austin. This chapter looks at the care work and the conflict that played out between Tim and his associates during the time I was conducting research with him and thereby challenges the conventional picture of homelessness as a state of social isolation. I identify the evidence of norms of hegemonic masculinity that make friendship between men difficult in any context, but especially amidst homelessness. I also discuss the structural racial inequality that shaped some of the tensions that developed between Tim and Andre. Despite these constraints, this chapter also identifies in their friendship an endurance that challenges contemporary notions of friendship as fleeting and reflexive. In this way, the context of homelessness has provided the circumstances for these two men to care for each other in ways that the conditions of late modernity as well as the norms of masculinity often prevent.

The tendency to not see friendship as a normal and central part of homelessness stems in part from the notion that when homeless people congregate and form social connection it becomes a problem, a "homeless hotspot," that is then broken up by police. I witnessed this dynamic during a Commander's Forum meeting in July of 2013 held in a performance space called The North Door. After several residents and business owners had complained of homeless groups hanging around on particular corners, including one woman who referred to a group outside her barber shop as an "infestation," Commander Jason Dusterhoft advised the group that because the Austin Police Department is understaffed they do not have enough eyes on the street to be able to stop "homeless hotspots" from developing. But, he stated, "that's why we really rely on you guys, on the people who are down here every day who live and work here to act as our eyes and ears.

If you see a group of people – and it's not a status thing, it's a behavior thing – if you see a group of people behaving in a way that isn't what we want in downtown and you see it happen regularly then we'll start paying attention to that spot."

That my friendship with Tim described above was complicated and productive of ambivalent feelings was nothing compared to the relationship between Tim and Andre. I was introduced to their "friendship" one spring day when I had arranged to meet with Tim in the park where he was staying at the time. When I arrived, he was sitting at his usual cement picnic table across from Andre. They later told me that they call this table the million dollar table, both for its desirable location (with a spectacular view of the capitol only yards away) and also for the amount of food, drinks, and drugs that have been consumed there over the years. "What are we doing today?" Andre asked shortly after Tim introduced us. He had already made a list of the places that he and Tim wanted to show me. A homeless tour, they called it. The list included the ARCH, the downtown public library, a small pedestrian ramp outside of an office building where Tim was currently spending his nights, Woolridge Park, a parking garage where Andre had been sleeping, and a quiet spot along Waller Creek where Andre likes to sit. We didn't make it past the picnic table that day, however, because the conversation kept us in our seats. But, we did visit each of those locations together, one at a time, over the next several months of my research.

On the day that I met them, I learned that whatever Tim was involved with, Andre would be as well. They were a pair. They later described that other people see them this way too. Andre told me, with Tim nodding in affirmation beside him, that "If I walk up

by myself, everyone asks 'Hey, where your boy at?' and if Tim shows up without me they say the same thing – 'Where your boy at?' So yeah, we're known as a pair. Tim and Andre." To this point, Tim adds, "Yeah, and when we show up, you better watch out. Uh oh… back up… and they part ways for us to come through. 'Cause we own this place. Everyone knows us." I never witnessed this parting of ways, but I did frequently hear people ask Andre where Tim was or Tim where Andre was when I was with one or the other of them and they were not together. This conveyed the regularity with which they engage in their social connections as a pair.

I wanted to know more about the meaning or workings of this affiliation, particularly because their alliance as an interracial duo cut across an informal segregation that shapes where homeless people tend to claim space as well as with whom they most frequently associate. Tim, who sat in a yoga posture in "Chapter 6: Comfortable while Homeless," had a lot to show me about friendship. He is a white man who was about to turn 60 when I met him. He had been homeless for more than twenty years, mostly in Austin. Tim said he grew up in California and that he worked as a welder in Arizona before he went to prison for homicide in 1983. He had two adult children, one daughter and one son, who he said he hadn't spoken to in over ten years. Following his release in the mid-1990s he had been able to find temporary work doing welding on oil rigs in Houston but over time his felony record prevented him from securing stable employment. His homicide arrest is corroborated by the following news clipping from the *Prescott Daily Courier* on Monday, September 19, 1983.

Tucson man jailed after two slain

TUCSON (AP) — A 28-year-old man was held at the Pima County Jail today on $100,000 bond for investigation of homicide in the shooting deaths of two men near a downtown bar, authorities said.

Jerry Watters, 22, of Tucson died after being shot once above the heart in the center of the chest, police said. They would not release the identity of the other man before relatives were contacted.

Timothy Countryman was arrested after Saturday's shootings, which occurred outside the Champagne Buffet Bar shootings shortly before midnight, police officer Dan Bohland said.

Figure 26: "Tucson Man Jailed After Two Slain." Prescott Daily Courier, September 19, 1983

Andre, Tim's primary associate, is a black man who had recently turned 52 when I met him in the spring of 2014. He said he was from Louisiana and had also been homeless in Austin for more than twenty years. Like Tim, Andre had spent time in prison, though he never told me what for. He did describe being moved around a lot during his prison time and that he had learned many job skills during his sentence, particularly during his time at Angola Prison, a maximum security prison which is known for its work programs and was featured in films such as *The Farm* (Garbus, Rideau, and Stack 1998), *Dead Man Walking* (Robbins 1996), and *I Love you Phillip Morris* (Ficarra and Requa 2011). Andre had a large family, with two sisters and four brothers. He kept a

photograph of his brothers with him, which was one of the first things he showed me on the day that I met him.

Figure 27: Andre Holding a Picture of his Four Brothers

"BUT WE'RE NOT FRIENDS"

During one of my visits with Tim and Andre I had casually asked what they felt the role of friendship played in their lives. There was an awkward silence. "Is that a weird question?" I asked self-consciously. And then quickly offered to explain why I was introducing the topic into our conversation. But Andre cut me off and said, "No, it's not weird… but… it's just…" Tim finished his thought for him with "But we're not friends." "No, we all family here in the park," Andre added. "We been knowin' each other for twenty-five years! Yeah, we're family," echoed Tim. Then after a pause only long enough for a breath, Tim added a seemingly contradictory statement: "They are all

associates, because I can't trust any of 'em." Andre then echoed, "Yeah, we all associates."

I struggled to make sense of this contradiction until I had spent several months getting to know Tim and Andre. Initially I thought: How could someone simultaneously be as distant as an associate and as close as a family member? Surely one of these assessments is not true. While there is a tradition within qualitative sociology to believe that "talk is cheap" and that the power of ethnography is that it "uncovers discrepancies between saying and doing," (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, 182), I took this moment of ambivalence as evidence that both saying and doing are complicated and that neither has a more immediate claim to "truth." I knew I would have to wait out the course of my research to get a better sense of how the social connection played out between Tim and Andre.

In the meantime, I was feeling my own complicated emotions. About one month into the ethnographic portion of my research, Tim revealed that he thought he had cancer. He lifted up his shirt to show me a dark brown silver-dollar sized mole-like growth on the lower left side of his abdomen. He said it was starting to bleed spontaneously and that he was getting worried. But, he really hated doctors. "I don't trust 'em," he said. "You never know what they're gonna' do to you in there. The homeless are like guinea pigs to them. And I hate being stuck in bed. Last time I was in the hospital all my stuff was gone when I got out. Someone stole it and I had to start all over again." Andre was also getting sicker. Through the course of my time conducting research with them, I saw a yellow hue creep into the whites of Andre's eyes and he got increasingly lethargic as the summer

progressed. By late fall, Andre had left Austin to live with his sister in Temple, Texas, a town roughly one hour north of Austin. I found this out because he called one day, which was the last time I heard from him, asking for me to contact Tim and ask him to hold on to his bag that had all his clothes in it. As early as July 4, when I joined Tim and Andre and their friends for an Independence Day cookout, I started to have thoughts that the lifespans of my two key participants might be shorter than the time it took for me to write this dissertation.

"God that sucks," I said to Tim as we continued our discussion about the difficulties associated with being admitted to a hospital. "I mean, you're probably tired or weak when you're released and it would be, like, so terrible to find that all your things were missing."

"Seems like it happens every time I get comfortable," Tim continued. "Someone comes through and takes it all and I gotta' start over. They come looking for stuff in the brush over there [pointing to the overgrown brush that lined the creek bed], sometimes they cut it down with a machete so they can find it easier. I think I know who did it though 'cause I saw he had somethin' o' mine. He'll get it someday. Not today [takes a long drink of beer]. But yep, someday. He know it too, 'cause he been avoidin' me and not comin' into the park anymore."

Over the course of the next several months, small red splotches appeared over the surface of Tim's abdomen right around his belt line. I started to feel scared for him. Tim began to complain about pain all over his body and a depletion of energy he had never felt before. His dread for the doctor had turned from confinement to a hospital room to a

fear of what he might find out if he went. Tim was afraid that his visit to the doctor would be his death sentence, and that fear was reinforced by his experience in his acquaintance group in northwest Austin, where he had recently started hanging out more regularly.

"WE'RE TAKING CARE OF HIM ON HIS WAY OUT"

Amongst the group was a man named The Mover. He went by that nickname because he used to be a mover before a gunshot wound rendered him no longer able to lift heavy things. His inability to work led to his inability to afford his apartment anymore, and therefore he was camping in the greenspace that surrounds the Pickle Research Center near Braker and MoPac (one of Austin's two north-south arteries located on the west side of the city) with his friend Sanny Claus. Sanny said everyone called him that because he had long white hair and a long white beard and a round belly and therefore looked just like Santa.

Figure 28: The Mover at Spicewood Springs and McNeil in Northwest Austin

The photograph above was taken at The Mover's request. He wanted me to document the bulge of insides and fluids that were herniating from his lower rib section above his abdomen. The hernia stretched and deformed a vertical scar marking where he had been closed up following emergency surgery, which was the result of a conflict that ended with The Mover getting shot in the chest. The muscles of his upper abdominal wall were not holding and doctors had apparently already attempted three times to keep his body intact. The Mover was done with doctors and felt certain that they had caused his body to fall apart in the way that it was. Much like Tim, The Mover was skeptical of the medical profession and felt like a guinea pig. He had a hard time describing what exactly was going wrong with his body, but it looked to me like his liver was falling out.

“The doctors did this to me. All I was was an experiment to them. I ain’t goin’ in there again ‘cause I wouldn’t come out alive. Not that I’m going to live anyway. I’m a dead man walking… well, sitting really. I know I’m dyin’. But at least here I can die on my own terms, camping with my friends. They’re all taking care of me and I’m gonna get to die under the trees like God intended me to.”

“We’re taking care of him on his way out,” said Sanny Claus. “Because nobody wants to die alone.”

“That’s how we do for each other,” Tim said. “We’re just makin’ sure he got enough beer to not feel the pain too bad. He’s got blood leaking out of his heart because the doctor’s fucked him up and now he’s got nothin’ to do but wait until he dies.”

More than fear stood in the way of Tim visiting a doctor, however. Austin has a Medical Access Program (MAP) that many people in the homeless community use when health issues become something that can no longer be ignored. Because there are income criteria that have to be met, which can only be assessed through the application process, acquiring a card requires an application submission that because he lacks a computer Tim can only do in person. Tim had gone through this in the past but had let his card expire and was therefore no longer eligible for MAP benefits unless he completed an application and was reissued a card.

MAP cards are issued through a Travis County office called Central Health, which has four locations in the city – all of which are either east or south. Tim had moved from his centrally located park to a corner in the far northwest area of Austin. His declining health made it challenging for him to find motivation for the walk to the bus

stop, the long wait at the stop, the wait at the Central Health office, and the journey back to the area he was now staying. He said it would take him all day and he didn't have the energy.

After watching him put this step off for two months, I asked Tim if it would help if I gave him a ride. "Yeah, that'd help," he said, "and maybe if you could wait in the waiting room with me too. I don't like sittin' in those places by myself." So, one morning I drove to northwest Austin from my southwest home and when I arrived at 9 a.m., our agreed upon time, he was sitting under a tree in the parking lot where we would usually meet. A small part of me doubted that he was going to show up and I felt relief when I saw him sitting there. But, I learned over time that Tim always showed up where he said he was going to.

A poignant example was the time that Tim told me he was going to join me on a Mobile Loaves and Fishes run because he said he wanted to give back. Tim was late and I assumed he wasn't going to make it, but then just as our team was loading the truck with food before departure, Tim came running up, out of breath and carrying his duffle bag. "I told you I'd get here!," he exclaimed. And then he told me how he had been picked up by a cop downtown a couple of days earlier and had spent a couple of nights in jail for failure to pay the fine for his Class C Misdemeanor of possession of small amounts of marijuana. He was released just that afternoon and came directly to the church where we were setting up for the food run. When I told him how amazed I was that he came even though he had just gotten out of jail, he told me, "Yeah, well I really don't like to let

people down. If I tell you I'm gonna' be here, I'm gonna' be here. But I was really worried they weren't gonna' let me out in time."

THE "REAL HOMELESS"

During our drive to the Central Health office for Tim to apply for a new MAP card, I asked him why he moved from his park just north of downtown to a busy intersection located so far from resources. He told me that this area was where the "real homeless" lived (described below) and he wanted to be around "real homeless." However, through our ongoing conversations over the next few months it emerged that Tim had a warrant out for his arrest for missing his court case. Actually, Andre let that detail slip during a conversation that the three of us were having together and Tim got momentarily angry at him. Then they both told the story about how Tim was arrested several months prior for a marijuana misdemeanor in front of the ARCH and was trying to avoid the potential of the police catching up with him by staying at this intersection roughly ten miles from the downtown core. A nearby church provided food, clothing and a grocery voucher which helped him get through each week.

As a follow up to Tim's answer in the car on the way to get his MAP card, I asked him, "What do you mean by real homeless?" "Well, we work. [long pause] I mean we want to work. We do odd jobs in construction or whatever but we don't line up and ask for stuff. What we got we got ourselves." Tim had said this repeatedly about his acquaintances in the northwest, who were all middle-aged white men except for two middle-aged white women who he loosely considered to be part of the group. Tim

explained that real homeless are not like the people who stand outside the ARCH day after day, year after year, not trying to do better for themselves. “They’re all usein’ crack or meth or dope or whatever. I ain’t like them. They never want to get off the streets, but I do. It’s gonna happen one day, I’m gonna get a job once I get my teeth fixed and then I’ll be back on my feet. And just wait, you’ll keep seeing the same people outside the ARCH, they not gonna leave because they get what they need right there and they don’t want better for themselves.”

In contrast to the white community he had developed in the northwest, the acquaintances Tim had in the park near downtown were either black and Latino, including Andre with whom he had been affiliated for over twenty years. The majority of people who stand or sit outside of the ARCH are also people of color. Throughout my research it became clear that racial segregation can be mapped across Austin’s homeless community in a similar way that it can be mapped onto Austin’s residential neighborhoods. The greyscale map below shows a clear east/west division where, with some exceptions, concentrations of Austin’s white residents are much higher on the west side of the city. The history of this mapping has been traced to the City of Austin Plan of 1928 that legally enforced racial segregation (Tretter 2013). The city can be mapped according to other racial categories as well, but for the purposes of this chapter I focus on this map to illustrate my point.

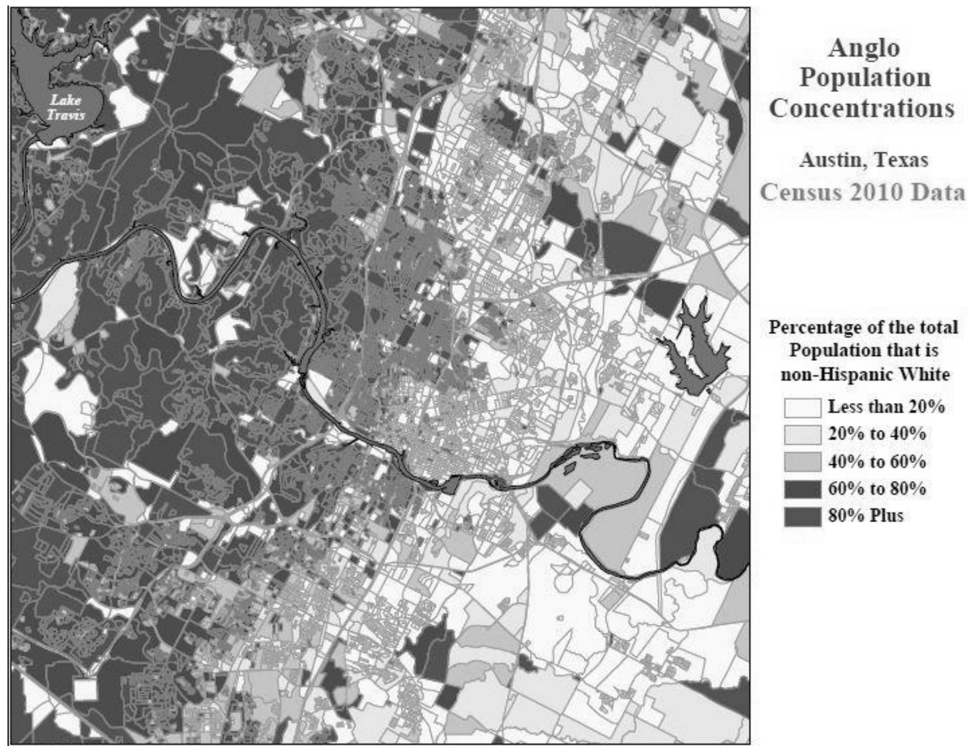

Figure 29: "Anglo Population Concentrations, Austin, Texas." Map produced by Ryan Robinson, City Demography, Department of Planning, City of Austin, July 2011

As I spent time with Tim and his acquaintances in northwest Austin, I learned that the main way they acquired money was through flying signs at the busy intersections where streets pass underneath the raised highway. Additionally, the group had a large July 4th cookout using steaks that one of them had stolen from a nearby HEB. So the moral and authentic undertones that defined the “real homeless” for Tim were little more than a mythology that supported his ability to maintain his self-perception as living up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. There were clearly racial stereotypes informing Tim’s assessments about the real homeless that align with cultural stereotypes about the deserving and undeserving poor.

In light of the racial segregation within Austin's homeless community, similar to the racial segregation that Bourgois and Schonberg found amongst the homeless in San Francisco, which was primarily based on a tension between black versus white heroin addicts (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009), I became interested in the mixed race friendship that Tim and Andre had developed over the past twenty-some years. A few days after the fight described above, Tim and Andre were as inseparable as when I first met them months earlier. There was a meaningful bond between them that had endured through time, through temporary jobs and housing, through illness and romantic relationships, through the multitude of life events that happen over the course of a "chronically homeless" career.

THE ENDURANCE OF AFFILIATION

It is in this endurance that I hesitatingly name the presence of love. The affective dimension of homelessness, including the importance of the emotional bonds that people form, rarely makes up the discourse of what is referred to as the "the homeless problem." This oversight is not to say that affiliation has been entirely ignored in the area of homelessness. Indeed it has received some attention. David Snow and Leon Anderson ethnographically uncovered the centrality of group affiliation in the lives of people living without adequate housing (Snow and Anderson 1993). However, the predominant emotion that emerged from their discussion was anger built on antagonism between groups. Mitch Duneier's discussion of the social networks of homeless street vendors in Greenwich Village shed light on the importance of connection between the men, but his

analysis revolved primarily around the business function of these networks (Duneier, Hasan, and Carter 2000). In a similar vein, Teresa Gowan's study of homeless recyclers in New York discussed affiliations between the men as primarily shaped around income generation (Gowan 2010).

Bourgois and Schonberg also present an important discussion of men's bonding in a homeless context, even including a section called "Male Love" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009). Despite what this title suggests, however, there is very little discussion of affect between men but instead bonding between men seems primarily based on access to scoring the next hit. There is a moment of emotion when one of their respondents tears up over the loss of his companion. But the overwhelming message from these analyses of affiliation in homeless contexts is that interpersonal bonding is predominantly instrumental. While this perspective has been informative regarding the cultures and strategies for survival that emerge from inadequate housing, there is a virtual erasure that affiliation in this social position can have affective dimensions that are based on the pleasure of each other's company or caring about one another.

These studies notwithstanding, it is rare that social connections between homeless people and the meanings that they have are taken seriously. A low level of social integration is, in fact, one of the defining characteristics people have pinned on the homeless (B. A. Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010; Bowpitt and Harding 2009). Assumptions about lack of social connection and love were reflected in the words of a pale skinned, red haired, twenty-something youth minister named Cooper, who I met at a weekly church service under an overpass. During our interview, he stated that the reason he felt it

was important to bring his ministry to the homeless was because "these people need to be loved on. They need to know that they are loved even if it's fleeting and the interaction is short. They don't get love, and they need to know they are loved." Similarly, a song that is frequently sung during the service each week contains the lyrics "You have a friend in me-e-e," a line that is repeated over and over in the song and is meant as an offering of friendship from those in the church to those on the streets. The well-intentioned sentiments of these religious organizations and the people who serve on their behalf reveal an important assumption about the social construction of homelessness: they are friendless, unloved, and socially under-connected.

Yet, as the affiliation between Andre and Tim suggests, at least some people living in homeless contexts take their social connections quite seriously. The affiliation narrated above is one that includes dependence, but also something more that revealed affective dimensions of their "knowin' each other." Tim and Andre relied on each other in ways that moved their relationship beyond friendship into the realm of family. This dependence mirrors other findings of social communities in homeless contexts where the collective is often referred to as family (T. Wright 1997a). Not only do they spend a remarkable amount of time together, but they also often share money with each other, rely on each other to keep watch over their belongings if one has to leave, and keep an eye out for cops if one wants to go to sleep for a bit. Their reliance on each other made them vulnerable to each other and showed that in some ways their bond was stronger and more meaningful than friendship. However, the lack of trust expressed by both Tim and

Andre throughout our interviews also suggested that friendship is sometimes idealized as a higher form of social relationship, one that their affiliation had not reached.

Despite their insistence that theirs was not a friendship, there were several times as they spoke to and about each other when they slipped and did refer to each other as friends. Perhaps remembering what they had told me, they would correct the slip. Or perhaps they would have corrected it anyway. Friendship, it seemed, was something that was both always there between them and never there between them. Their affiliation was meaningful to them, however, which they communicated to me several time through stories that they referenced as evidence to their caring about each other.

Figure 30: Tim and Andre in Waterloo Park

One example of this care was a time many years ago when Tim suffered several stab wounds and left the hospital against doctor's wishes. Tim had been confronted by

the boyfriend of a woman that he was "messing around with," Andre told me. "You should have seen him when he was younger, he was real handsome and he could always find a woman who was willing to take him in for a little bit. This one just happened to be in a relationship though and it got him into a lot of trouble." After Tim walked out of the hospital against his doctor's advisement, Andre stayed with him in their usual place in the park and nursed him through his healing by replacing the gauze and bandages and rinsing the wounds with water so Tim wouldn't get an infection.

They also told me another story about their caring relationship which had happened only the year prior to me meeting them. Andre had to spend a month in the hospital because his kidneys were failing as a complication of diabetes. Andre did not want to be in the hospital by himself so Tim stayed in his room with him each day for the whole month, sitting at his bedside despite his extreme dislike of hospitals. The perk, Tim said, was that Andre shared his food with him. Tim said he hated the thought of Andre being stuck in there all by himself and they're family so that's how they take care of each other.

"MAN, I LOVE YOU. I JUST CAN'T SAY IT."

Of the two, Andre was usually the affectionate one. During my visits with them, Andre shared an affectionate touch with his associates seemingly without hesitation, as though by second nature. As he told a story, which he did frequently, he often touched the elbow or shoulder of the [usually] man sitting next to him. Most often the man next to Andre was Tim. Sometimes these touches went along with an "ain't that right Tim" or

when Tim was talking a “you tell ‘er Tim.” He did this more often when Tim was more inebriated than usual and would start mentally drift away from the conversation, so at least between the two of them I began to see these touches partially as a way that Andre kept Tim engaged in the moment.

Andre was also quick to translate for me the affective language between the men with whom they associated. After witnessing countless negative verbal exchanges between men – in the park, outside of the ARCH, at Church under the Bridge, outside of a convenience store - I asked Andre why so many people insult each other and say things like “I’m going to kick your ass when we get outside the store” or “Man, you’re so ugly, you’re gonna’ break her camera.” Without much need for pondering my question, Andre assuredly responded that these insults were a form of affection. “It’s what you say when you can’t say I love you. Yep, all that is a way of saying I love you. If they say ‘I’ll kick your ass’ it really means ‘Man, I love you’. I just can’t say it.”

Figure 31: Tim and Andre in Downtown Austin on a Tour of "Their Spots"

While Andre translated these exchanges as being about affection rather than hostility, they also reveal that affection is constrained by the necessity to perform a tough masculinity even, or particularly, in a socially vulnerable situation such as homelessness. I observed that while a number of women do experience homelessness in my place of study, the spaces in which homeless men interact are largely homosocial spaces. Spaces that are characterized as homosocial often include expressions of homophobia, including acts of policing what types of masculinities are acceptable. Spatial separation plays an important role in the reproduction of men's power, where even in social positions that appear powerless in the larger social order, men still form bonds that exclude women and other men who "fail to display typically 'masculine' characteristics" (Spain 1992, 71). There is, therefore, much at stake in performing masculinity as defined by hegemonic

ideals because being without community for a man living on the streets could have devastating consequences, such as lack of shared resources and loss of belongings without the shared agreement of guarding belongings.

Aside from offering the majority of his associates affectionate touches, Andre also exhibited care work around appearance. During the weeks when the trees in the park shed pollen, seeds, and other natural debris, I frequently saw Andre pull the particles out of other men's hair or brush it off their shoulders. He also often gave compliments to men who had just shaved, put on a nice shirt, or once to Tim when he went a day without wearing his ball cap or pulling his shoulder-length hair back into a pony tail. "You look sharp with your hair down like that," he said. He also gave encouragement when one of his associates was trying to get clean, learn new job skills, or in the case of Slim when he began taking classes at the day resource center to learn how to read. "I'm proud of you, man," Andre said to Slim and then to me, "that's a life-long goal of his and he's doin' it just in time to turn fifty."

Throughout their interactions, I observed that Tim was more withdrawn and Andre was more emotive. This affective difference was most apparent in their differing versions about the loss of their friend Billy Gunn. They told me the story separately from each other, on two different occasions, but they both unflinchingly referred to this man as their friend and made no correction after the fact. Billy's death freed their affiliation from the homophobia that is used to police men's interactions. Additionally, Billy was a veteran of the army and was apparently a large and muscular man. His toughness also assured his proper heterosexual masculinity. He also belonged to the Aryan nation. For

Andre, who was also in the army, their military bond outweighed Billy's Aryan affiliation as long as it did not come up between them in conversation.

Tim raised the topic of Billy first. He had just showed me the spot under a big oak tree where he slept on a bed of cardboard, and we were laughing about my unfulfilled wish to photograph one of the many fireflies that were making occasional neon-like streaks under the awning of his tree. He had waited patiently for me as I took hundreds of shots, and even encouraged me to continue, but I never did freeze one in the frame. Just as I had reached my "oh well" at having missed the photographic opportunity, Tim pointed to an old blue car with a flat tire that we were passing on our way back to the underpass. "A friend of mine died in that car," he said with a straight-forward tone. "He froze to death, I think, because the doors are all made out of steel and it was cold that night and it must have been like an ice box in there." Billy was always hard to wake up when he would fall asleep drunk, Tim told me. The cops found his body in the morning.

Figure 32: The Car Where Billy Died. It has since been towed from this location outside of a car wash near Spicewood Springs and McNeil

About six weeks later, Andre told me about the incident when we were sitting on the corner across the street from where the old muscle car is still parked. Andre was playfully showing off the blue and grey skater shoes he had just gotten from a nearby church donation, when his mood suddenly shifted gears and he told me that his friend Billy had died this past February in that car. “We were like this,” Andre said as he intertwined his left forefinger and middle finger around each other. “He would tell me stories and I would listen to him all day long. I wouldn’t have to talk to nobody else,” Andre said. He had begun a collection of these stories by recording them by hand in a notebook, and they were intending to try to get the collection published one day. But now Andre does not want to pursue it because he “would feel guilty making money off a dead man.”

As Andre described the loss of his friend, he wiped tears from his eyes, and then smirked a little bit before he told me he was suffering from allergies. In this exchange, Andre shared several stories about how he had tried to take care of Billy's safety during similar cold, drunk nights. One night, Andre was walking to an apartment of a friend near the intersection when he found Billy asleep on the ground passed out from drinking. "I lifted Billy up over my shoulders and carried him to that apartment. And Billy was not a small man, well over two hundred pounds," he began the story. "It was back when I was bigger too and my neck was like this," Andre said as he held his hands around his neck in a circle much larger than it is now. He laid him down on the couch in the apartment, but when morning came Andre found Billy lying on the ground outside. "He must have liked it better out there," he reasoned. Reflecting on the night that Billy passed, Andre wondered whether Billy had even slept with the blanket Andre had given him not long before.

Later that day, the memories of Billy reemerged. The three of us were talking about Tim's health and what he called his tumor, which he anticipated was melanoma because of the pace at which it had grown in the last two years and because it bled sometimes and had begun to spread in other places. Despite his extreme aversion to hospitals, Tim had been making plans for having it surgically removed. Andre claimed he would take Tim to a nearby hospital himself if Tim would not go there on his own. They were both concerned because Tim lost a significant amount of weight over the last year, despite the fact that Andre regularly offered him food and encouraged him to eat. But Tim rarely had an appetite. As we spoke, Tim kept saying "Yeah, because I *don't*

feel good. I ain't feelin' good. I ache all over and I'm tired and it keeps bleedin'. I know I gotta' go in. I just don't want to. I don't wanna' go." In response to Tim's comment, Andre turned to me and in a serious, quiet tone said "I'll take him in myself if I have to. I'll carry him over my shoulders and walk him in there and just lay him down on a bed and tell them, 'Hey, take care of him. He's gotta' get better.'" And then even quieter, so that Tim could not hear, he said, "Because I ain't gonna' let him die like Billy did."

"AND THAT WAS MY LAST SEVEN DOLLARS"

After all of the affection and laughter that I saw between Tim, Andre, and their other associates, I kept wondering what more could Andre be for Tim in order for him to consider their relationship a friendship. While Andre initially said that being a brother is better than being a friend, Tim often alluded to the fact that he just could not trust Andre, that maybe for him they were something less than friends. And then one evening, the evening that I describe in the opening scene of this chapter, Tim told me that Andre had gone back downtown and that he was angry with him. "He took my last seven dollars, that's all the money I had left, and he went downtown and never came back," Tim explained, "And that was my last seven dollars." He shook his head as he said the last part, and he seemed genuinely disappointed.

I recalled the last few times I had seen them together. Tim had received a check for which he had been waiting for several months. Before the money came, he had mentioned wanting to save the money so he could buy an old car to use for errands rather than taking the bus. He did not like that it took two sometimes three hours for him to get

downtown, where all the social services offices and many of his associates were. The traveling time included time spent waiting for the bus, which Tim particularly hated, and then going through all the stops on the bus route. The ride is especially long on Sunday, when buses run less frequently.

Tim put the check in the bank the following Tuesday, but after less than a week the money was gone and there was no car. I saw Tim and Andre at the end of this week. They told me they had used the money to eat at Tim's favorite restaurant for several days and get a room at *Motel 6* for a couple of nights so they could take real showers and not "bird baths" in the sink at the Whataburger. I asked Tim whether he shared the money with Andre, and he confirmed that yes, "that's how it is between us. When I got and he doesn't then I take care of him, and when he's got and I don't then he takes care of me. We got each other like that." Two days later Andre had split with Tim's last seven dollars. While he was supposed to go buy weed for the both of them, Tim was convinced that instead Andre went downtown to buy drugs for himself and was down there partying without him. In a voice that sounded more like defeat than anger Tim said, "He went downtown to buy some weed and didn't come back and I had to just sit there all by myself with nobody to talk to."

Tim was disappointed that Andre left him, which showed a certain degree of emotional or social connection. I was curious about this display of vulnerability because Tim had expressed several times that he enjoyed what he called the independence of his male friendships because he could still maintain the freedom to leave if he wanted. Despite witnessing several ways in which Tim, Andre, and others relied on each other, as

well as the monetary offerings of people in cars passing intersections where they were flying signs, and occasional uses of social services, Tim described himself according to the individualist terms of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. He claimed not to use the services at a local homeless resource center because, as he stated, “I got this. I do for me. I take care of my own self.”

Additionally, he explained that there is a gender difference in life on the streets where unhoused women tend to look out for each other more than men do. Women have real friendships, he said, and they exhibit this camaraderie according to Tim primarily through consistently pooling their money together. Tim was specifically referring to a group of women with whom he associated in northwest Austin who rarely had to sleep rough because when they pooled their money each day it was usually enough to pay for a hotel room for them to share. Despite the fact that Tim had just shared what felt like a financial windfall with Andre, Tim claimed that “Well, it’s like, men are more individual. I might all the sudden have an opportunity and if I’m gonna’ pursue something that comes up I don’t want to be letting someone else down. I don’t want to feel like I’m obligated to anyone, or like they might need me. I wanna’ be able to just go, ya’ know. I wanna’ be free like that.”

FAILURE TO BOND

That men’s and women’s experiences of friendship amidst homelessness are different is not surprising as there are often gender differences in friendship experiences in society more broadly that while men frequently report the same number of friendships

as women, the quality of these friendships is reported as less meaningful for men than women (P. H. Wright and Scanlon 1991; J. A. Hall 2010). It has been argued that the competitiveness that men typically feel toward each other shape particular forms of bonding that “contribute to the construction of a gender order that is dominated by heterosexual males” (Messner 1992, 233). Masculine competition makes bonding between men across differential occupational status attainment and different performances of masculinities less likely. The result of this failure to bond, as Messner argues, is that “the ability to develop egalitarian relationships with either males or females is impoverished” (1992, 233).

The history of sexuality is informative in understanding the social construction of friendship (Greene 2004). Social order and the relationships that comprise it, including the qualities of friendship between men, changed significantly with processes of modernization. Sally Munt states that during the eighteenth century Western countries saw “the ground shift under passionate male friendships” (2008, 39). This shift occurred as social order became less structured around kinship networks between higher ranked men and more around sexuality, procreation, and the nuclear family. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s writing on the changing regimes of social order, Munt uncovers how the shift away from a social order based on men’s alliances toward a heterosexual, privatized model meant that “the traditional formulations of same-sex friendship with their socially recognized kinship and ethical functions were downgraded, becoming less significant than familial and heterosexual bonds” (2008, 39). Because patriarchy has continued to shape the social order, bonds between men were more deeply affected by this shift than

were bonds between women. Eve Sedgwick pointed out the gendered asymmetry of same-sex social bonds represented by "the radically disrupted continuum, in our society, between sexual and nonsexual male bonds, as against the relatively smooth and palpable continuum of female homosocial desire" (1985, 23).[12]

Despite Tim's wish to be free and independent of social bonds, when Andre let him down, he was deeply affected. This disappointment revealed the realities of relationalities in the context of living on the streets, and while it was specific to the lives of Tim and Andre, it is unlikely unique to them alone. The strain that addiction, limited money, and the loneliness of long hours spent under an overpass puts on a social relationship seemed to make it particularly hard for Tim and Andre to forge the bond that is often associated with the ideals of friendship. Yet, the conditions of homelessness also meant that Tim and Andre continue their affiliation anyway when friendships in other contexts might dissipate.

"Tim just got arrested"

Not even one week after their feud I learned that Tim and Andre are back on good terms. I got a message on my voicemail one evening left by Andre. "Tim just got arrested," he said. "I don't know what to do with his stuff. He's got a bag with everything he needs in it and the cop wouldn't let him take it with him, so now it's sittin' up here and I gotta' go. I can't stay and watch it but if I leave his stuff will be gone for sure.

[12] The discussion of gender and friendship discussed here was previously developed in a co-authored paper entitled "Something More than Something Less: Ambivalence and Friendship Among Marginalized Men" (Tate and Robinson 2014).

There's papers in there and … I just can't leave it. Yeah, so I was wondering if you could come up here and get his bag and keep it for him until he's out. He'll probably be there for a week or so. Anyway, I'm borrowing a phone so you can't call me back. But if you get this, could you drive up here please?"

Three hours had passed between the time he left that message and the time I heard it. I fully anticipated that he would be gone when I arrived. But, when I pulled up in the parking lot across the street from their corner I saw Andre just sitting there, chin resting on one fist with Tim's bag underneath him like it was an egg he was keeping warm. I put the bag in the hatchback of my car and spent a few minutes chatting with Andre while he waited for the bus to take him downtown. He insisted on taking the bus because I had already gone out of my way.

"I thought you and Tim weren't talkin' to each other," I said. "He sounded pretty mad at you when I spoke to him last so it's nice that you're worried about his bag like this." "Yeah," said Andre, "well we got over it. I gave him a little money and he was happy. I told him I was gonna' bring it to him so I don't know why he got so mad. But that happens sometimes, especially when it comes to money. But we move past it, 'cause you know, we family."

As they told me, the recent incident was not the first time they had let each other down, nor did either of them believe it would be the last. They enacted a commitment to their affiliation and their social tie remained intact despite one letting the other down. In a more normative setting, this relationship would likely fall apart. There is an endurance here, where Tim and Andre had been "knowing each other for twenty-five years," and

probably disappointing each other for almost that long. The stories they told of occasionally getting into fights would suggest that to be the case.

Larger structures make friendships almost impossible for all men, but especially for marginalized men; however, the potentiality that lies in how the bond between Tim and Andre endures can open up new ways of thinking about friendship that challenge the larger social order. The endurance of their affiliation also challenges the sociological understanding of how relationships are shortened by the conditions of late modernity. Giddens has stated that contemporary social arrangements, no longer constrained by time or space, have opened up a greater range of choices in personal relationships, both in terms of with whom someone has a relationship and for how long (Giddens 1993). He further argues that this shift produced the conditions for a "pure relationship" where "a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1993, 58).

Endurance is not generally viewed as a feature of modern relationships, and this has been theorized as a "double-edged sword" because while relationships are supposedly freed from the constraints of tradition, commitment within them is contingent on the relationship being mutually beneficial and when "the values, interests, and identities of the partners begin to diverge in noncomplementary ways, the relationship loses its reason for being and becomes subject to dissolution" (Gross and Simmons 2002, 536). Zygmunt Bauman similarly described the social conditions of the contemporary period in his

theorization of "liquid modernity," in which commitments have been "replaced by fleeting encounters" (Bauman 2001, 52). In regard to relationships, "there is greater scope and willingness for any party to terminate them, or not enter into them in the first place" (Franklin 2012, 16). This is because "in liquid modernity, everything seems to be a teasing reminder of something else worth pursuing" (Blackshaw 2005, 99). Bauman asserts that this new freedom to avoid interpersonal commitments has had the consequence of increasing levels of loneliness because people lack true community with others.

THE POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP

Given this rather bleak picture of friendship in this high-tech, high choice, high speed era, the endurance of the connection between Tim and Andre appears just short of a miracle. As such, it pushes back against the constraints on community that characterize the social relations described above. Here I emphasize the political relevance of friendship bonds, which Jacques Derrida described in *The Politics of Friendship* (Derrida 2006). Derrida argued that friendship is inherently political because it played an organizing role in the formation of both justice and democracy. Throughout the book, Derrida returns to the meaning of a phrase that is often misattributed to Aristotle: "O my friends, there is no friend." What has him stuck to this phrase is its self-negating quality, its paradoxical nature that describes the ambivalence of friendship present throughout this chapter.

The canonical definition of friendship, whose values form the basis of democracy, could only take place between two equitably virtuous men. It therefore excluded the possibility of friendship between men and women, friendship between women, and friendship between men who were less than virtuous. Canonical friendship excluded men outside of the aristocracy because their lack of cash meant their friendship was always utilitarian, and therefore could never be friendship for the sake of friendship alone. This foundation informs why friendships among the homeless are minimized – because they often include dependence and utilitarian dimensions.

In its canonical form friendship is exclusionary because of its basis in brotherhood, family, roots in a territory, soil and place, etc. (Derrida 2006). These exclusions opened up the puzzle of friendship for Derrida. Why would something so exclusionary form the basis of the ethical justifications for democracy as the desired organizing principle for society? This makes friendship an impossible foundation for democracy because in its supposedly pure form it excludes in ways that are inimical to democracy.

For Derrida, this internal contradiction points the way for imagining a "democracy to come." The way that democracy has taken shape in practice is that individuals become imagined as countable units, often in the form of voting blocks, void of singularity. The potentiality in the dyadic friendship is the ability to recognize the "singularity of the Other" as opposed to the merging of the Other into the self. For Derrida, then, friendship is inherently ambivalent. Friendship is a possibility yet an impossibility, utilitarian yet pleasurable, a union yet a separation. Instead of the

hopelessness that emerges from the realization of the inequality that friendship has produced, Derrida suggests the importance of a kind of friendship to come, which he describes as a "democracy to come" that could be "any kind of experience in which there is equality, justice, equity, respect for the singularity of the Other."[13] This notion of the utopia 'to come' is a concept that points to the future, yet as Derrida explains, we need not wait for this future to appear, instead "we have to do right here and now what has to be done for it."[14]

Tim and Andre continue their affiliation - a non-verbal promise to endure through disappointment. When I left Tim that night with his Twisted Tea and pack of cigarettes, I asked him if he was going to be okay and I checked in with him again about how he was feeling about Andre. "I be alright," he said. "And about Andre, well there really ain't nothin' I can do about it." A moralistic reading of their connection might find that neither of them have much to offer on the meaning of friendship. Tim sometimes falls back on racist language when he gets mad and Andre sometimes disappears. But when I reflect on Tim's resignation that night, I hear a form of acceptance where he understands that these disappointments are part of what it means to associate with Andre. And Andre looks past Tim's racist language because they're family. As Jose Esteban Muñoz (Munoz 2009) points out, hope often comes with disappointment. While Tim was angry about the money, what seemed to bother him even more was that Andre left him up there alone. He missed his companionship. He missed having Andre there to talk to. This missing

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[13] Derrida, Jacques. 1997. "Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida." Centre for Modern French Thought, University of Sussex. December 1.
[14] Ibid.

reveals that their association is more than just about money or strategically claiming public space. It is about passing the time with a companion who, when gone, leaves an absence that is felt by the other as a loss. The enduring relationship between Tim and Andre breaks gendered expectations that normalize male friendships as lacking caring forms of emotionality (Holmes 2015) at the same time that it suggests a counter narrative to the prevalence of fleeting and rationally reflexive relationships that last only as long as they are mutually beneficial. As I write these final words to this chapter, I myself feel the pain of missing the connection that had developed between the three of us.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The point of this dissertation has been to think through, with a critical and nuanced perspective, many of the ways that visibility relates to “the homeless problem.” I have claimed that the concept of visibility is central to the construction of homelessness as a societal phenomenon, but in ways that are overly simplistic and reifying of stereotypes that perpetuate the marginalization of homeless people. My interest to write about visibility came from my own past, from the framing of the homeless problem in the media and local politics, and from the theorizing of my research participants. Understanding the complexity of visibility, that is at once empowering and disempowering and somewhere in between, is important for recognizing the complex conditions within which homeless people make lives and enter frames of representation.

In “Chapter 4: Who Counts?,” I argued that the overreliance on visibility to produce homeless counts reproduces a narrow depiction of who experiences homelessness and often leads to the underestimation of the extent of homelessness in a given location. This seemed like a particularly relevant observation in light of the interaction during the MLF run that was described at the beginning of the chapter, where many women and children were feeling the consequences of displacement due to gentrification, joblessness, drug addiction, and eviction. The visibility of “open air drug markets” in Austin has constructed that particular urban space as in need of police control rather than compassionate care, an invisibility that has exacerbated the devastation described by the woman outside of the Urban Market.

In “Chapter 5: (In)visibility,” I further explored the role that the concept of visibility has had in the construction of homelessness both in Austin and in the U.S. more broadly. The narrative provided by Marie at the beginning of the chapter spoke to the ways the homeless people manage the stigma of poverty and its associated characteristics. She also suggested that there are perspectives within homeless conditions that are useful in understanding how homelessness and homeless services are experienced, and this knowledge would be better received through a research position that values listening as much as it does observing. Finally, this chapter’s purpose is to call into question both the assumption that homelessness is indeed a visible phenomenon and to question how homelessness might be constructed differently if visibility was not its defining feature.

“Chapter 6: Comfortable While Homeless,” derives its title from the play on language, “Driving While Black,” which is a phrase that is used to reveal the racial profiling practices of police that make driving while black virtually a criminal activity. The findings of this chapter are drawn from the perspectives of two black men, Howard and Andre, who are familiar enough with the practices of police surveillance to be able to identify and describe how they apply to the homeless population in Austin. In light of this surveillance, Andre in particular presents a perspective that is resistant to the spatial constrictions that surveillance produces. His everyday comfort-seeking practices, as well as those of others who are illustrated through ethnographic photography, call into question the assumption that homelessness is characterized by a lack of comfort. The

history of comfort provides a contextual grounding for understanding why it is that homelessness and comfort have been constructed as antithetical.

Finally, “Chapter 7: We Been Knowin’ Each Other,” looks at the endurance of a friendship between two of my research participants, Tim and Andre. Their interracial affiliation, along with their status of being homeless, creates a social situation that seems unlikely to foster a lasting connection. However, narratives provided by both Tim and Andre, both involving their friendship with each other and their friendship with others, provide a window into the types of care that these homeless men have provided for each other over the twenty-plus years that they have been affiliated. Not only does this challenge the stereotypes association with homelessness as a state of disaffiliation, but it also presents an alternative to the contemporary discourse about friendship as being fleeting and disarticulated from interdependence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What I have found in relation to my research questions is that visibility is a constraining term through which to understand homelessness. Because the homeless experience both heightened attention and attention deprivation (Snow and Anderson 1993), there are no simple answers to whether and how the homeless are, can, or should be visible or not visible. There were times when being visible produced pain, such as described by Marie as she reflected on walking from the Salvation Army to the bus. There were other times when visibility felt like a necessity, such as the case of the woman outside of the Urban Market who wanted someone from the city to pay attention

to the consequences of urban growth that she was witness to. I found that being visible in public was not as restrictive to homeless people in the downtown urban core during certain times of the week/day, as indicated by the freedom of movement that I witnessed on weekend mornings at the Church under the Bridge and the Bridge of Angels. However, there were times when respondents attempted to avoid the downtown area entirely, such as Sanny Claus who described downtown as a virtual jail and Tim who would not go downtown with his duffel bag in tow. That the urban core and the entertainment district in downtown Austin is an area that business owners and public officials manage the visual appearance of, and that this has consequences for the city's homeless, is not a surprising outcome. How people manage to find comfort (which requires taking up space in ways that are normally restricted), and friendship (which includes the congregation of two or more visibly homeless people), within the conditions of homeless are questions that present more interesting conclusions which inform the sociological study of homelessness, visibility, and friendship.

SOCIAL POLICY

The findings of this dissertation also speak more widely to social policy. My experience in this research project, revealed in the discussions in the previous chapters, brought about a shift in how I understand current policy and philanthropic initiatives that are meant to address homelessness. In particular, I am critical of the dominant framework suggesting that the best way to deal with "the homeless problem" is through the goal of ending homelessness. This foundation, that homelessness must be ended, appears at first

to be the only moral perspective that makes sense. However, this concluding chapter will clarify the unintended consequences of “ending homelessness” that further marginalize and stigmatize those who experience conditions of poverty and housing instability.

Basing homeless relief services on the slogan “end homelessness” suggests that this is attainable, which in a society where market forces drive housing possibilities this is unlikely to be the case. Initiatives to end homelessness will not work unless housing is taken off the market or an adequate supply of non-profit housing is created. A non-profit model would contrast the lease-based housing support currently offered under the Housing First model described below. Given the importance of property and property values for the production of wealth in U.S. society, the demand for affordable housing often outweighs the supply. While it might represent the compassion of some of the people who labor within the organizations that help homeless people, as a discursive structure “ending homelessness” does little more than hide the neoliberal logic of abstract individualism and self-sufficiency that lies at the foundation of the continuums of care networks, rapid rehousing initiatives, corporate managed emergency shelters, and federally mandated homeless counts to measure progress toward the goal.

The argument that the current integrative care models that help the homeless are based on a neoliberal logic is nothing new. Vincent Lyon-Callo pointed out the neoliberal governance of shelters in his ethnography on the shelter industry in Massachussets (Lyon-Callo 2004). Pierre Bourdieu described neoliberalism as “a programme of methodical destruction of collectives,” (Bourdieu 1999, 95–96) which can be seen in the increasing divisions of types of homelessness and in the individualized intake processes

that flag people as in need of specific types of rehabilitation. The scale of intervention is always at the individual. Tent cities where homeless people develop networks of support are viewed as problematic and threatening to public safety, replaced by rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing programs that provide individual living units to single adults or individual families. Shelters emphasize the rehabilitation of singular people experiencing homelessness, through which “neoliberalism works to displace attention from structural violence and onto the individualized bodies of homeless people” (Lyon-Callo 2004, 172).

Currently, the most popular approach to ending homelessness is the Housing First campaign, which “is an approach that centers on providing individuals experiencing homelessness with appropriate housing quickly, regardless of potential housing barriers, then providing support services as needed” (“ECHO – Housing First – Community Wide Definition” 2016). In a 2015 memo to the Mayor and City Council, Austin’s Director of Neighborhood, Housing and Community Development, Betsy Spencer, stated that Housing First is central to Austin’s ongoing approach to “end chronic homelessness” through Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), a strategy implemented in 2000 that “ensures people have access to lease-based housing and the support services they need to maintain that housing (2015).

PHS is Austin’s “leading strategy to end homelessness” (McHorse 2015). Its success is measured largely by cost analysis on three key points – jail bed days; Downtown Austin Community Court cases; and emergency department, inpatient, clinic, and outpatient utilization and costs (McHorse 2015). Case managers in social service

agencies and the downtown community court select candidates for PHS vouchers by "looking at those who are hard to serve and expensive to serve when they are not in permanent supportive housing" [15] The issue with PHS as a leading strategy in a city like Austin with a shrinking supply of affordable housing is that finding lease-based housing units with property owners who are willing to participate in Housing First PSH is an uphill battle.

In 2010, ECHO identified a need for 1900 PSH units – a number that I think underestimates the need based on my research for "Chapter 4: Who Counts?" But even if that number were taken as an adequate number of units to end homelessness in Austin, the progression toward that goal is minimal at best and at worst undone by the recent homeless count in January of 2016, when volunteers counted "1,382 sheltered and 815 unsheltered, compared to last year's 1,165 sheltered and 667 unsheltered" (Easter 2016). Between the years 2010 and 2014, the city created 350 PSH units, 100 of which were through existing landlords and 250 of which were new construction specifically for PSH. Meeting that goal was used to justify continued investment for a 2018 goal of another 400 new units added.

In 2015, ECHO updated the need for PSH units in Austin to be 1930. Therefore, the PSH efforts between 2010 and 2014 still resulted in an increase in need rather than a decrease. This trend will likely continue as the construction of new affordable housing units, from which PSH draws their supply, is far outpaced by the growing demand for

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[15] Ed McHorse, Chair of the Leadership Committee on Permanent Supportive Housing Finance. Austin City Council Meeting Minutes, May 24, 2012.

affordable housing and by the loss of previous affordable housing due to rent increases or building demolition. An analysis of Austin's housing market found that homeownership opportunities are significantly low as "the market is particularly tight for renters earning less than $35,000 per year: 46 percent of all renters in Austin earn less than $35,000 per year but only 9 percent of homes on the market are affordable to them" (BBC Research & Consulting 2014, Section ES-10).

This means a large portion of low income residents will stay renters in a market where there is a significant shortage in affordable rental units – In 2012 there was a shortage of 41,000 units (for households earning less than $25,000), a number that grew to 48,000 by 2014. In addition, "as many as 3,000 low income renters in the city occupy units that are in extremely poor condition" and will probably not be on the market for long (BBC Research & Consulting 2014, II-6). Without the efforts of the city, some of which were cited above, "the rental gap would be larger by as many as 1,000 units" (BBC Research & Consulting 2014, ES-8). That a policy initiative that creates 1,000 housing units in comparison to the documented shortage 48,000 is described as a success reveals the lack of transparency between how the two problems of homelessness and affordable housing are made intelligible in relation to each other. This is not to downplay the success of rehousing efforts unnecessarily.

Instead, I want to raise the question of how success is defined. Currently the city measures PSH success by how many homeless individuals get housing and stay housed for at least a year. But, if the concerns of the community are ultimately based on reduced hospital visits, fewer nights in jail, and fewer court cases, then overall picture of the

housing market – which prices people out of homes and into homelessness – must become the target of change. The private investment models described above are simply too small to even dream that they will successfully "end homelessness." The private investment strategy described above has the approval of the Downtown Austin Alliance, a group of businesses that have long been trying to fix "the homeless problem" downtown as a way to keep Austin clean and safe for shoppers and tourists and thereby protect their own business interests. But, if people are being housed through PSH vouchers and still the total number of homeless actually changes very little (and therefore the consequent drains on the community remain level), will investors and local government reach agreement about whether the Housing First PSH program is a success?

Agreement on how success is imagined matters in order to prevent future conflict and continued investment, particularly in the case of the LIHTC funded projects in Austin that are reliant on success. And while GO bonds do not rely on success for repayment, they do likely rely on evidence of success for future investments – which the city will need given the bigger picture of housing shortage. Another critique of Pay for Success is that the contracts that delineate the terms of the agreement are likely to be weak because "attempting to manage social service through contract attorneys, consultants, program evaluators, and an all-or-nothing payment model will inevitably produce a contract that is extremely complex" (McKay 2016).

It can also be argued that both Pay for Success and the "end homelessness" campaign reduce the likelihood of innovation in what is imaginable as a solution for alleviating the difficulties that homelessness creates for those experiencing it. To begin,

Pay for Success is a model of investment that relies on previous evidence of success at the small scale before investors are willing to put money towards scaling a particular program. Innovation usually requires risk and Pay for Success is designed to be a low risk investment. Secondly, the moral authority that "ending homelessness" carries is so strong that it shuts the door on other possibilities that might enter the discussion when imagining better conditions for people whose housing status puts their lives at risk.

Part of the morality around ending homelessness is that those who are living outside of traditional housing are expected to desperately want to get off the street and into formal housing. But to some of the people in my study, doing so was a lonely endeavor. When Slim was temporarily housed and getting mental health help for addiction and suicidal ideation, he said he was stuck spending more time alone with himself than he could stand. When Tim's friend Scott gave him a trailer to live in and paid for some of the rent for the land that he parked it on, Tim said it was one of the loneliest times of his life and that loneliness was why he gave up the trailer and joined his friends back in the park.

Both Tim and Slim had expressed a feeling of isolation during the times that they were sleeping rough, but that feeling was nothing compared to the loneliness they felt when they were in housing but did not have access to their social network. As was stated in Chapter 6, the literature on homelessness has really only recognized weak ties or utilitarian ties. But I witnessed connections that were built (even if only a short time) between some people in some conditions of homelessness that were deep and emotionally significant – connections based on a shared understanding of life in a particular social

location. Many other identities are allowed this type of pan-identity recognition. But a homeless identity is not – at least not in the social scientific literature. In fact, homelessness is seen as an obstruction to meaningful identity formation. As a case in point, David Snow and Leon Anderson stated that "the homeless constitute a kind of superfluous population, in the sense that they fall outside the hierarchy of structurally available societal roles and thus beyond the conventional , role-based sources of moral worth and dignity that most citizens take for granted" (Snow and Anderson 1987, 1339).

As a consequence of the emphasis on ending homelessness, the individuals who are visible representations of its persistence bear the weight of the inevitable failure that follows. Like most people who have internalized the norms of neoliberalism, "the equalizing possibilities of the free market has meant that individuals tend to blame themselves for being poor free marketeers" (Kingsolver 2012, 204). Additionally, that homeless people are "politically marginalized through their semantic association with three major categories of social deviance: *dirtiness*, *drugs*, and *danger*" indicates a society more concerned with how the homeless are representations of individual deviance rather than structural failure (Toft 2014, 784). Meanwhile, the industry that operates under the banner of ending homelessness is further instilled as a normal and necessary part of society.

It is difficult to ignore the irony of an industry that is aimed at ending homelessness becoming a vaster and more enduring network of seemingly permanent institutions. This is like a clothing company that claims to want to end the tyranny of clothes. Ending homelessness has become big business, as indicated by the Pay for

Success model that now funds much of the housing initiatives. Individual social workers such as Randy, who I quote in "Chapter 5: Who Counts?," responded to the suggesting that ending homelessness would put him out of business by stating, "I would love to be out of a job if it meant there would be no more homelessness. That would be the best outcome of all of this." I did not doubt his sincerity.

Yet it needs to be acknowledged that there is an entire sector of the economy referred to as the Homeless Service Workforce that would be jobless without homeless service agencies (Mullen and Leginski 2010). Additionally, there are "billions of dollars yearly for contracts and grants to offer services to homeless persons by the government" (Adetula 2010, 38). These statements suggest that homeless individuals function as a type of commodity in a system where private management companies receive large amounts of money for operating municipal emergency shelters and private investors can earn money by providing the upfront capital for housing the homeless initiatives.

The problem with using a neoliberal model to organize the "ending homelessness" campaign is that as indicated above it is driven by cost analyses. A recent story in the *Austin Chronicle* quoted Ann Howard, the executive director of ECHO (which coordinates the majority of homeless services in Austin) as describing the goal of ending homelessness as a matter of money for the city. The article states: "When we house people," said Howard, "we show that the community saves money because [people] go to jail less, their health care costs go down, criminal justice costs go down, so the community wins" (Easter 2016). An earlier *Austin Chronicle* story stated that many in Austin are concerned with the "diverse, systemic stresses that homelessness creates on

local nonprofits, churches, hospitals, mental health agencies, the courts and jails, the urban core, and the larger community" (Gregor 2009). The danger, however, is that once these programs are no longer viewed as cost effective, the reason for keeping them running will no longer be relevant. So, while it might lower the risk of investment for both investors and governments, it does little to increase the security of people who might benefit from the social good produced by Pay for Success programs.

In Austin, more than half of the expected funding for PSH comes from two sources of private funding, both which fall under the umbrella of the Pay for Success approach that "shields service providers and governments from performance and outcome risks" (McKay 2016). The Committee on Permanent Supportive Housing Finance projected that in order to meet the 2018 goal of 400 additional PHS units the city would need $45,500,000 (McHorse 2015). $15,000,000 of that is expected to come from General Obligation Bonds. This type of investment is seen as an even lower risk investment than SIB's because they are based on "general obligations" rather than specific projects with measurable outcomes. The government entity (in this case the city of Austin) that sells the bond to an investor must pay it back regardless of the outcome of the project on which the money is spent – and therefore the cost of the project is figured into the city's annual projected budget.

In the Fiscal Year 2013-14, Austin allocated General Obligation Bond (GO bonds) funding to come from property tax revenue, which accounted for 41.8% of the city's total income to the City's General Fund. The property tax rate was 50.27 cents for every $100 of assessed property value. According to Austin's 2013-14 budget report,

11.71 cents of that property tax rate would be used to make payments for GO bonds. What makes GO bonds low risk for investors is that they get repayment regardless of outcome, and what makes GO bonds low risk for governments is that the allocated capital, in this case property taxes, is a source of revenue that be raised if the financial strain of the project exceeds the projected cost burden. This turns out to be in fact a risky venture for the city, because an increase in property taxes would further exacerbate the problem of affordable housing that the city faces.

An additional $11,000,000 is projected to come from a program called Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). LIHTC incentivizes investors through federal tax credit. In this model, developers invest in the affordable housing market by building new construction or rehabbing existing structures and ensuring the units stay within the definition of affordable housing for at least 15 years. Eligible projects "must have at least (1) 20 percent of residential units occupied by tenants with household income below 50 percent of the area median income; or (2) 40 percent of residential units occupied by tenants with household income below 60 percent of the area median income" (The Tax Policy Center 2016). In return, the investor/developer "may claim credits over 10 years equal to the present value of up to 70 percent of the qualified costs of a development project" (The Tax Policy Center 2016).

Critics of Pay for Success and similar programs state that the foundations of investing in social problems which are already viewed as financial drains to society are nothing more than myths. First, in best case scenarios governments will have to pay for programs that meet agreed upon goals and governments are often restricted from creating

future budget liabilities and therefore usually have to show the ability to pay for the program prior to implementing the program (McKay 2016). Another critic refers to Pay for Success as a “high-stakes carrot-and-stick approach is not unlike the expectations inherent to the ‘No Child Left Behind’ education legislation, which had its own heavyweight marketing promotion before dismal unintended consequences set in” (Pratt 2013). And since the structural causes of homelessness are unlikely to have changed, the need for housing assistance and other social welfare services is still going to remain.

Discourse of Visibility

But this dissertation is not just a critique of neoliberalism and homeless services. At the heart of this dissertation is a critique of the language through which homelessness is socially constructed, particularly on the work that the concept of visibility does. While this critique leads to a questioning of policy approaches, it is fundamentally a critique of a discourse. This is equally as important as making policy suggestions because “changing how we speak of (and with) the homeless challenges the hegemonic practices of those whose larger objective is to isolate individuals deemed unproductive political-economic and socio-cultural subjects” (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008, 195).

The role that visibility plays in the discursive construction of homelessness is multifold. To begin with, there is a proliferation of “photographic representations of homelessness [that] in most cases work strongly to produce a ‘visual regime’ of homeless people and homelessness that is created through devaluation and stereotyping” (Schmidt 2015, 284). The media circulation of photographs depicting the homeless often play into

tropes of the 'spectacle of the poor,' which includes the homeless as helpless and people who help them as heroic (Lancione 2014). Additionally, the category referred to as the "visible homeless" has received the most attention from photographers, journalists, and politicians, even though it represents just a small fraction of people experiencing homelessness (Schmidt 2015). This visual emphasis has produced the discursive category of invisible or hidden homeless, which is sometimes used to refer to women and children, sometimes people doubling up with friends, and sometimes anybody who stays outside of formal shelters.

The visible homeless and the chronically homeless often become synonyms in policy initiatives, and "the chronically homeless subject is viewed, in the end, as hopeless. Therefore, the best policy is to target them and clear them from the streets" (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008, 194). This clearing of the streets is done for the sake of the visual landscape of the city. The aesthetics of urban spaces are being preserved for tourists by enclosing the homeless in shelters or relocating them to the margins of cities so as not to be visible to shoppers in urban centers (Gagnier 1998). As I outlined in "Chapter 4: (In)visibility," the discourse of homelessness is trapped in the binary framing of whether visible or invisible and this discourse normalizes the ideas that visibility on the streets is bad but visibility in representation is good.

COUNTERVISUALITY

One way out of this discursive and conceptual trap would be to incorporate Nicholas Mirzoeff's use of the term visuality, or more specifically his concept

“complexes of visuality” (2011). Mirzoeff states that “simple visibility or media coverage does not ensure any change in political practice” because that visibility operates within a “complex of visuality” (2011, 308). A complex of visuality is an authorized way of looking that performs three functions: “classifies by naming, categorizing, and defining;” “separates the groups so classified as a means of social organization;” and “makes this separation seem right and hence aesthetic” (Mirzoeff 2011, 3). Visuality is “a discursive organization of history” that authorizes power and produces “a coherent and intelligible picture” of social order (Mirzoeff 2011, 22–23).

Theorizing visuality this way also allows for what Mirzeoff refers to as countervisuality, which is “the claim to the right to look” by seeing authority for what it is and how it is reproduced through representation and then daring to see things differently, to imagine a different social order (Mirzoeff 2011). In his article “In Defense of Homelessness,” Andrew Smith offered what I claim is a countervisuality on the issue of homelessness. First, he identified three looks that people take toward the homeless; hostile, charitable, and therapeutic. He argued that each of these in their own way “perpetuates and exacerbates suffering by the homeless” (A. F. Smith 2014, 34). Some of the ways that suffering is exacerbated in shelters is through the degrading sorting rituals at shelter intake and the social control through surveillance and drug screening.

Instead of seeing homelessness as inherently undignified and deviant, Smith instead asserted that cultures of the homeless are characterized by three norms that the broader U.S. culture would do well to learn something from. These are “security through community, free sharing of provisions, and equitable exchange” (A. F. Smith 2014, 38).

Perceptions of isolation and disaffiliation are overstated in representations of homelessness and realities of resourcefulness and self-discipline are ignored in the popular and scientific discussions of homeless lifestyles. While certainly, homeless people experience distress and hardship, also “activities of the homeless provide a means to challenge prevailing socio-economic norms” (A. F. Smith 2014, 42).

Rather than imposing the moral stance that the homeless must be gotten off the street, either because of compassion or because of disgust/fear, Smith instead argued that “If the homeless desire assistance, provide it for them on their terms. If they wish to be left to their own devices, leave them alone. If they seek to build communities partially or fully beyond the reach of state institutions and philanthropic organizations, permit them to do so and ask what can be learned from them in the process” (A. F. Smith 2014, 51). This is a daring claim to make because it is far from the authorized perspective on the homeless problem. Smith’s statement rethinks homelessness as only a social problem and locates it as a valid place of dissent to the existing social order. In his view, homelessness need not necessarily be eradicated and “ending homelessness” is not the only moral claim.

What moral or ethical claims can be made then? The narrow vision of a neoliberal logic that wants to end homelessness through a rehabilitation paradigm that individualizes the homeless and measures the consequences of homelessness as matters of economic loss per individual head count is not a promising one. Joanne Passaro argued that to find a permanent solution to homelessness would no doubt require an economic loss. But, more importantly for Passaro, solving homelessness would produce a social

benefit in “the reaffirmation of all people’s common humanity” (1996, 34). Unlike most structural arguments that emphasize the economy as that which needs to be changed in order to end homelessness, Passaro states instead that change will only come if “we challenge the mystifying and divisive discourses of gender and race difference” (1996, 34). Dismantling these ideological structures would allow policy initiatives to expand beyond the dominant beliefs about family, gender and race that currently shape and constrain them.

The project that Passaro calls for has not to date been taken up by a focused sociological study, neither in this dissertation nor in the broader field of homeless studies. What her writing suggests is that while U.S. culture has witnessed a feminization of poverty (Tiamiyu and Mitchell 2001; Gimenez 1999; Brady and Kall 2008), it has simultaneously witnessed a masculinization of homelessness. These two positions can be seen in the discourse on homelessness as the distinction between the hidden homeless and the visibly homeless as disparate and unrelated forms of homeless life, one the domain of women (hidden homeless) and one the domain of men (visibly homeless).

While these homologies are not perfect associations, they bear truth in the ways that social services are offered (in gender segregated shelters) and the forms of social categories that develop (the normalization of “unattached men” versus “women and children in need.”) Isolating these as distinct realms of homeless (in)visibilities further embeds each in a gendered social order that is doubly affected by local racial politics that construct black neighborhoods as less worthy of investment, which are instead pushed out of the city or kept in invisibility. This was revealed by the women in East Austin

whose homeless experiences were made visible by one fleeting occurrence of an MLF delivery.

Implicit in the analysis I have provided is that the discourse of visibility in relation to homelessness in Austin, Texas, is complicit in the authorization of naming, categorizing and defining homelessness in a way that constructs separate and distinct groups. These groups are categorized as more or less deserving of the circumstances they are in, and are therefore placed in a hierarchy of worth (in relation to resources) and threat (in terms of disorder posed to the city). Local news stories are useful for tracing some of these categories as they reveal that in Austin, 2015 was a year when the city targeted homeless veterans for housing assistance (Kendall 2015) and 2016 appears to be the year for targeting students in the Austin Independent School System as recipients of housing resources (Whittaker 2016; Jackson 2012). Lease-based housing is currently the authorized form of social support, which has its limitations given the competition in the current Austin housing market and the racial divisions that pre-exist this competition (Tretter 2013). This path for housing policy is embedded in a history that has an "aversion to direct production of housing by government" which produces a situation where "local debate is more likely to be framed around the problem of regulation than the need for redistributive justice" (Tighe and Mueller 2012).

As perspectives of countervisuality to the discourse of visibility , the narratives provided by Tim and Andre in particular, but also those of Howard and Marie, provide ways to think about homelessness differently. Marie saw her new position in homelessness as a place of stigma but also of knowledge that could have political

relevance, Howard knew he had something politically relevant to say but had no illusions that he could effect change, and finally, in terms of Tim and Andre, it was the researcher who had a change of perspective. Throughout my conversations with Tim and Andre I experienced an underlying wish that their actions would eventually "get them off the street," and I also experienced the subsequent frustration when their actions worked against that outcome. This expectation reflected the authorized way of seeing homelessness. But, as my friendships with Tim and Andre developed I began to see them as they saw each other – as complicated people who were good enough just as they were. Their enduring acceptance of each other was the most radical perspective that I found during my research, and it is the perspective that I hold on to as I consider which directions I might take following this research project.

Afterword

For Tim

I watch the rain drops drip from metal edges as we wait out the storm together. We are huddled under a bus stop awning, caught off guard by the storm because rain is so rare this summer. You apologize because you haven't showered and you're worried I'll be offended by the smell. I try to assure you I don't notice and wouldn't care anyway, but I see that you doubt me and you go on worrying and edging away. I feel guilty as your left shoulder starts to get wet so I move further to the right wanting to make room for you. But you stay put and my right shoulder gets wet too. We sit mostly in silence after you tell me you like the sound of rain on metal. I do too so we listen from our separate sides of the bench. You break the silence to thank me for the beer; that you really appreciate it, and I feel self-conscious as I drink mine faster than you drink yours. It's just that I get nervous in silence. I try not to chatter because you told me once you love the quiet, that you wake up extra early just so you can hear it, or rather not hear it. I remember you told me you don't like people much. It's a good forty-five minutes before the rain lets up and we walk back to the picnic bench in the park to join the others. I see you starting to get antsy because you want to light up one of the joints in your pocket but you don't have a lighter. You hold on to your quiet and the walk feels like a mile though it can't be even near that. Once you start smoking we won't have any silence. Words will fly and sentences will pile on top of each other. I won't be able to keep up and later I will listen over and over and over to my audio recording just to make out bits of conversation. I will feel like a failure as a researcher but I will have had one hell of a time.

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