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Down But Not Out: A Study of a Men's
Shelter From a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

by

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Abstract

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Men living in a shelter was examined from the perspective of
the individual.   The research encompasses three main areas: 1)
attribution of causes which lead to homelessness, 2) the homeless'
own definition of their situation, and 3) the subjects' future
plans relating to their family, employment and housing. The
theoretical framework employed is Symbolic Interactionism.
Following an Interpretive Interactionist methodology, 30 males
living in the shelter were interviewed utilizing an open ended
questionnaire. The research questions included the role macro and
micro causes played in men becoming homelessness. Other questions
centred on the subject's definition of the situation and
presentation of the self.

The results demonstrated that both macro and micro causes of
homelessness have to be considered together. The men also employed
various stigma management strategies to reduce the negative
psychological impact of being homeless. The majority of the sample
suggested that their future plans revolved around finding housing
and/or employment.   The similarities within the sample were
discussed.

This thesis is dedicated to all of the men who shared their stories with me. They only need a hand-up, not an hand-out.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

The study of homelessness is not a new endeavour. Nels Anderson (1923) for example, conducted an important study in the tradition of the Chicago School in which he researched transient homeless men. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, local and transient homelessness increased drastically in Canada and the United States (Rossi, 1989b: 22; Burt, 1992: 3; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 5). However, during the 1950's and 1960's with employment rates remaining high in both the United States and Canada, the number of homeless people declined sharply only to drastically increase during the 1970's and 1980's (Rossi, 1989b: 27; O'Reilly- Fleming, 1993: 17).

From the early part of the century until the 1980's, the traditional view of homeless people is that they were made up of adult men who "rode the rails" and were called "tramps" (Smith, 1988; Snow and Anderson, 1993). Even though their numbers were not as large, homeless women were often referred to as "bag ladies" (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Rossi, 1989a). However, in the 1980's, women, children and even entire families entered the legions of homeless in record numbers (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 5; Smith, 1988: 233; Rossi, 1989a: 3).

As a result, homelessness has been an increasing focus of study in Canada and the United States (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Rossi, 1989a; Smith, 1988). The causes of homelessness vary

from macro issues such as unaffordable housing and poverty, to micro influences such as alcoholism or disaffiliation (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Smith, 1988; Rossi,1989a).

Defining Homelessness

Homelessness is a label given to people when they are living in a shelter. The word homelessness is actually a negative statement. This means people are defined by what they do not have, instead of what they have. They are called homelessness because they do not have some type of shelter.

Before one can define homelessness there has to be consideration of what a "home" actually is. Many people view a home as a place that provides basic shelter and involves some degree of permanency. Watson and Austerberry (1986) argue that a home is different from a house. A house is the basic physical structure while the home is defined by everything else that goes along with structure like images of family and possessions.

The majority of Canadians would view their home in this way. Furniture, possessions and warmth would be the image evoked and many would view the home as a haven from the problems of the world (in reality this is not always the case). Having raised this issue, there are several conceptions of homelessness.

Defining homelessness in Canadian society is a very difficult undertaking. In the past, homelessness evoked images of "tramps" riding the rails. There was no mention of

women and children because being homeless was synonymous with being a single unattached male. These stereotypical images certainly are not the case in 1997.

There are the chronic homeless who have 30 or more days of continuous lack of proper accommodation, and there are the sporadic homeless who are without shelter for less than 30 days (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 7). Baxter (1991: 7) and Oberlander and Fallick (1987/88) would identify the chronic homeless as absolute homeless because they walk the streets during the day and either seek refuge in a shelter or sleep outside at night.

Wright (1988/89: 47) would label people like this literally homeless because they do not have any form of permanent shelter. Situational homeless is similar to sporadic homelessness because it occurs when homelessness is the result of a very serious crisis. For example, many women become homeless due to being abused by their partner and they seek refuge in a temporary women's shelter.

Baxter (1991: 7) and Begin (1994: 2) also argue that there are many people who are "at risk" of becoming homeless because of economic and/or social instability. This is a very astute observation because many people can only afford minimum, low quality shelter and do not have the resources to feed themselves. As a result, they are teetering on the verge of homelessness.

Another definition of homelessness comes from the Symbolic Interactionist perspective. The individual is the only person who can truly decide if he/she is homeless or not. A person-centred definition would focus on the meanings and definitions that the individual places on the situation. This is extremely important because their approach to dealing with homelessness will depend a lot on how they perceive the situation. However, this definition has one major weakness.

People who are not homeless by the strict definition still may consider themselves so. This is illustrated by a brief example. Someone may define a home by the people they are living with. If that person is alone in an apartment, they might not consider it a home because their family is living somewhere else. Within a Symbolic Interactionist definition, this person is considered homeless because he/she define himself/herself as homeless because his/her family is not residing in the same household. As a result, they view their apartment simply as a "roof" over their head.

Another example illustrates the weakness in the Symbolic Interactionist definition of homelessness. A man is living on the streets. This individual has a small place outside where he/she stays. It might only be a cardboard box in an abandoned warehouse but it may be considered a "home." The definitions of homelessness that have been presented earlier certainly would consider this man homeless. However, he

believes that his/her space is his "home" so he does not necessarily define himself/herself as homeless.

For this thesis, the definition that will be used for homelessness is a man who is staying at the shelter under study. Length of time does not matter. Operationally speaking, if the man is staying at the shelter then he is defined as homeless for this study.

The key to this section is that there is a difficulty in defining homelessness. Several definitions have been provided to acknowledge the fact that there are competing definitions. No single definition is better or worse than any other.

Make-Up of the Homeless Population

The make-up of the homeless population in Canada is wide ranging. Homelessness cuts across all lines of gender and age. Canada has homeless families, single unattached men and women, and single women with children. The number of homeless people in Canada is well over 100,000 at the very least (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 17) and some estimates are projected even higher at 250,000 (Begin, 1994: 1). Regardless of the exact numbers, it is evident that homelessness in Canada is a chronic situation.

Recognizing this, the next issue to be discussed is the etiology of homelessness in Canada. There have been several explanations put forth to explain the causes of homeless. These explanations can roughly be divided into two different areas: political/economic factors and personal/societal

5

factors. The issues contained within the two areas range from unaffordable housing, to mental illness.

It is important to note that macro factors have to be considered along with personal causes in order to gain an accurate picture of the causes of homelessness in Canada. Too often has the victim been blamed for circumstances that are beyond their control (see O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 136; Wright, 1993: 1). Space does not permit for an in-depth discussion of the causes of homelessness, but the important point is that there is no one single cause; there are several factors that work together to contribute to homelessness.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the proposed research is to conduct an exploratory study on a limited purposive sample of homeless adult men living in a shelter in Southwestern, ON. Its goal is to penetrate or uncover the subjective world of homeless individuals with the hope of gaining a deeper understanding of their plight. Their own definition of homelessness will be emphasized rather than the investigator's "objective" viewpoint of their situation.

It is their own "identity-making" and "role-taking" that will be sought in the process of becoming, and living as homeless. As a result, the investigator's interpretation of what psychological and sociological factors contribute to homelessness will not be emphasized because it could ignore or undermine the homeless' own definition of their situation.

6

In this context, the research will encompass three main areas: 1) attribution of causes which lead to homelessness, 2) the homeless' own definition of their situation, and 3) the subjects' future plans relating to their family, employment and housing. The literature review will discuss several possible issues that could be issues men attribute to their homelessness. Unemployment, substance abuse, mental illness, and a lack of affiliation are major areas that will be researched to discover their role in the men's homeless career.

The second section will provide an analysis of how definitions of the sample are subjectively constructed and explained. It will be followed by examining how the definitions are redefined and incorporated into people's identity. Finally, the subjects' identification with societal or cultural explanations of homelessness will be investigated.

The final section will explain the future goals/plans of the homeless men and evaluate how they view and define their opportunities.

Also related to this, is how they view their chances to find employment, and plans on maintaining, or (re)establishing primary relationships. A lack of affiliation is a crucial issue when exploring why men land on, and remain on the street.

It will not be argued in this thesis that there is no objective reality "out there." A debate about objective and subjective is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am operating under the assumption that potentially there is an objective reality that can be discovered through scientific inquiry. Nonetheless, I am more interested in the subjects' personal and subjective interpretations of reality.

I am also interested in how their subjective interpretations influence or relate to objective reality. These subjective interpretations have a great impact on their day-to-day lives. Following this, I am also interested in how subjective interpretations influence or relate to objective reality. It is not as important for me to discover if what they are reporting really exists in an objective sense, only that they believe it does.

As a result of this approach, this research is operating from a *micro* perspective. In brief, a micro approach for this research means that the focus is on the individual, instead of more large scale societal factors. For example, even though alcoholism is a societal wide problem, I am more interested in the individual's problems (or lack of) with alcoholism. The micro issues that will be examined are: alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, a lack of affiliation, and the main emphasis is on Symbolic Interactionism and homelessness.

Macro and micro issues have to be examined together. The macro issues dealt with are: unemployment, underemployment and housing. However, micro issues will be emphasized over the macro issues. That is not to say that various macro issues will not be discussed in the literature review and data analysis chapters, only that I am more interested in the men's subjective definition and reaction to the macro situations.

Even though the men's attributions of the causes homelessness are included, the emphasis is on the men's reaction to their world. This thesis will focus on how the men experience the role of homelessness, and the perceptions of their present state of affairs. Again the emphasis is on trying to understand the inner definitions the men have in the experience of being homeless.

Cause and effect is a major issue in this thesis. It is not my job as a researcher to prove cause and effect. All I can do is give one version of the data. Even the subjects cannot prove cause and effect as to why they are homeless. For this study it only matters why they perceive they are homeless.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following chapter will review the literature related to causes of homelessness. Macro causes will be presented first and will encompass: housing, poverty, unemployment and deinstitutionalization. Micro causes will be discussed second and will include the following areas: affiliation, alcohol and drug abuse, and mental illness. Also briefly reviewed in this chapter are characteristics of homeless men, and provision of services for homeless men.

Macro Issues

Lack of Affordable Housing

The main Canadian contribution to the United Nations Year of Shelter for the Homeless was a year long study by MaryAnn McLaughlin (1988). The report examined the 1986 Canadian Census to outline the number of dwelling units found in Canada. The authors also looked at the proportion of units that were subsidized. It was clearly suggested that there is a large number of poor people in Canada who do not have adequate, affordable housing (McLaughlin, 1988: 13). For example, in March of 1991 more than 500 people a week in Toronto were joining the list for subsidized housing (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 19).

During the 1980's successive Canadian governments at both the Federal and Provincial levels allocated few resources to the creation of low cost housing (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 33).

10

As a result, McLaughlin (1988: 13) and O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 164) argue that social programs should be expanded and new programs should be developed to help the working poor improve their housing conditions.

Mallin (1987: 115) also argues that the availability of low-cost rental housing available for shelter has been drastically reduced. For example, gentrification of housing units is raising the cost of space in inner cities making homes unaffordable for most low-income families (Mallin, 1987: 15; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 33-34).

In the United States, the growth of homelessness during the 1980's has, in large part, been attributed to problems with the housing market (Rossi, 1989b; Burt, 1992; Hartman, 1986; Wright and Lam, 1987; Hopper and Hamberg, 1986). The decrease in the number of single room occupancy units (SRO'S) has had the most direct effect on the homeless. Even though the rooms were not always of the best quality, they were usually affordable to many people who were very poor (Burt, 1992: 33).

Corresponding to this, availability of adequate housing is decreasing in the United States as well (Burt, 1992: 43). When you couple this with the fact that the housing market is not providing homes at the prices that homeless people can afford, you have a serious problem (Rossi, 1989b; Wright and Lam, 1987). The lack of affordable housing is not the only cause of homelessness as poverty is a key factor.

11

Labour Markets

To understand poverty, a brief examination of labour markets must first be provided. Dual labour market theory tries to explain the continued perpetuation of low-wage work by looking at the way labour markets operate (Gannage, 1986: 13; Kuhn and Bluestone, 1987: 3-4). The labour market is separated into two levels- the primary and secondary markets.

The primary labour market contains those jobs that are relatively well paid and secure, like traditional white collar professions and management positions. It also includes skilled, unionized male workers (Agocs, 1989: 317; Gannage, 1986: 13). Jobs in this sector have relatively high wages, high job security, promotion opportunities, and can be "personally challenging and intrinsically satisfying" (Macionis et al., 1994: 535).

The characteristics of the secondary labour market provide a striking contrast to those in the primary market. The jobs found here are characterized by low wages, little or no union protection, little job security, few advancement opportunities, and poor working conditions (Agocs, 1989: 317; Macionis et al., 1994: 535; Gannage, 1986: 13). The jobs are usually low-skilled including factory assembly, farm workers, and waitressing. A common phrase often heard when referring to these jobs is "dead end."

12

The Canadian economy is moving in the direction of greater polarization between those employed in the primary labour market, and those working in the secondary labour market. Because it helps explain poverty and its relation to homelessness, secondary labour markets will be the area of concentration for this discussion.

Many argue that poverty is a major cause of homelessness in Canada and the United States (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1983; Rossi, 1989b). Rossi (1989b: 9) and Burt (1992: 6) claim that the homeless are the most disadvantaged of the extremely poor.

The poverty rate for families in 1992 was 13.3% (Ross et al., 1994: 35). Since 1973 the total number of poor families has increased dramatically. For example, the number of poor families increased from 70,100 in 1973, to 988,000 in 1992 (Ross et al., 1994: 36). Similarly, the trend in poverty rate and the total number of poor unattached individuals has reflected that of poor families. When one examines the income distribution, the top 20% of Canadian households receive nine times the income of the bottom 20% (Ross et al., 1994: 43; Bolaria and Wotherspoon, 1991: 465).

Role of Government

One area that can be discussed in a political economy approach to homelessness, is the role of the Canadian government in helping to alleviate poverty. In Canada, the three levels of government are not giving enough money to help end hunger (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993). Canada unemployment rate

13

is at a historical high. For example, in Windsor Ontario, unemployment reached almost 30% by May of 1991 and the welfare role was estimated at almost 6,000 by mid-summer (O'Reilly-Fleming 1993: 36). O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 36) states that many jobs are now in the secondary labour market which does not allow for an adequate "living wage."

The 1980's proved to be a very insecure time economically for many Canadians. In 1991, the recession reached its peak where 15,000 jobs per month were being lost in Canada (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 133). To reflect this, foodbanks, and shelters grew at an alarming rate. In fact, there are now more foodbanks in Canada than there are McDonald's (Duffy and Mandell, 1994: 49).

The approach of the Mulroney government in the 1980's did not help the social welfare of the citizens of Canada. Government preference to private entrepreneurs took importance over welfare, unemployment, and medical care programs. Conservative economic policies in large part led to the impoverishment of working people (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993). The conservative reaction to homelessness and poverty was to "blame the victim" by holding them personally and morally responsible for their condition (O'Reilly-Fleming 1993: 136).

Foodbanks

Foodbanks are one aid to the poor that can be gauged to see how welfare cuts are affecting the level of poverty. They were first introduced to Canada in 1991 in Edmonton (Oderkirk,

1994: 397; Bolaria and Wotherspoon, 1991: 470). In 1991, there were 292 foodbanks in Canada with the highest concentration (88) in Ontario (Oderkirk, 1994: 398). By strict definition, food banks are different from soup kitchens and church programs, however, many soup kitchens also run a food bank on their premises. If one took into account all of the soup kitchens and church programs that run foodbanks, the number is even higher. In 1991, two million Canadians received food assistance at least once. Forty percent of food bank beneficiaries were children, and grocery baskets were more common than meals (Oderkirk, 1994: 399).

Bolaria and Wotherspoon (1991: 470) and Oderkirk (1994: 400) argue that food banks indicate the extent to which hunger and poverty have become prevalent in advanced economies. Sixty-eight percent of recipients of food banks in 1990 had welfare as the major source of their income (Oderkirk, 1994: 400).

It is important to keep in mind that food banks are not intended to be long-term/permanent solutions to poverty and hunger. They are only intended to provide a short-term emergency measure against hunger. With the economy still feeling the effects of the recession, the growth in food banks will increase because they are becoming a more important part of the strategy to accommodate poverty (Oderkirk, 1994: 400).

15

Unemployment

The loss of a job can be a precipitating factor in the onset of homelessness. For example, many older workers are unable to find new employment once they lose their job. People who earn very low wages and become unemployed, usually lack the resources to survive for very long. O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 39) argues that the loss of work has been connected with various forms of chemical abuse. This, in turn, can lead to a downward spiral onto the street.

The rate of joblessness among homeless adults is less apparent but men generally have been jobless for long periods of time. Rossi (1989a: 20) maintains that many homeless men are no longer able to find casual, part-time labour, and as a result have less income than homeless people in the past. O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 54) argues that it is the lack of employment that leads many people into homelessness (see also Rossi, 1989b; Caton, 1990). Rossi (1989b: 134) claims that the homeless typically have not held steady jobs for several years.

In one study by Calysn and Morse (1992: 122), more than 90% of their sample were unemployed. The homeless that did work suffered from underemployment, because they had unsteady employment at very low wages. Usually they could not find enough steady work to make a living and if they did find employment, the jobs were usually temporary and low-paying.

16

According to O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 141) and Burt (1992: 70), job loss accounted for a large percentage of the unemployment during the recession of the 1980's. As a result, a conclusion that can be made is "the lack of resources arising from not having a job probably contributed to homelessness" (Burt and Cohen, 1989: 514).

Unemployment statistics do not give an accurate reflection of the number of people who are out of work because those who have simply given up looking for work are not included. These people are discouraged workers who have become so disheartened in their futile job searches, that they no longer look for work (Rossi, 1989b). Therefore, homeless persons who are not looking for work, are not counted among the unemployed. In Canada, at the peak of the 1981-82 recession, Labour Force Survey estimates placed the size of this group of discouraged workers at over 130,000 (Krahn and Lowe, 1993: 83). As the economy recovered, the number of discouraged workers decreased.

During the recession that began in 1990, the number of discouraged workers did not rise as high as the levels in 1981-82. This is because in 1990-91 unemployment was particularly concentrated in Ontario where a history of low unemployment meant that many unemployed workers continued to look for jobs (Krahn and Lowe, 1993: 84). The 1991 annual average of discouraged workers was 55,000 (Krahn and Lowe, 1993: 84).

Krahn and Lowe (1993: 84) argue that the groups most affected by unemployment are overly represented among discouraged workers. Consequently, if everyone who had given up looking for work were counted, the unemployment rate would be somewhat higher (Krahn and Lowe, 1993: 84).

Deinstitutionalization

Another aspect that scholars (Crystal, 1984; Mallin, 1987; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; McLaughlin, 1987; and La Gory et al., 1990) discuss is that the homeless have been "deinstitutionalized," and "fallen through the cracks" of the social system. They have been released from mental hospitals and have no resources to live on. Consequently, they became homeless. O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 25) argues that deinstitutionalization has been a national disgrace in Canada. Rossi (1989b: 145) contends that deinstitutionalization in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's had an impact on the number of homeless people. Interestingly, homeless men are more likely to have this experience of "falling through the cracks" as compared to women.

Bassuk et al., (1984: 1546) conducted a study where they discovered 75% of homeless men were found to have severe, untreated mental illnesses. For example, twenty one percent were found to have personality disorders (Bassuk et., 1984). They concluded that the needs of mentally ill people who are no longer taken care of by mental institutions are now being

taken care of by alternative institutions (Bassuk et al., 1984: 1549).

Micro Issues

Affiliation

Crystal (1984), and others (La Gory et al., 1990; Hughes and Fleming, 1991; Rossi, 1989b) argue that the salient feature of homeless men is that they tend to be characterized by disaffiliation. In other words, there tends to be a lack of involvement with various kinds of relationships. Homeless men, have few primary relationships such as being married or having other close family members. Burt (1992: 29) states that literal homelessness is the final step of a gradual process in which there is a loss of connection to family or friends who might help in a crisis.

This is important because being disaffiliated prevents homeless men from having an attachment to people that could shield them from living in shelters or on the street. With less affiliation, they are more likely to be pushed, and remain on the streets.

Hughes and Fleming (1991) look at experiences of grief with homeless men and their attachment to significant others. They argue that these men have a deficiency in primary relationships. Once they experience the loss of a loved one, there are very few ties that would keep them bound to society. Furthermore, if there are few primary relationships to start with, the men have few avenues to deal with their grief so

they easily slip onto the street (La Gory et al., 1990 and Crystal, 1984). The assumption for this discussion is that if they are on the street and have lost a significant other, their level of affiliation will be minimal if not non-existent.

Hughes and Fleming (1991) also found that the homeless men experienced some degree of status loss as a result of their experience. These men were unable to deal with their grief, and this led them to decrease their will to maintain their social standing. Their drinking in many cases led to job loss, which in turn led them to the street. Once this process started, it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to stop the downward spiral.

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse have been argued as a leading cause of homelessness (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Burt, 1992; Milburn, 1989; Schutt and Garrett, 1992; Wilhite, 1992). It is a micro factor that can play a large role in individuals becoming homeless.

Alcoholism can lead many men to lose their jobs, and with meagre resources begin the downward spiral towards the street. Homeless men are more likely than women to have a drinking problem (Rossi, 1989b: 156; Burt, 1992: 24; Benda and Dattalo, 1990: 50; North and Smith, 1993: 423). For example, the rate of alcoholism for men is double compared to the rate of single women with children (Burt and Cohen 1989: 516). Alcohol abuse

is only one of the factors that leads to, and maintains, homelessness.

Mental Illness

Another issue in the etiology of homelessness is mental illness. The issue to consider with mental illness is the assumption that mental illness causes homelessness when, at the same time, the state of homelessness can certainly cause some forms of mental illness like depression (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 24).

Burt and Cohen (1989: 516) report that only one quarter of single women and one fifth of single men report histories of mental illness which illustrates that perceptions of universal mental illness among the homeless are overly distorted. This does not mean that mental illness is not a factor when examining homelessness. The evidence is very strong (Greenblatt, 1992; Morse and Calysn, 1992; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Rossi, 1989b) that mental illness has a role in causing people to become homeless, or in maintaining their homelessness.

Characteristics of Homeless Men

La Gory et al., (1990), and Crystal (1984) examine the characteristics of homeless men on the street. Homeless men that are most often found on the street tend to be poorly educated and socially detached (La Gory et al., 1990: 163; Rossi, 1989b: 117). They usually have been in contact with social institutions like jails and mental hospitals (Crystal,

21

1984; Rossi, 1989b: 164). Furthermore, men have been homeless for longer periods of time than their female counterparts (Burt and Cohen, 1989).

Compared to homeless women, homeless men in shelters are unlikely to have ever been married, and suffer less from psychiatric problems than women. Men in shelters are likely to have had some degree of contact with the correctional system (Crystal 1984: 5). Men are more likely than women to have had familial problems when growing up, and they are likely to have been employed at some point before they became homeless. Men in shelters were also likely to have "fallen through the cracks" of the system. Crystal (1984: 6) is careful to point out the data from this study may not apply to homeless people in other situations (i.e. living on the street).

Provision of Services

The characteristics of men living in homeless shelters has an impact on the services they require. For example, men require less child care services as compared to women, because homeless men generally do not have child care responsibilities. Alternatively, men require more drug and alcohol addiction programs as compared to women (Calysn and Morse, 1990: 606).

Calsyn and Morse (1990: 606) argue that in their study almost none of the men are caring for dependent children. This fact has important service implications. Because women

22

are more likely to be caring for children, communities usually provide more resources for homeless families (Burt and Cohen, 1989: 519). They suggest that this leads to a form of hierarchy of how deserving homeless people are.

Men would tend to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of "deservedness" because of their greater abuse of alcohol and greater criminal involvement (Burt and Cohen 1989, 518; Calysn and Morse 1990: 606). There is a prevailing cultural stereotype that men should be able to provide for themselves.

The resulting service implication is that homeless men are provided with fewer resources such as assistance with their housing needs and general welfare aid. In the final analysis, the "Consequences of these attitudes and policies are that the disenfranchisement of homeless men is heightened and homelessness is perpetuated" (Calysn and Morse 1990: 606).

Concluding Remarks on the Literature Review

Macro Causes

As the literature review has demonstrated, the causes of homelessness are varied. As with many other social problems, there is no single cause. Several factors can work together to lead someone into homelessness.

There has been a decrease in the availability of low-cost housing for poor people. When the number of dwelling units in the 1996 Canadian Census were examined, McLaughlin (1988: 13) suggested that there is a large number of poor people in Canada who do not have affordable housing. Problems

23

attributed to the housing market has played a role in the growth of homelessness in Canada and the United States (Rossi, 1989b; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993).

Many argue that poverty is a major cause of homelessness in Canada and the United States (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1983; Rossi, 1989b). Rossi (1989b: 9) and Burt (1992: 6) claim that the homeless are the most disadvantaged of the extremely poor. Related to this, O'Reilly-Fleming (1993) argues the three levels of government in Canada are not giving enough money to help end hunger. Furthermore, O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 36) states that many jobs are now in the secondary labour market which does not allow for an adequate "living wage."

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Unemployment

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24

did work suffered from underemployment, because they had unsteady employment at very low wages.

According to O'Reilly-Fleming (1993: 141) and Burt (1992: 70), job loss accounted for a large percentage of the unemployment during the recession of the 1980's. As a result, a conclusion that can be made is "the lack of resources arising from not having a job probably contributed to homelessness" (Burt and Cohen, 1989: 514).

Another aspect that scholars (Crystal, 1984; Mallin, 1987; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; McLaughlin, 1987; and La Gory et al., 1990) discuss is that the homeless have been "deinstitutionalized," and "fallen through the cracks" of the social system. Bassuk et al., (1984: 1546) conducted a study where they discovered 75% of homeless men were found to have severe, untreated mental illnesses. They concluded that the needs of mentally ill people who are no longer taken care of by mental institutions are now being taken care of by alternative institutions (Bassuk et al., 1984: 1549).

Micro Causes

Micro causes of homelessness have to be taken into account with macro causes when discussing the etiology of homelessness. Micro causes can work in tandem with macro causes to push someone into homelessness.

One salient feature of homeless men is that they tend to be characterized by disaffiliation (Crystal, 1984; La Gory et al., 1990; Hughes and Fleming, 1991; Rossi, 1989b). Burt

(1992: 29) states that literal homelessness is the final step of a gradual process in which there is a loss of connection to family or friends who might help in a crisis. With less affiliation, they are more likely to be pushed, and remain on the streets.

Alcohol and drug abuse have been argued as a leading cause of homelessness (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Burt, 1992; Milburn, 1989; Schutt and Garrett, 1992; Wilhite, 1992). Alcoholism and/or drug abuse can lead many men to lose their jobs, and with meagre resources begin the downward spiral towards the street. Substance abuse is only one of the factors that leads to, and maintains, homelessness.

Mental illness is another factor that can contribute to men becoming homeless. Unable to cope with the everyday pressures of the world, the men land on the street and are unable to get off it on their own.

Characteristics of Homeless Men

Homeless men that are most often found on the street tend to be poorly educated and socially detached (La Gory et al., 1990: 163; Rossi, 1989b: 117). They usually have been in contact with social institutions like jails and mental hospitals (Crystal, 1984; Rossi, 1989b: 164). Men in shelters are likely to have had some degree of contact with the correctional system and to have "fallen through the cracks of the system" (Crystal 1984: 5).

Provision of Services

The characteristics of men living in homeless shelters has an impact on the services they require. Men require less child care services as compared to women, but men require more drug and alcohol addiction programs as compared to women (Calysn and Morse, 1990: 606). There is a prevailing cultural stereotype that men should be able to provide for themselves. The resulting service implication is that homeless men are provided with fewer resources such as assistance with their housing needs and general welfare aid.

Chapter 3

Symbolic Interactionism and Homelessness

The literature utilizing Symbolic Interactionism to studying homelessness is not vast. Drawing heavily on Erving Goffman, Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993, 1994) are the main researcher's that have published important studies that apply Symbolic Interactionism to homelessness. Snow and Anderson's (1993) book, Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People received the Charles Horton Cooley Award from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionism.

The authors employed ethnographic description, detailed research records, and in-depth interviews. The purpose of their research was to better understand "life on the streets as experienced by the homeless, their strategies and struggles to subsist from one moment to the next, materially, socially, and psychologically" (Snow and Anderson, 1993: ix-x).

The two researchers lived on the streets and explained homelessness from the point of view of the homeless people. Snow and Anderson (1993) were not overwhelmed by the complexity of living on the street because living on the street involves strategies that are problematic and always changing (Saxton, 1995: 95).

Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that the homeless are agents who make their own way while facing, at times, seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. This is based on Blumer's third premise (which will be discussed in the theory section)

28

in that meaning is processed and modified as each situation is encountered. The homeless are self-conscious actors and have very important histories and purposes for the future.

One aspect of street life that Snow and Anderson (1993) were interested in was the survival strategies the homeless used to find and make their way on the streets. In connection with this, they identified the conditions "which influence the selection and alteration of these survival strategies" (Saxton 1995: 96).

Like O'Reilly-Fleming (1993), Snow and Anderson (1993) view the experiences of homeless people from both a macro and an micro level. Even though a micro-level of analysis is necessary to achieve the greatest depth of understanding, larger, societal causes of homelessness must be kept in context as well. An individual's entry onto the street can be caused by low-cost housing shortages, government cut-backs of income, and the lack of initiative on the government's part in providing low-cost housing.

Micro issues that can be found in conjunction with macro issues are alcohol and drug abuse. Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that not all people who are vulnerable to structural conditions become homeless; a micro level of analysis is also necessary to explain their homelessness.

Snow and Anderson (1993) use process analysis when examining an individual's homeless career. There are several different career paths during an individual's time on the

street. These include the recently dislocated, who are people at the beginning of their homeless career. These individuals face special challenges like finding shelter. These actors also have to deal with social services and professionals in their search for shelter. Other homeless careers include the homeless with no fixed address and who have little choice of where they can stay; on the street or in shelters (Rossi, 1989b: 11).

The authors describe the difficulties that homeless people face in getting off the street. Some of the challenges outlined are: personal disability, little or no income, and bureaucratic obstacles, all of which make the process of ending their homeless career difficult if not impossible for some.

Finally, Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that when homeless people are attracted to, and find companionship with others on the street, the sense of hopelessness can lead them from being recently dislocated to having no fixed address.

Snow and Anderson (1987) and Anderson et al. (1994) have two other important studies on homelessness from a Symbolic Interactionist orientation. In one study, Anderson et al. (1994) draw on the work of Goffman (1961b, 1963) describing two broad categories of stigma management strategies the homeless develop and use in their interactions with people who live on and off the street.

In-group strategies are techniques that the homeless men use amongst each other to work against the social-psychological impact of stigmatization. According to Anderson et al. (1994: 126), three common in-group strategies are: drinking, cheap entertainment, and "hanging out."

Many homeless men drink alcohol to escape the trials and tribulations of the streets. It is one way they can deal with the pain and humiliation of being on the street. Anderson et al. (1994) found that drinking tends to increase with the time spent on the street and many men said that it was their "escape." Cheap entertainment such as libraries and paperback novels also provided a psychological retreat from stigmatization (Anderson et al., 1994).

Hanging out "provides a retreat from conscious striving and facing one's situation" (Anderson et al., 1994: 127). The support of street friendships allow the men to share their meagre resources. It allows them to associate with a non-stigmatizing reference group and gives them a source of interpersonal validation (Anderson et al., 1994: 128).

Goffman (1961a) is important to include within this section because Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993, 1994) were in large part, influenced by his work. Goffman (1961a) calls in-group stigma management strategies "secondary adjustments." These adjustments occur with individuals who find themselves trapped in demeaning social contexts and they can stand "apart from the role and the self 'implied'" (Anderson et al., 1994:

31

129). The individuals can take part in activities that they can lose themselves in. All of the strategies taken together allow the men to come together and form their own community on the streets.

The reality of being homeless is that they will have to come into contact with those who are not homeless. In order to deal with the stigmatization, the homeless have several out-group strategies. The first strategy is to try to pass as nonhomeless. If they can escape being detected as homeless, they can avoid the stigmatization.

Goffman (1963) calls this "information control", in which they try to pass in public as domiciled individuals. The homeless men also try to display "disidentifiers" (Goffman, 1963) which are symbols that clearly suggest they are not homeless (Anderson et al., 1994: 130). An example of a disidentifier would be wearing clothes that would "fit" in with mainstream society.

An alternative approach to passing is covering. In covering, the homeless men openly admit their status, but try to minimize its impact (Anderson et al., 1994: 130). One covering strategy is to verbally, to cast themselves in a positive light. The second is to use props to deflect attention from their stigmatized status (Anderson et al., 1994: 132).

The third out-group stigma management strategy is defiance. Defiant behaviours are actions and verbalizations that are meant to reject humiliating moral assaults or ridicule. Goffman (1961a) observed that defiance may be "open" or "contained." Open defiance is overt and directly confrontational, while contained defiance is a more subtle and covert expression of anger. Both types of defiance are meant to deal with humiliating encounters or situations.

The last out-group strategy is collective action which is employed to overcome material deprivations/powerlessness, and neutralize their stigma (Anderson et al., 1994: 136). With the help of the nonhomeless and organizations, the homeless have been able to protest against their situation. Collective action results in a sense of empowerment, positive group identity (Wagner and Cohen, 1991), and what Foss and Larkin (1986) have referred to as "disalienation" (Anderson et al., 1994: 138).

The homeless also conduct a process of identity construction. This occurs when individuals at the bottom of the status system attempts to generate identities that provide them with a measure of self- worth and dignity. Homeless people do not fit into societal roles. Therefore, they are beyond the conventional, role-based sources of moral worth and dignity that most citizens take for granted.

Social identities are identities that homeless people come up with to place or situate themselves as social objects. Personal identities refer to the meanings attributed to the self by the actor (Snow and Anderson, 1987: 1347). Self concept refers to one's overarching view or image of her-or himself "as a physical, social, spiritual or moral being" (quoted from Gecas, 1982: 3). Identity talk is verbal construction and assertions of personal identities which is their primary form of "identity work" of which homeless street people construct and negotiate personal identities.

There are three generic patterns of identity talk: distancing, embracement, and fictive storytelling. Each of these contain several subtypes that vary in usage depending on the length of time spent on the streets (Snow and Anderson, 1987: 1336).

Distancing is the form of identity construction where individuals concentrate on distancing themselves from other homeless people, their street roles and various associated institutions. By doing this, they can avoid negative self-worth because they see themselves as different from people who are viewed negatively.

The second technique of identity work is embracement. Embracement occurs when there is the verbal and expressive confirmation of one's acceptance of, and attachment to the social identity associated with a general or specific role. It is a set of social relationships, or a particular ideology.

With street people, there is little doubt of who they "are". People who have been on the streets for a longer period of time generally embraced their personal identity as a street person rather than distancing themselves.

Fictive storytelling is the third form of identity talk. Here the homeless person embellishes past or present experiences or fantasize about their future. These practices allow the homeless individual to have a much more positive self-identity. For example, many homeless people tend to embellish the amount of money they earn when they work at occasional or semi-permanent jobs. By reporting high wages they look for respect from other homeless people. All three forms of identity talk allow the homeless person to present themselves in a way which will allow them to have some degree of self-worth and positive identity.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing heavily on Erving Goffman, Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993) and Anderson et al. (1994) are the main researcher's that have published studies that apply Symbolic Interactionism to homelessness. The authors employed ethnographic description, detailed research records, and in-depth interviews.

The two researchers lived on the streets and explained homelessness from the point of view of the homeless people. Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that the homeless are agents who make their own way while facing, at times, seemingly

unsurmountable obstacles. The homeless are self-conscious actors and have very important histories and purposes for the future.

Snow and Anderson (1993) view the experiences of homeless people from both a macro and micro level. Even though a micro-level of analysis is necessary to achieve the greatest depth of understanding, larger, societal causes of homelessness must be kept in context as well. Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that not all people who are vulnerable to structural conditions become homeless; a micro level of analysis is also necessary to explain their homelessness.

In another study, Anderson et al. (1994) draw on the work of Goffman (1961b, 1963) describing two broad categories of stigma management strategies the homeless develop and use in their interactions with people who live on and off the street. In-group strategies are techniques that the homeless men use amongst each other to work against the social-psychological impact of stigmatization. According to Anderson et al. (1994: 126), three common in-group strategies are: drinking, cheap entertainment, "hanging out."

The homeless also have several out-group strategies. The first strategy is to try to pass as nonhomeless. If they can escape being detected as homeless, they can avoid the stigmatization. An alternative approach to passing is covering. In covering, the homeless men openly admit their status, but try to minimize its impact (Anderson et al., 1994:

130). The third out-group stigma management strategy is defiance. Defiant behaviours are actions and verbalizations that are meant to reject humiliating moral assaults or ridicule. The last out-group strategy is collective action which is employed to overcome material deprivations and powerlessness, and neutralize their stigma (Anderson et al., 1994: 136).

In a third study, Snow and Anderson (1987) examined how the homeless also conduct a process of identity construction. This occurs when individuals at the bottom of the status system attempts to generate identities that provide them with a measure of self-worth and dignity. In order to achieve this, homeless men engage in a process called identity talk.

Identity talk is verbal construction and assertions of personal identities which is their primary form of "identity work" of which homeless street people construct and negotiate personal identities. There are three generic patterns of identity talk: distancing, embracement, and fictive storytelling. Each of these contain several subtypes that vary in usage depending on the length of time spent on the streets (Snow and Anderson, 1987: 1336).

From a theoretical point of view, this study would add to the work of Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993, 1994) because it provides a comparison to their findings. Comparison is important because Snow and Anderson conducted their research in a large, southwestern city in the United States. As a result, it will be necessary to see if their findings can be replicated.

This research would also add to Snow and Anderson because it will be conducted in a more controlled setting (i.e. one shelter). Three studies by one set of researchers cannot be taken as the definitive voice, and this research would be one small step in adding to knowledge in this area.

Chapter 4

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be utilized in exploring homeless men's perceptions of their lives will be Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism is a school of thought generally traced back to the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) who was a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago (Charon, 1995: 25). The perspective can be summarized with four main ideas.

Symbolic Interactionism focusses on the interaction and social activities among persons. The perspective examines how two people define their action based on interaction with each other. Secondly, human action also results from interaction between people. This is the idea of the definition of the situation that is fundamental for this research.

The third main idea within symbolic interactionism is the focus on the present (Charon, 1995: 25). Our actions are primarily a result of what is going on in the present. Finally, the fourth idea is ". . . symbolic interactionism describes the human being as more unpredictable and active in his or her world than other perspectives do" (Charon, 1995: 25). Humans have the ability to direct themselves, and to reassess their actions.

Within this framework, the underlying principle is that the individual and society are mutually dependent on each other and cannot be analyzed as separate entities. As a

result, even though they are not taken as one, the individual and society are indivisible. The work of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Charles Horton Cooley and Erving Goffman, all of the Chicago school, will be employed in assessing homeless men's perceptions of their circumstances.

The Chicago School model can be applied to a homeless shelter situation because it can provide an in-depth understanding of homeless men's social actions within the shelter and between each other. Blumer (1969: 6-7) states:

> . . . social structure in any of its aspects, as represented by such terms as social position, status, role, authority, and prestige, refers to relationships derived from how people act toward each other.

As a result, the Chicago School and its examination of interaction between human beings will be able to help explain how homeless men define their situation both as a group, and as individuals.

A fundamental concept for Symbolic Interactionism is Mead's definition of the self. For the symbolic interactionist, the self is an object that the actor acts toward (Charon 1995: 68). The development of the self is a creative and spontaneous process, governed by free will, and emerging through social interaction. The self is not passive, the individual can choose to accept, reject, or modify certain stimuli during social interaction.

Charon (1995: 68-69) argues that the self has the form of a social object that is changed as it is defined and redefined during the process of interaction. This argument does not

imply that when we wake up one day that we will be totally different than we were the day before, because the core self remains stable. Charon (1995: 88) asserts that the self can remain stable due to interaction.

Applying this to homeless men, their selves may not remain static, it may be redefined when they go on the street, when they come into contact with professionals, and as they spend more time in the shelter. Their selves can even be redefined when coming into contact with a graduate student conducting research. They can define themselves differently depending upon whom they are interacting with.

Blumer (1969: 63-64) builds on this idea by arguing that the self is in a process of reflexivity where he/she handles the world through a defining process instead of merely responding to it. Consequently, it forces the individual to take a course of action, instead of mere reaction.

Within the origins of the Symbolic Interactionist approach are the fundamental premises of the Chicago School which derive from the work of Herbert Blumer who advanced the conceptualizations of George Herbert Mead (1934). His first premise states that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969: 2). The second premise is that the meanings of such things are products of social interaction between individuals. Blumer's third premise is that the meanings are processed and modified through each individuals' interpretation in dealing

with them as they are encountered.

The importance of Blumer's three premises for homeless men is that meaning comes from interaction with other people. Homeless men are going to act toward other people on the basis of the meaning that they receive out of social interaction. The meanings homeless men carry around with them will be modified according to their interpretation of that meaning.

George Herbert Mead's (1934) idea of role playing is also important to the study of homeless men. When the men become homeless, do they take on the role of what they think a homeless man should be, or do they try to maintain the role(s) they previously had? Taking on the role of what they think a homeless man is could allow them to fit in with the other men. It also could allow them to relate to other people who expect them to act in a certain way.

However, when someone takes on a role, they are not simply putting themselves in the place of someone else. They are adjusting and accommodating the role according to their own behaviour (Stryker, 1980). Denzin (1995: 177) states that roles are fluid, vague and contradictory. Stryker (1981: 20) argues that actors continuously test the assumptions of their roles, and negotiate these assumptions with the adjustments they have made.

Another contribution that Mead (1934) can make to the study of homeless men is his concept of symbols. Homeless men have shared symbols amongst each other in which they derive

42

meaning. The way the homeless men act towards the symbols and each other, will depend on the shared meanings of these symbols. The symbols would be significant for both the actor who is using them, and the actor who is receiving them.

The origins of the Symbolic Interactionist approach also lie, in part, with the work of Charles Cooley (1970). His concept of the looking-glass self can be applied to the perceptions that homeless men have. It would help discover how they believe they appear to both other homeless men and society in general. They can be asked how they think other homeless men and society judge them. Logically derived from this, the men would have a self-feeling based on their perception of how other people view and judge them. This is important because it would in part, explain how homeless men view themselves based on what others perceive them as.

A very important element of Symbolic Interactionism, is the concept of "the definition of the situation." Donald Ball (1972: 63) argues that the definition of the situation is the:

> . . . sum total of all recognized information, from the point-of-view of the actor, which is relevant to his locating himself and others, so that he can engage in self- determined lines of action and interaction.

This knowledge could enable the homeless men to have a structure for interpreting situations in and outside of the shelter.

A major factor that plays a role in the process of defining a situation is the influence of other people. Significant others in a person's life are those people who

43

serve as role models on which the individual patterns themselves. For homeless men the concept of significant others is very interesting. Many lack affiliation with primary relationships, therefore, their significant others would mainly be other men and the workers in the shelter. Some homeless men may have relationships outside of the shelter, such as a girlfriend, and part of the exploration will involve discovering the meanings these relationships have for the men.

The situations and actions that an individual takes are not constant. Therefore, the way an individual defines one situation may not apply to another similar situation. For example, a homeless man can define living on the street differently than living in a shelter because of the different challenges each offers. However, a person can consistently define situations depending on their frame of reference.

An individual's frame of reference can involve many different groups. As a result, he or she has several sets of social worlds with whom they share a perspective. The reference groups a homeless man might have include: other homeless people, social workers and welfare case workers, friends, family members, the general public and police.

Defining the situation is also an interpretive process in terms of collective action. People indicate their interpretation of a situation not only to themselves, but to each other. The result from this interpretation is the

44

emergence of group definitions of the situations. These interpretations are then employed to guide an individual's behaviour.

With homeless men, the group living in the shelter can define their situation collectively in terms of how they view each other. They also could have a collective interpretation of how society, professionals, and shelter workers view them. The way homeless men define their situation may or may not be different depending on whose point of view they are defining.

The concept of a reference group was refined by Tamotsu Shibutani (1955). Reference groups are:

> any identifiable group whose supposed perspective is used
> by the actor as a frame of reference in the organization
> of his perceptual field (Charon, 1995: 30).

Simply put, reference groups are groups that an individual psychologically identifies with. Membership groups (Sherif and Sherif, 1956: 176-177) are the groups that a person actually belongs to.

There may be a discrepancy between the individual's actual membership, and the reference group which they use to regulate their standards and aspirations (Sherif and Sherif, 1956: 177). The reference group that an individual psychologically identifies with may be different from their physical membership group. For example, they may identify with their friends/family, or possibly with an occupational group they used to belong to.

One does not have to be a member of a group to share a perspective with that group; the reference group can be real or imaginary. A homeless man who is isolated may have fictional characters to make up for a lack of affiliation with significant others. The important part is the real or imagined meaning that this reference group has for the individual.

Another major concept that can be utilized is Erving Goffman's (1959) presentation of the self. Individuals present themselves to others according to the identities that they have for themselves. This self label, or identity is highly influential in how an individual presents their self to others. One way that people can do this is through their dress. Clothing can be used as a guide for what other people can expect. Furthermore, clothing can be a symbol of homelessness that the men might share to identify with each other as homeless.

Goffman (1959: 1-2) argues that when people interact, what they say and do makes a difference to others. Based on their actions, the actor can "figure" them out and act towards them accordingly. Therefore, people strive to act in a way that will influence how others think of them. When other actors have information, it helps them to define the situation.

For example, many people have an image of homeless men wearing shabby, dirty clothes, unshaven and generally dishevelled. When the general public sees someone who looks like this, they automatically relate to that person as a "bum". This research will seek out views on presentation of selves to others, and perceptions of people's views in return.

Concluding Remarks on the Theoretical Framework

George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Charles Horton Cooley, and Erving Goffman all provide important concepts that can be applied to the study of homelessness. The main focus for this research is how the men define their situation in the shelter. Symbolic Interactionism can also contribute other important concepts such as: role playing, looking-glass self, significant others, and reference/membership groups.

Significant others are especially important because one of the major issues with homelessness to be explored is the affiliation the men have with nonhomeless people. The concepts that have been discussed are not exhaustive of the ideas that can be applied to homelessness. They are only some of the important ideas that can be used to study the subjective interpretation homeless men have about their situation.

Research Questions

Several research questions can be drawn from the literature review. O'Reilly-Fleming (1993) and Rossi (1989a) argue that structural causes of homelessness are important to

47

consider when examining how men become homeless. This research seeks out the men's subjective interpretation of why they are homeless. The reason why it is subjective is that even the subject's cannot prove cause and effect as to why they are homeless. For this study it only matters why they perceive they are homeless.

At the more micro level, the literature review leads to other important questions. Here the main focus will be on the contribution of alcohol/drug abuse, disaffiliation, and mental illness to the men becoming homeless.

The theoretical framework leads to additional research questions. Based on the looking-glass self, it is important to ask how these men perceive other views of them. This research will also attempt to uncover the stigma management strategies that these men may use to deal with their situation. Finally, how the men define their future opportunities/plans will be explored.

Even though homelessness is an ever increasing problem in Canada, it is a social problem that has been largely ignored in Canadian literature (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993: 29). The proposed study would be important because it would add to the growing body of general knowledge on homelessness in Canada. More specifically, it would advance our knowledge of homeless men living in shelters in a small, Canadian city and be used by the hostel to assess the delivery of their services.

From a theoretical point of view, this study would add to

48

the work of Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993, 1994) because it provides a comparison to their findings. Comparison is important because Snow and Anderson conducted their research in a large, southwestern city in the United States. As a result, it will be necessary to see if their findings can be replicated.

This research would also add to Snow and Anderson because it will be conducted in a more controlled setting (i.e. one shelter). Finally, this research would add to the general knowledge of the application of Symbolic Interactionism to the study of homelessness. Three studies by one set of researchers cannot be taken as the definitive voice, and this research would be one small step in adding to knowledge in this area.

Chapter 5

Qualitative Research Paradigm

The intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman, 1987). Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that it is an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of study. Finally, Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that you become immersed in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study. For this study, I entered the world of a homeless men's shelter. I sought their own perspectives and subjective meanings.

Methodology

The theoretical framework that one employs can be very important in determining which methodological approach will be employed. The Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism will be used, and will follow in the Meadian tradition of qualitative methodology. It is not being argued that all qualitative methods follow Symbolic Interactionism, only that it is one approach that can be used. Herbert Blumer stated that, "only through intimate association with those who are being studied...can the investigator enter their inner worlds" (Meltzer et al., 1975: 58). Blumer advocated the importance of qualitative methodology, inclusive of interviews of the "free or non-directive type" (Meltzer et al., 1975: 58).

He also recommended taking the role of the other when conducting research. Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin (1975: 7) argue that human activity can be indeterminate and emerges over time. As a result, it is not entirely open to fixed quantitative statistical modes of inquiry. Because of the focus of this research, a qualitative analysis will be employed to discover the insights and meanings achieved through the use of thick descriptions.

Thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences (Denzin, 1989: 83). Included in thick descriptions are the meanings that an individual attaches to an action. When a researcher presents thick descriptions, he/she give details, context, emotion, and the various social relationships that join persons to one another (Denzin, 1989: 83). In thick description, the subjective meanings and feelings of the actors are taken into account.

Interpretive Interactionism

The main methodology of in-depth interviews with direct observations in the shelter are based on Denzin's (1989) book Interpretive Interactionism. Interpretive Interactionism is a qualitative research technique that attempts to "make the world of problematic lived experience of ordinary people directly available." The technique endeavours to capture the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied (Denzin, 1989: 10).

The focus of this type of research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings that people give to themselves, and their experiences. In the case of homeless people, becoming homeless is certainly a life altering event, but it is only one in a whole chain of events that led up to them becoming homeless.

There are five steps for the data analysis that constitute the interpretive process taken from *Interpretive Interactionism* (1989). The next section will discuss each step from a theoretical basis, and the following section will provide concrete examples of each step related to the specifics of the research.

Deconstruction

The first step is the *deconstruction* and critical analysis of prior conceptions of the phenomenon (Denzin, 1989: 48). This is the literature review on homelessness that precedes the research questions that this project will try to answer. Denzin (1989: 51) stated: "A deconstructive reading of a phenomenon involves a critical analysis of how it has been presented, studied, and analyzed in the existing research and theoretical literature."

Deconstruction also provides the researcher an interpretation of previous definitions and observations of the phenomenon. During the deconstruction phase of the study, the researcher can critically examine preconceptions and biases of

the existing knowledge related to the topic (Denzin, 1989: 51).

Capture

The second step is *capturing* the phenomenon, including locating and situating it in the natural world, and obtaining multiple instances of it (Denzin, 1989: 48). Furthermore, the researcher can capture the crises and important events within the lives of the subjects whom are being studied.

This step is the main data collection method of in-depth interviews, where the vital subjective information will be obtained. Direct observation (which will be recorded), and a short-term stay in the shelter also fill out the second step of capturing.

Bracketing

The third step in the interpretive process is the beginning of the data analysis. The phenomenon has to be *bracketed*, which means it is reduced to its essential elements and is cut loose "from the natural world so that its essential structures and features may be uncovered" (Denzin, 1989: 48).

The subject matter is uncovered, defined, and analyzed on its own terms apart from the context of the existing literature (Denzin, 1989: 55). The data are analyzed by taking into consideration the meanings it had for the individual (Denzin, 1989: 55). The bracketing of the essential structures will be taken from the main areas covered in the interview schedule.

53

Construction

The fourth step is *construction*, or putting the phenomenon back together in terms of its essential parts, pieces, and structures into a coherent whole (Denzin, 1989: 48). The important component of the construction process is stating how the separate parts of the phenomenon come together in totality. Functionally, this means that I will take all of the separate themes that came out of the interviews and observations, and relate them to each other instead of examining them individually.

Contextualization

The fifth and final step in the interpretive process is called *contextualization*. This step involves relocating the phenomenon back in the social world. "Contextualization takes what has been learned about the phenomenon, through bracketing, and fits that knowledge to the social world where it occurs. It brings phenomenon alive in the worlds of interacting individuals" (Denzin, 1989: 60).

By contextualizing the phenomenon, it gives the structure meaning. According to Denzin (1989: 61), the intent of contextualization is to show how lived experience alters and shapes the phenomenon being studied. This is very important because the participants alter the structure of their experiences based on how they describe, and give them meaning.

Strengths of Interpretive Interactionism

There are five main strengths of using the technique of Interpretive Interactionism. The first is that it can help define how homeless men interpret the process of becoming, and living as a homeless person. Secondly, the assumptions of the homeless can be discovered and evaluated. This means that their perceptions and interpretations can be analyzed. Thirdly, through discussion with the homeless individual, crucial points in their lives where intervention is needed (such as landing on the street) can be identified and as a result, the services for the homeless can be improved and evaluated.

The fourth strength, by using thick descriptions provided by the men, "it is possible to suggest alternatives from which policies, programs, and the problem can be addressed" (O'Reilly-Fleming 1993: xvi). Finally and very importantly, the data obtained through this qualitative method can be used to discover the subjective interpretation of homeless men regarding their situation.

Specific Methodology

Deconstruction

Prior research related to homeless men in general, and Symbolic Interactionism and homeless men, were examined to reveal the previously known believes about the subject (see chapters 3 and 4). In this stage of *deconstruction*, a sample of the research about the causes of homelessness was

55

presented. The research directly related to symbolic interactionism and homelessness were also presented.

Capturing

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted from May 9th to June 23rd 1996. During this time, the total pool or population of men was 219. Each night, there were an average of 55 men sleeping in the shelter. The number of men registered on any given day was much higher than 55, but each night some men do not sleep at the shelter so the average is much less.

Out of the 219 total pool of men, 107 left before I was able to interview them. Of the remaining men who were not interviewed, the reasons for their exclusion vary. Suspected mental illness, refusing to be interviewed, working, and a problem building rapport are all reasons why some were not interviewed. Furthermore, I simply had little or no contact with others because they were rarely around the shelter. There were also a potential pool of subjects not interviewed because my study ended while they were still registered.

The sample for this study includes 30 adult males between the ages of 18 and 65. The mean age of the men is 34.6 years old. In the 18-19 age range there were 2 subjects, from 20-29 there were 11 subjects, 30-39 8 subjects, 40-49 there were 5 subjects, 50-59 2 subjects, and from 60-69 there were also two subjects.

The men came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Two subjects who had immigrated to Canada from Central Europe. Two subjects immigrated to Canada from Western Europe, and one man had refugee status in Canada (coming from Central America). The rest of the men are either Canadian or have dual citizenship in the United States. There were 26 Caucasian, 1 Latino, and 3 African Canadians in the sample.

Participant Observation

The phenomenon in this study were *captured* in a two-fold manner. First, I engaged in participant observation for one week. This was done with the full knowledge of the staff. I feel that living in the shelter for a short period of time was necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of the lives of the homeless men. I would not have been able to achieve this if I had only conducted interviews.

In-Depth Interviews

The phenomenon were also captured through in-depth interviews. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) explored the issues discussed in the literature review and theory sections of this thesis. The interviews consisted of semi-structured dialogue between the subject and myself.

Before the interview began, an introductory letter of consent was provided (see Appendix B) ensuring complete confidentiality. I waited while the subjects read through the form. Once they were done reading, I went over the form again

to emphasize that the interview would be confidential, that if necessary their name would not appear anywhere, and that I would change any details about their story. At this point I asked them to sign the form and all thirty subjects agreed.

Prior to the interview, I also asked each subject if he would agree to the interview being taped. Twenty eight of the thirty subjects agreed. For the two men that did not agree, I took extensive notes while they were talking. The interviews took place in several different locations in the shelter including the dining room, offices, and two were conducted off shelter property. The majority of the interviews took place at the back of the shelter in a parking lot where there was privacy. I had to conduct most of the interviews here because the noise inside the shelter proved to be very distracting.

The interview began with demographic questions focusing on general information like their age, date, and place of birth. Once the subjects had given me this information, I simply asked them to tell me their story and catch me up to the time when they came to the shelter. The subject would guide me through their past, and I would prompt them with questions that came to mind to keep the interview flowing.

This criteria allowed me to extract a lot of the information I wanted without having to ask the questions. By the time the subject "caught" me up to when they arrived at the shelter, they had already given a lot of the information

that explained why they arrived there. Demographics also allowed me to compare the men to each other. In this section, it was crucial to discover their long-term path to homelessness, and the events that immediately preceded them becoming homeless.

The issues of unemployment, alcohol/drug abuse, and mental illness were then explored with the intention of discovering the role that they played in causing, and maintaining the men's homelessness. The extent of affiliation that men had in their lives before they become homeless then became the focus.

The interview then shifted to how the men define their situation. This section covered areas such as their definition of the shelter environment, and how they view what others think of them. Stigma management strategies were then investigated to discover how the men psychologically cope with their disadvantaged status. The questions concentrated on both in-groups (other homeless men) and out-groups (people in society). This area is very sensitive because the men could take offense to questions that may seem critical such as "Do you make up stories to make yourself look good?" As a result, many of the strategies were discovered through direct observation.

Finally, the men's future plans were investigated. This area of questioning surrounded three main areas. The first focussed on their immediate plans in terms of finding a job

and an apartment. Then affiliation was revisited to see if the men wanted to reestablish primary relationships, and/or foster the current ones. Lastly, in order to get their impression of their future, I asked them what they wanted to do with the rest of their life.

The interview schedule was slightly modified to include relevant information overlooked in the original interview schedule. One question was added to see if the subjects were on welfare. Another question asked what they usually spent their money on.

The main addition to the interview schedule was (with subject #6) to ask them if they felt that living in the shelter had "changed" them in any way. I felt that this question was important for exploring the definition or redefinition of their selves. Finally, in general, I modified slightly the wording of each question to make them flow more easily when I asked them. However, the content of the questions did not change at all.

Bracketing

The third step in the interpretive process is the beginning of the data analysis. The phenomenon has to be *bracketed*, which means it is reduced to its essential elements and is cut loose "from the natural world so that its essential structures and features may be uncovered" (Denzin, 1989: 48). The subject matter is uncovered, defined, and analyzed

on its own terms apart from the context of the existing literature (Denzin, 1989: 55).

The bracketing of the essential structures is taken from the main areas covered in the interview schedule. To perform the *bracketing* of the data, I located within the transcripts key phrases or statements that spoke "... directly to the phenomenon in question" (Denzin, 1989: 56). These key phrases and statements were directly related to the areas covered during the interview.

In the bracketing phase of this research, each case was coded and analyzed to discover the events and subjective interpretations that the individuals felt were important in explaining their situation of homelessness. The coding of the data is based on Tesch's (1990: 142-145) data analysis procedures. The coding involved seven steps:

1. I arbitrarily picked one interview and went through it, asking myself, what is this about, and what is the underlying meaning? Any thoughts I had were written in the margin. I also made more extensive notes about major themes in their story which facilitated step number two.

2. Once I finished step one for all thirty interviews, I made a list of all the topics. I then formed these topics into columns that were arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.

3. I then took this list back to the data. The topics were given a written code which I then wrote next to the appropriate segments of the text (see Appendix G). By doing this, I was able finalize any other topics and subsequent codes.

4. The fourth step involved finding the most descriptive wording for the topics, and then turning them into categories. At this point I also grouped topics together that related to each other (see Appendix G).

5. I then made a final decision on the abbreviation for each category, and alphabetized the codes (see Appendix G).

6. At this point, I took the letter codes back to the data and recoded the appropriate sections in order to perform the data analysis.

7. I then assembled the data material belonging to each category in one place, and performed an analysis.

Appendix G demonstrates the end result of steps 3 to 7. Each major theme were first given an abbreviation. For example, the abbreviation for the subject's background information is BACK. I then took these abbreviations back to the data and recorded them in the margin of the text.

Once each individual theme had an abbreviation, similar themes were grouped together and given a letter code (A, B, C, etc.) The final step involved going back to the data and putting the letter code next to the appropriate section of the transcript.

I then took all thirty interviews and depending on what area I was analyzing, I went through each interview looked for the appropriate letter code. For example, when I was analyzing alcoholism and drug abuse, I went through the transcript and looked for the letter D in the margin of the text. When I found the appropriate sections in the interview, I wrote the subjects' answers on separate sheets of paper.

Once I had gone through all thirty interviews looking for a specific topic, I was able to analyze each area major topic in isolation. In other words, I took all thirty interviews and looked at the data only for alcoholism, or short-term

future plans etc. At this point, I started to see if similar themes or similarities emerged.

When themes did emerge, I took another piece of paper, put down the heading for the theme, and wrote the subject's number under the appropriate heading. For example, a theme with alcoholism and drug abuse was "no role." Any subject whom alcoholism and/or drug abuse played no role in their lives, were placed next to this theme.

Once this step in the bracketing process was completed, there were several categories or themes under which the subjects were placed for every area of the interview schedule. After the entire data analysis was performed for every area of the interview schedule, the data analysis chapter was written (see chapter six). Chapter seven will relate the final two steps of construction and contextualization back to the specific methodology.

Chapter 6

Data Analysis

Attributions of Homelessness

Before going in-depth with the data analysis, it is logical and necessary that the foundation be laid in terms of how the men arrived in the shelter in the first place. However, there is one important point that has to be established and understood before this can be discussed. When looking at the causes of someone being homeless, the majority of the time it is not a straight line between a cause and someone becoming homeless. A very good example of this is with housing and unemployment.

These two important issues are not necessarily separate. A man becomes unemployed (or is underemployed), and eventually he can no longer afford housing and he ends up homeless. On the surface, the literal reason why he became homeless is that he could no longer afford housing. But when you analyze one level deeper, unemployment is the reason that he can no longer afford housing and subsequently becomes homeless.

There are several other examples I could use to demonstrate this point, but they would only serve to be redundant. The point is that there can be several related issues that work together or are related to each other, that cause an individual to end up on the street. Again, this issue was raised in chapter 1 where it was argued that it is very difficult to determine cause and effect.

64

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part will examine the subject's perceptions about the causes of their homelessness. Within this section, micro issues will be first explained followed by macro issues. Micro and macro issues will be presented in this order: alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, affiliation, unemployment, and housing.

The core of this thesis is the second part of the chapter. It includes all of the data related to Symbolic Interactionism and homelessness. The second part is divided into the following main areas: definition of the situation, present situation, presentation of the self, definition of the self, reference and membership groups, in-group and out-group strategies, identity talk, and future plans.

Micro Causes

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse has been argued as a major cause of adult men becoming homeless (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Burt, 1992). The literature also suggests that alcohol plays a major role in keeping them homeless either in a shelter or on the street (Anderson et al., 1994). This research demonstrated that alcohol and/or drug abuse played a role with some men, however the abuse was not nearly as prevalent as the myths and stereotypes suggest.

Out of thirty men in the sample, 19 reported that neither drugs nor alcohol played a role in them becoming homeless. The reason(s) for ending up in the shelter were different.

65

Furthermore, these 19 subjects reported that alcohol and/or drug abuse did not keep them on the street or prevent them from getting out of the shelter. That is not to say that some of these men have not consumed alcohol in the past, or do not currently drink, only that they felt that alcohol and drugs played no role in them landing on the street.

Three subjects reported that alcohol abuse was the most important reason why they ended up homeless. When these subjects' stories were analyzed in-depth, no major stressor appeared at some point in their lives leading to alcohol abuse. In other words, there was no root cause whereby they began to drink. When asked the role drinking plays in his life Bob responded:

> Well probably partially stealing the money for drinking, drugs, gambling yeah. I still have the urge to go drink and I still do. Any money I have in my pocket goes right to the booze or the drugs.

There were four subjects in the sample who reported that alcoholism was the major reason why they ended up homeless. In two cases, the men began drinking after divorcing their spouse. Divorce seemed to be the root cause of becoming homeless because they started drinking after their divorce. Myron describes his behaviour after his second divorce:

> I started isolating myself. I wouldn't answer the door nothing. I would just stay inside my apartment. This was the way it went until 94 when I started (drinking). Something popped. I found myself at the Mall where I had a . . . bottle of beer. Another bottle of beer.

In the other two instances, they were unemployed and drinking subsequently increased.

66

For the men who increased their drinking because of a divorce, each have been in out and out of several rehabilitation programs in the past. Even though alcohol is the main reason why they are homeless, in these two cases it is extremely important to look at divorce as the root cause of their drinking, because divorce was the beginning of their homeless careers.

For the two men that began drinking heavily during periods of unemployment, each reported that they had consumed alcohol in the past but it became more of an issue when they were unemployed. One subject replied this way when discussing the role alcohol and unemployment played in him landing in the shelter:

> To me it's all interrelated. Not working. Too much time on my hands you know. Despair. Despondent. One job lasted a month. Started drinking.

In the case of both of them, drinking keeps them on the street because the majority of their income goes to alcohol. Their alcoholism does not impair their ability to go to work, it just prevents them from saving any money to find a place to live.

In summary, there are two main patterns. For 19 subjects, alcohol played no role in their etiology of homelessness. This research demonstrated that for eight subjects alcohol and/or drug abuse played a role, however the abuse was not nearly as prevalent as myths and stereotypes of suggest.

Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that drinking is an activity that homeless men engaged in to help them deal with the psychological stress of being homeless. It is a way that they can escape the everyday problems of street life. Drinking is one in-group strategy that homeless men can employ to work against the social-psychological impact of stigmatization (Anderson et al., 1994: 126).

The reasons the men in the sample reported for drinking were related to their present situation. At first glance the reasons seemed very personal and no major patterns emerged. However, upon closer analysis there were similarities. On a very general level, several of the men abused alcohol and/or drugs because they were trying to "deal" with something in their life.

The most common thread is that they drank to get away from their problems. These problems are specific to the individual, but in many cases they were trying to deal with low-self esteem, marital problems, and unemployment. One subject reported that he drinks to take the pressure off. Another subject said:

> I never really got in too much trouble until big marriage break-up when I had kids. I realized I drank for the same reasons when I was a teenager. You know just changes you. Like uh I don't know if I feel down on myself or not good enough or whatever. It just changes you. I don't get mean when I drink or it just get that euphoric feeling that then I want to keep it.

Unlike Snow and Anderson (1993), I did not observe drinking or taking drugs "out in the open" at the shelter. There was only one time when I observed men drinking in the laneway of the shelter. That is not to say that there were not instances where men drank on the property, just that during the time I spent in the field I did not observe a lot of drinking and/or drug abuse on the property.

More prevalent was men going out off the property to various city bars. It is impossible to come up with any kind of statistics, but there were several instances where I was told about people going out and coming back to the shelter drunk.

Snow and Anderson (1993) found that drinking increased the more time that someone spent on the street. This is not a finding that I can report. During my fieldwork I observed many men come and go. I was part of their lives on a daily basis for almost two months. What I found was that the men who did not drink when they arrived did not change their pattern the longer they stayed in the shelter. In other words, they all of a sudden did not start to drink heavily. There were many subjects (both that were interviewed and not interviewed) that told me that they did not drink. In these cases, they did not start just because they were living in the shelter.

As I discussed, there were frequent instances of men going to bars during the day or the evening. Some men did not drink when they did not have any money because they could not afford it. When they did get a cheque, some would go out and have a few drinks. Brendan, a 24 year unemployed factory worker who became depressed when he could not find a place to live said:

> . . . I would end up with an emergency cheque it would be
> $230. And then when you go looking around you can't
> usually get a place on $230. The next thing you know
> you'd be going over to a friend's with a bottle drink a
> bottle. There goes 20 bucks or 40 whatever it costs.

He adds that the reason why he drinks is: "Drinkin, sometimes drinkin makes you forget all your problems I guess."

There was also a core group of four or five men that would go out and rent a hotel room and party when one of them got a cheque. The two men behind this both were alcoholics before they arrived at the shelter, and both went on programs during my time in the field.

In conclusion, the general pattern in this sample with the men's perceptions as to why they drink is that drinking was connected with other aspects in their lives. Consuming alcohol seemed to help some men cope with the everyday problems before they became homeless, and after. However, I did not find any overwhelming evidence to suggest that the shelter experience in and of itself led a great number of men to increase their drinking and/or drug abuse.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse, like alcohol, has also been argued as a leading cause of homelessness for men (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Milburn, 1989). Drug abuse can lead men to lose their jobs, and with meagre resources they can quickly become homeless. Furthermore, drug abuse can also work in tandem with alcohol abuse to cause men to become homeless.

Two subjects believe that drug abuse was the most important reason they became homeless. In both cases, there was no obvious life stressor after which they began to abuse drugs. For one of them, drug abuse keeps him from getting off the street. As he reported:

> It keep me in this kind of life yeah. I always do the wrong things. I'm always... I always I'm too spontaneous. I'm too uh I always do the wrong decision. I know it's wrong but I always say fuck it. Because at the point I am now I'm at the point where almost given up. I don't want to give up but I'm at that point just across the red line.

In the other man's case, it does not keep him on the street because he is clean now.

There were two subjects in the sample who reported that both drugs and alcohol were the most important reason why they became homeless. In one case, there was a very important root cause, and in the other case, there was no obvious life stressor after which he began his substance abuse. In the past, both subjects were living on the streets for many years.

For one of the two, his pattern is that he would get a job and everything would go well until he began abusing drugs

71

and alcohol again, and he would quickly lose his job and become homeless.

The root cause of the other man's substance abuse was the death of his wife and two children. He told me how he quickly became homeless because he could not deal with this tragedy. He was literally homeless for 10 years living next to a garbage bin. He called himself "a laneway drunk and a laneway junkie." As he reported in our interview:

> I didn't want to face the fact that I was a widower and I didn't know who to talk to and who would give me an open ear that I could talk to about losing my daughter, my son, and my wife.

When I examined his story there did not seem to be a major history of substance abuse before his family was killed. He discussed how he had very good jobs and enjoyed a nice life before the tragedy. This event was the root of his life falling apart.

The results for drug abuse were similar to those for alcohol abuse. In many of the cases, alcohol and/or drug abuse were the main reason why they became homeless. For others there were precipitating factors that caused the men to begin drinking and/or taking drugs and thereby become homeless.

Mental Illness

Mental illness can play a major role in causing people to become homeless, or in maintaining their homelessness (Greenblatt, 1992; Calysn and Morse, 1992; Rossi, 1989b). There were several subjects living in the shelter who displayed schizophrenic symptoms. These men were not

72

interviewed because I felt that I would not have been able to gain much useful data from them. I made sure I interacted with them, but was unable to build any rapport. In most cases I was unable to carry on a conversation.

As a result, mental illness cannot be analyzed because I did not obtain a representative sample. Individuals with mental illness were underrepresented in the sample because those who displayed schizophrenic symptoms were difficult to interview. Also, it is possible that those who are classified as mentally ill have left the shelter. Consequently, I cannot make any inferences about mental illness and this sample.

Affiliation

The evidence is very strong in the literature that a lack of affiliation is a major issue in the homeless career of adult males (Crystal, 1994; La Gory et al., 1990; Rossi, 1989b). Burt (1992: 29) states that literal homelessness is the final step of a gradual process in which there is a loss of connection to family or friends who might help in a crisis. This research proved to be no different. Three dominant themes emerged.

The first theme to be discussed are men who lacked affiliation with anyone previous to coming to the shelter. These men were characterized by a total lack of affiliation with significant others. In the sample, there were 12 men who fit this category. Within this major category, there are several explanations. One subject became separated from his

73

wife and literally had no one else that could help him from becoming homeless. Three subjects landed in Canada from other countries, and had no family or friends who could take them in. They were instantly homeless in Canada.

Five of these twelve subjects had absolutely no one in their lives that were important to them that they were attached to. As a result, they had no support system to help them from landing on the street. Here is an exchange I had with one subject that demonstrates this:

Question-Who were the most important people in your life before you came to the shelter?
Answer-Nobody.

Question-You were on your own? You haven't had contact with your family?
Answer-No.

Question-Did anyone try and help you or give you any assistance before you had to come here after you got laid off?
Answer-Nope.

Question-Whose the most important person in your life right now?
Answer-I guess myself because there ain't nobody else in my life.

As this exchange demonstrates, when an individual does not have anyone in his life, when a crisis occurs there is no support for him and he quickly becomes homeless.

The second major theme within affiliation are the men who do have friends and family in their life but these affiliations are unable to help. This situation includes nine subjects. For one man, the most important people to him are his children. They are too young to be able to provide any kind of assistance to him. Four of the subjects reported that

74

the people they are attached to the most are currently living in another city and are unable to help due to this distance. Three of the subjects in this category reported that they do have family/friends but they are unwilling to request help. As Kyle commented:

> I wanted to do it by myself. I don't ask anybody to do anything for me. I always found it the right thing to do not to depend on anybody. Because all I've ever got was hurt by people I've depended on.

Finally, one subject had significant others that are unable to help him because they are in no economic position to do so.

The second group of men are the same as the first group except for the fact they do have important people in their lives. When they reached a crisis point in their lives they did not have anyone who was able to help them to overcome the crisis, and prevent them from landing in the shelter.

The third major category within affiliation are the men who have strong affiliation with significant others, and these others have provided help in the past. However, this help has since been exhausted. Nine men in the sample can be included in this category. This situation served to delay entry onto the street. The logical question is why can they not help the men now? There are several explanations.

One subject's family is unwilling to give further help. Three of the men want to get back on their feet without the help of anyone. One subject's family feels he is now old enough to take care of himself. He stated:

> Um they leave the responsibility to me now because I'm 24
> I had the opportunity to stay when I was 17 but I left so
> kinda left it like that. Basically I'm on my own.

One other subject received help in the past from a family member, but this individual is now in another city and can no longer provide assistance.

Finally, in this group of nine men, three subjects' significant others are no longer able to provide any form of financial assistance to them. In the case of these three men, they still receive emotional help from their family.

Justin states:

> My mom yup she was always encouraging whenever I talked
> to her. She says keep your spirits up you'll find
> something soon. ____ was a big help too he was always
> there for you to listen if I ever needed somebody to talk
> to.

One underlying factor should be reported. Several of the subjects reported that there are people they could ask, but they will not. They simply do not want to impose on family members and friends who have families of their own. The inconvenience they would cause would simply be too much.

There are those men who do not want their families to know that they are living in the shelter. Four men do not want their families to know because they have never been in this position before. One subject commented that he was always the one giving help to other people when they needed it and he has never been in this position before.

In summary, a lack of affiliation with significant others proved to be a very salient issue in many of the men's lives. A large number of men had no one in their lives before they became homeless. Others had people in their lives but they were unable to help for various reasons. Finally, there were other men who did receive assistance at some point, but this aid ceased for a variety of reasons.

Unemployment/Underemployment

Unemployment is a key issue when explaining how many men become homeless (Caton, 1990: 13; Rossi, 1989b: 134). Rossi (1989b: 134) claims that the homeless typically have not held steady jobs for several years. Calysn and Morse (1992: 122) discovered that in one study, 90% of the sample were unemployed. The reason these two areas are together is that they are directly related to each other, and therefore, should be discussed at the same time.

As has been the case with other causes of homelessness, unemployment is directly related to other issues in their lives. It can lead to alcohol abuse, or emerge as an effect of something like family problems. This section will analyze the data for the sample specifically looking at un/underemployment stressing the context.

When the data were analyzed to determine the role that un/underemployment had in the men becoming homeless four major themes emerged. The first theme is unemployment having no role in these men landing on the street. There were seven men

77

who were characterized by this. The reasons why they are homeless are different than issues of unemployment.

The second major group included 17 men where unemployment did play a role in them becoming homeless, but it was an effect of some other factor. These 17 men demonstrate that as with many of the subjects, there is more than one factor that contributes to them becoming homeless. On the surface level, it seems that they are homeless because of unemployment, but when their stories are analyzed in-depth, unemployment was an effect of some other issue in their lives.

For three of these eight men, unemployment was a result of alcohol abuse. Bucky states:

> Unemployment just ran out. No no that was the time before. Last year I was working. I've been on the program twice here. The 1st time I was here about 6 months on the program. Did what I had...did what they said for you to do. Get an apartment, get your start-up. Within a month I had resumes out all over and I got a job. I lasted there about uh 5 months in the summer. Then through a number of relapses I decided to come back on the program.

Two attribute their unemployment to drug abuse, two more suggest alcohol and drug abuse led to their unemployment. Finally, one out of the eight became unemployed when he landed in Canada from the United States.

There were five men in the sample who attributed unemployment as the only major reason why they are homeless. With these five individuals, there were no other major issues in their lives that pushed them onto the street.

78

Jack explains his situation:

> I lost my job well got laid off. And then ah just
> couldn't get another job for awhile. Just ended up back
> here. I couldn't afford a place. No job.

It is important to realize that unemployment is a major
issue for these men after they are in the shelter. When I
concluded my fieldwork, only eight of the thirty men were
employed in some capacity. If a man finds a job while living
in the shelter, usually it is characterized by low pay and
sporadic hours. A typical job of this nature in warmer
weather was roofing or some other type of construction work.
There were even a couple of men who pushed an ice cream cart
around town.

I observed on many occasions men working for a day or two
in a row then not working for several days. Of the eight men
who were just mentioned above, only two had full-time jobs
that would give them any kind of substantial income.

The pattern with this section of the data analysis
suggested that un/underemployment is a major issue in many of
the men's lives. However, there was not always a one-way
causation between unemployment and homelessness. Often times,
unemployment was directly associated with other factors.

Housing

A lack of affordable housing is a very important issue
when examining homelessness. Mallin (1987: 115) argues that
the availability of low-cost rental housing available for
shelter has been drastically reduced in Canada. Rossi (1989b)

79

and Burt (1992) argue that the growth of homelessness during the 1980's has, in large part, been attributed to problems with the housing market.

Contrary to the above research, the evidence was overwhelming in that it demonstrated that housing was not a cause in 25 of the 30 men becoming homeless. That is not to say that housing was not an issue at some point in their homeless career, because obviously if they are living in a homeless shelter they lost their housing at some point. But the reason(s) why these 25 men became homeless were due to some other cause.

For the vast majority of these 25 men, when they were working they were able to afford a place to live. It was only when some other event such as unemployment or death of a spouse that these men became homeless. This exchange demonstrates this finding:

Q-What do you think was the most important thing that caused
you to come here?
A-My son.

C-Your son.
A-'Cause if it wasn't for that I wouldn't be in here. I'd
still have my apartment. Yeah. It's been one helluva move.
But it was either that stay there keep living good or either
come down here and deal with my son. I came down here to deal
with my son. So that's why I'm here.

There was not one subject who reported that a lack of affordable housing was a major factor in them becoming homeless. Furthermore, five subjects reported a lack of affordable housing contributed to them becoming homeless. In these cases, they reported that they could not afford housing

because of too little income. In one subject's case, drug abuse contributed to his housing problems. The other 4 were on welfare and when they lost assistance, they landed on the streets. One subject described his situation with welfare this way:

> They (welfare) were giving me enough money it was just
> ... my cheque would be late or something and I'd have my
> landlord telling me he was going to destroy my credit or
> whatever or do this and that. That wasn't my fault so.
> Just being on welfare is like very frustrating and it
> takes a lot out of you. You can't even do the simplest
> things like a job search.

The evidence was overwhelming in this study that a lack of affordable housing was not a major issue in the men becoming homeless. This does not mean that it played no role, only that housing was tied to other issues. After they were living in shelter, a lack of affordable was only important factor as it related to other issues in their lives (for example unemployment).

Symbolic Interactionism and Homelessness

Definition of the Situation

A very important concept in Symbolic Interactionism is the "definition of the situation." Donald Ball (1972: 63) argues that the definition of the situation is the:

> . . . sum total of all recognized information, from the
> point-of-view of the actor, which is relevant to his
> locating himself and others, so that he can engage in
> self- determined lines of action and interaction.

The situations and actions that an individual takes are not constant. The way an individual defines one situation may not apply to another.

Defining the situation is also an interpretive process in terms of collective action. People indicate their interpretation of a situation not only to themselves, but to each other. The result from this interpretation is the emergence of group definitions of the situations. These interpretations are then employed to guide an individual's behaviour.

With homeless men, the group living in the shelter can define their situation collectively in terms of how they view each other. They also could have a collective interpretation of how society, professionals, and shelter workers view them. The way homeless men define their situation may or may not be different depending on whose point of view they are defining.

Perceptions of What Other Men Think

As part of the definition of the situation, I wanted to explore how the subjects viewed the other men. More importantly, I wanted to discover what they thought the other men thought about them. The key to this is that I am asking them to speculate on what the others think. The reason why it is speculation, is that very few if any of the men walk around the shelter asking the other guys what they think of them.

The key to this question is the answers are essentially the subjects own opinions of themselves, or their situation etc. When I analyzed their answers to this question, over and over they responded as to what they think of themselves, rather than what the other men view them as.

Before going in-depth, one aspect of the analysis has to be established. Because there are thirty subjects, and the answers are very subjective, the answers seemed on the surface to be quite different from the others. Even though the answers were varied, I came up with several *general* categories whereby similar answers were grouped together. The reason why this is necessary is that it is not feasible to describe thirty different answers, but if they are grouped under a generic heading, then it is easier to analyze the data.

Seven men reported that the others who stay at the shelter viewed them in a positive way. Three of the seven said they are liked by the other men, two said the others have respect for them, one said they view him as a gentleman because of the way he acts. Hank states:

> Other people I talk with they seem to get along with me so I would say they would like me.

Nova also replied:

> I would think they would at least respect that I am trying to work all the time. Going out and trying to come back all dirty and take a shower so they know I worked. A lot of people they look up to me they always come and talk to me.

The other subject said the other men view him as a quiet guy who does not cause any trouble. Three of the seven said that they did not care what the other guys thought, and then added their opinion on what they thought.

Four men reported that the others viewed them in a negative way. Two said they were viewed as obnoxious and arrogant because of the way they act. Jack states:

83

Probably arrogant I guess because of the way I am toward them. I'm not being arrogant on purpose. It's just I don't want to get involved with other people. Just stay in your space I'll stay in my space.

One said they think he is an idiot because he has given a lot of people "crap", and the final man said the others view him as competition for resources (jobs and housing).

The subject who reported they view him as arrogant said that they think this because he stays away from them all the time. He told me several times he thinks that he is better than them. The subject who said they view him as competition actually views them as competition, and simply viewed himself in this way.

There were five subjects who said they did not care what the others thought of them. As Jackson states:

To put it simply I don't give 2 damns what they view me. I have to take care of myself. Right now I'm trying to take care of myself and another person to get a 16 year old kid out of here.

Four of the five did not provide any information beyond this comment. The fifth subject said they probably view him as a "prick" because he is a loner.

Six subjects reported that they did not know what the other men thought of them. However, like the category above, four were able to offer an opinion about what they would think. Two men added that the others have a positive opinion of them. One said they had a negative opinion of him and the fourth simply said that they were similar to him because they are all there for the same reason (to get back on their feet).

Two subjects were even more extreme by reporting that they did not know what the others thought of them, and they did not care what they thought of them. This is important because in both cases, they did not offer an opinion on what the others might think of them. Two subjects reported that the others viewed them as outsiders. One was an outsider because he was American and did not know the area or relate to the men. The other man presented himself in a positive light.

The last group of men (four) were those who gave unique answers that did not fit into any generic category. These four did have one common thread though (which in large part explains why they are unique). All four gave an answer that was a direct reflection on their situation.
Here is an example:

> Uh just as someone whose stuck, stuck in a cycle. 'Cause
> a lot of them have been here long too and they notice I
> keep coming back and getting out.

When you analyze this answer in the context of his entire interview, this theme of being stuck was very important for this subject.

There are 3 major categories or patterns that were revealed. Several subjects expressed either positive or negative comments about the other men in the shelter. A positive comment was that they were liked by the other men in the shelter and that they were respected. Examples of negative comments are that the men are arrogant or obnoxious.

Others reported that they did not know and/or care what the others thought of them. However, they usually did offer an opinion of how they perceived the other men viewed them. Finally, four men commented directly on their own situation. For example, one man commented how they viewed him as someone who is stuck in a cycle because he keeps leaving and coming back.

Perceptions of the Other Men

Another important part of the subjects' definition of their situation is how they view the other men that stay at the shelter. Again, there are potentially a number of answers because there were a very large number of men staying at the shelter at any given time. In fact, this is exactly what happened. In a large number of the men's answers, they provided more than one view on the men that they were living with.

The first and most prevalent category, are the men who viewed other residents in a negative way. Fourteen different subjects reported they had a negative view. Five of these fourteen were critical of the men who did not go out and look for work. Other subjects regarded the men as selfish because they tried to con other residents.

The most severe criticism came from a young man travelling from another country. He exclaimed:

> I think they're just a bunch of horribly materialistic people and have no discipline. I think some of them are psychopaths to be quite honest.

Not all of the men's opinions were this extreme, but there certainly were a significant number of subjects who were critical of the other men in the shelter.

Ten subjects gave a positive opinion of the other men. Two viewed them as human beings and should be treated as humans and not animals. Four of the ten said that the other guys were pretty "good", three said that they liked some of the other men, and one said that some of the guys were "o.k." Half of these had negative comments about the other men in the shelter.

The next largest group of men (9) stated that they believed that the other men in the shelter had their own problems that they had to deal with. There was the perception amongst this group of nine that the other guys must have pretty "bad" problems to end up in the shelter. It was interesting to discover that in all nine cases, they did not take the opportunity to speculate on what the other men's problems actually were. Hammie explains his view as:

> Everybody has their problems. Some of them I don't understand some of them. Like driving a truck seeing what they do. I see their little routine. They go to the whatchmacallit and then come back here. Can't get a job that way. I don't know what the reasons are.

A common theme throughout the various sections of the interview is the opinion that a lot of the people staying at the shelter are comfortable living there, and have no desire to leave. Eight subjects expressed sentiments such as this

when asked how they viewed the other men. A typical response
was like this one:

> I just think some guys they do stay here because they get
> taken care of in a way. Because they don't really have to
> cook, they don't have to do dishes. They don't, to them
> it's a less of hassle they can live here and just like go
> look for a job or whatever.

The shelter that was studied was supposed to be only for
adult males. However, there were no facilities for teenage
boys in the city. Therefore the boys simply were mixed with
the adult men. Although I did not observe any problems, there
were a large number of men who felt that they did not belong
in the shelter with them. Six subjects in the sample made
reference to this.

Two subjects reported that they viewed the other
subjects' as being similar to them. They both felt that their
situation and the situations of the other men were very
similar. Opposite to this, two men who felt that they did not
relate to the other men. For one of the two, he is not
interested because he is older than most of the others. The
other subject said that in part, he did not relate to the
other men because he was from another country and did not seem
to share a lot of the other men's views.

When answering what they thought about the other men,
several subjects' answers fit into more than one category.
Twenty four subjects responded in either a negative or
positive manner. Several subjects responded they had their
own problems and were not concerned with the other men. The

final major pattern included a group of men who commented that the other men did not want to leave and did nothing to get themselves out of the situation.

Present Situation

In this section, to discover subjective opinions I asked the men what they thought of their situation in the shelter. When the data were analyzed for this question, five themes emerged. One subject who made no report.

Sixteen respondents reported that they did not like their situation and they wanted to get out of the shelter into their own place. One of the most telling responses was from Timmie, a 28 year old university graduate:

> I hate it. Well gettin up at 7 or 6:30 whatever walking the streets all day, people treating you like fuckin dog meat. Well just everybody thinks yer I don't know like some of the desk clerks and stuff you're in the hostel you're garbage.

There were six subjects who viewed their present situation as a positive experience or situation. For example, one subject wanted to learn from his experience and apply the lessons to his future. Another who had a job and was moving out in the very near future commented:

> I think it's o.k. I think my mind... my mind's telling me everything's going to be all right now for a long time. I got a job, go to school at the U in September, got a place, got my girlfriend, might have a kid.

Two subjects felt trapped or "stuck" in their present situation. One felt he would not be able to do anything about his situation until he received some form of income. The other already had a place and a job and simply had to wait for

a few days until he took possession of his housing and received a paycheque. Regardless of either situation, it was extremely frustrating for them to have to wait until they can put their plans into action.

Two subjects viewed the shelter as a temporary stop in their life and were very upbeat about their chances to get out of the shelter very quickly. There were three subjects who responded that they accepted their situation as it was. For two of the three, they feel life in the homeless shelter is what is in store for them. The third subject accepts the fact that he is in the shelter and he has to live there until he can get himself out.

The major pattern that was revealed in this section was the subjects either being positive or negative about their present situation. In fact, there were more men in the sample who had negative feelings about the shelter than positive. Many of the subjects expressed frustration with their circumstances and expressed a desire to leave the shelter.

Perceptions About the Shelter

In this section, opinions and thoughts about the shelter will be discussed. This was not a formal question but in the context of the interview 19 of the 30 men commented directly about the shelter. The other eleven men who did not directly comment certainly alluded to the shelter in other parts of their interview (such as their present situation).

Seven subjects were glad that the shelter was there for them and the other guys. They were happy and appreciative that they had somewhere to go where they could receive help and assistance.

Four subjects had other positive comments about the shelter. Two of the four expressed that the shelter did a good job of keeping drugs and rulebreakers under control. One subject said:

> They got a good they got kinda like good services how they when you 1st come in and you need to live er live to need a place to stay they usually write you in for the certain amount of days to give you enough time to try to get social services or get yourself a job. It's pretty good. I find it pretty fair actually the way they run the place.

The last group of men (six) were very critical of the services that the shelter provides. These were not low-level complaints such as cold food or a terrible smell in the dorm. These criticisms were more harsh. Three of the six subjects said that the shelter was not there to help the poor. For example, one of these three felt that there was no motivation or incentive provided by the shelter for the men so they could leave.

One subject was critical that there were no laundry facilities available. One other subject believes that the drug and alcohol program that the shelter provides does not have enough counselling for the men. He feels that the counselling that is provided is inadequate, and that when the

men finish the program they have not received enough help to work through their problems.

The final two subjects of this group of six men were very critical of the way the shelter handles the finances of the men. They both felt that the shelter staff should do more with the men's finances so they can get out of the shelter quicker. Hans, who was perhaps the most critical of everybody expressed his opinion this way:

> I'm developing a very negative opinion of the (shelter) here. I feel they're not doing anything at all to help people. It's not about that anymore. It's turned into more uh money making proposition. You know like they're holding these guys out to other people. This is you know what we're dealing with and we need money.
>
> And that's not what. What I would have thought this place would be about. Like if they truly genuinely cared about people the guys in here. They wouldn't take the money and put 'em in bank accounts and you know collect interest. They'd set-up accounts in escrow for guys that are in programs are going to be out. So they have something to start with. They just throw in programs and take their money and then you know put a ludicrous little graduation ceremony and you know you're going to be all better.

The majority of the subjects gave a negative or positive perception about the shelter. The majority of the subjects whom answered this question had positive comments about the shelter. They expressed sentiments such as being glad the shelter was there for them when they needed it. Other subjects' comments were negative. For example, some men felt that they shelter did not provide incentive for the men to leave the shelter.

92

Perceptions of Other Men's Thoughts About The Shelter

This section will examine what the men believe the other men in the shelter think about the hostel. These answers were based on their perception, and consequently, reveal their opinions and thoughts as well as what they think the other men think about the shelter.

In every other section of the data analysis, each response fit into one category (either with other men who had similar answers or their own individual category). This trend does not apply to this section because the men often gave several different opinions which fit into different categories or themes. When you count the number of subjects reporting in each theme, the total will be over 30.

Three subjects reported that they do not know what the other men think about the shelter. They took the question literally and answered without elaborating more. One of the three was even adamant about pointing out that he did not know, and did not care. He comments:

> Don't know, don't care. I really don't care what they think, what they do. You know I don't care. I have no idea, I don't really care.

Four subjects reported that some men like it at the shelter. One of these said that most men like it at the shelter because they have been there for a long time. He argued that because they did not demonstrate any desire to leave the shelter, they must like it.

Eight subjects believed that the other men hate it in the shelter. One subject out of the eight believes that the other men hate it because they are ashamed to be there. A further common answer was that the men hate the strict rules, the food, curfew, the smell and anything else they can think of. One subject told me that:

> I hear them talk. Like some of them don't like this place at all. They consider it a death sentence almost right. Others they don't really like it but they're here they end up staying here like they give you meals and whatever else and they think it's all right. Most of them think you know they hate it.

Now the categories begin to widen. Four subjects reported that some men like it, and some men hate it. They did not narrow themselves to one category. Again subjects discussed how some do not like the rules and the smell. One subject even said that when the guys have money the hostel could go to hell. He added when they are broke, they like the shelter because they would be sleeping on the street if it was not there.

Four subjects reported that the other men want to get out. These subjects gave opinions of what they think of the other guys instead of what they believe about the shelter. J.D. demonstrates this point:

> They want to get out. At the same time a lot of them are trapped in their own cycle. They live here they don't have to take responsibility. They can sort of panhandle each other try and get by.

94

One subject said that the guys do not know what they think. One day they think one thing, another day they think something else. One subject gave no report.

Two subjects said that the others guys do not want to work because they feel secure at the shelter and lack the motivation to get a job. Two subjects felt that the only thing that the other guys care about is their cheque. Once they receive their cheque, they go out to drink and party. Their main concern while staying there is not about working or finding a place to live, it is literally waiting day-to-day to receive a welfare cheque.

Two subjects thought the others viewed the shelter as a stopover place where they could think and get their gameplan in place. The following passage expresses this outlook:

> Well some people see it as a weigh station to other things. I have to stay here until I get my place or get my job. Or I have to stay here until I get my place while I'm working you know whatever. Some people see it and I'm part of that as a place to stay and free food. You know what the hell. You know, could care less about moving on.

> A lot of people walk in with that opinion but that changes as they're here. You know, you get sick and tired of the place. Um I don't know it's well whatever the case it's a stepping stone for your life. Whether it's on the way down or on the way up. Quite often both are the case. It's a place to stop and think.

Finally, four subjects discussed how the men get used to living in the shelter. They do not have to take any responsibility and/or care for themselves so they end up staying. The following comment demonstrates this point:

I think some of them become accustomed to it. You know
they get so used to being here that they make this their
way of life. They don't really want to help themselves.
They think as long as I have this place I'm o.k. I might
as well let them take care of me instead of taking care
of myself.

The pattern for this section of the data demonstrated

that the subjects often had more than one opinion. They often

commented that some men like it in the shelter, some did not

like it etc. There were a wide range of answers in that many

subjects generally suggested that the other men in the shelter

had positive and/or negative opinions about the shelter

environment.

A common negative opinion was that the men hate the

strict rules, the food, curfew, and the smell. A positive

comment revolved around the belief that the other men must

like it in the shelter because they keep coming back. Other

subjects reported that the other men want to get out of the

shelter. Finally, several subjects discussed how the men

either get used to living in the shelter or use it as a

stopover place.

Presentation of the Self

At the very heart of this research is the desire to study

how the men in the shelter present themselves in their daily

lives (Goffman, 1959). Individuals present themselves to

others according to the identities that they have for

themselves.

Goffman (1959: 1-2) argued that when people interact,

what they say and do makes a difference to others so they can

"figure" them out and act towards them accordingly.
Therefore, people strive to act in a way that will influence
the way others will think of them. Goffman's perspective is
called "dramaturgical," which for him means that interaction
is like a staged drama where actors act out roles on a stage.

Like many of the other questions, several themes emerged
in the subjects answers. The largest category (12) were the
men who felt that they acted the same towards everyone.

Six subjects reported that when the are interacting with
people in the general public, they will be polite and talk to
them if necessary. They were careful not be rude to them.
They also noted that they would not necessarily seek out any
conversations with anybody, unless the situation warranted it,
or someone approached them. One subject stated:

> I've had people say hi but they say hi 1st. I don't
> really go out to talk to people. I mean I won't be rude
> if somebody talks to me.

Four subjects made reference to their appearance when
asked how they present themselves to nonhomeless people. In
all four cases, they tried to dress so people would not guess
that they were staying at the shelter. One subject commented:

> Well I think um I try not to look like a bum. I
> try to keep myself reasonable well presentable. I
> think unless people you know really get to know me
> they wouldn't believe that I would be staying here.

This quote shows that this subject has an image of what a
homeless "bum" would dress like. Another subject was even
more concerned about his dress when discussing how he presents
himself:

Uh I'll be friendly. Um I don't put myself below them
necessarily because I'm here. Um in fact I try dress
beyond this place. The way I dress is pretty much my
only expression, my only rebellion of who or where I am.
So I will dress, people who say you're dressed up today,
no I'm not. I'm like this because I feel like dressing
up. For me this isn't even dressing up.

Wearing clothing as a disidentifier is an out-group
technique that the men used to reduce the potential to be
stigmatized as homeless. Goffman (1959) in *The Presentation
of Self in Everyday Life* would call this deliberate impression
management. The men are consciously trying to convey to
nonhomeless people the impression that they are not homeless.

Three subjects did not provide any report as to how they
present themselves to other people. Two subjects did not know
how they present themselves. As one of the two stated:

You know I don't know. I don't know I don't find too
much difference but except for a little bit of attitude
of this place.

Two subjects said that they acted indifferently toward
nonhomeless people. Both alluded to the fact that they act
this way to avoid the chance of having the other people
discover that they were living in the shelter.

Finally, one subject reported that he was drawn toward
nonhomeless people. He commented that he likes to be around
them so he can be encouraged by them leading a normal life.
When he talked to them, he wanted to find out how they
achieved the things they did, and more importantly, how they
kept them.

98

There were 23 subjects in this sample that presented themselves the same to nonhomeless people as they would to other homeless people. The men reported that they did significantly alter they way they interact with nonhomeless people just because they were living in a shelter. They were trying to convey the impression that they were not homeless.

Definition of the Self

The self is an object that the actor acts toward (Charon 1995: 68). The development of the self is a creative and spontaneous process, governed by free will and it emerges through social interaction. The self is not passive, the individual can choose to accept, reject, or modify certain stimuli during social interaction. Charon (1995: 68-69) argued that the self has the form of a social object that is changed as it is defined and redefined during the process of interaction.

Applying this idea to homeless men, their selves do not remain static. Their selves can be redefined when they go on the street, when they come into contact with professionals, and as they spend more time in the shelter. Their selves can even be redefined when coming into contact with a graduate student conducting research. They can define themselves differently depending upon whom they are interacting with. It is this theoretical tenet of symbolic interactionism that I wanted to test when I asked them if they thought they had changed at all from living in the shelter.

Once I began to interview the subjects, I realized that I was missing an important question. That is, has living in the shelter changed them at all. This is an important question because it delves into their interpretation as to whether being homeless has changed their "self", or more generally how has the experience impacted them. I did not start asking this question until the sixth interview. Two subjects did not provide an answer for this question so 23 men in the sample provided responses.

The largest category included seven men who said that landing in the shelter provided a "reality check" for them. These men realized how far they had fallen and what their future would be like if they did not get out of the shelter. They were able to look at their lives and see what they lost, and experience what could happen when one becomes homeless. Bennie, a 32 year old divorced father of one, sums up this change:

> Uh my idea of staying here is it's my reality check. People might think that's crazy but uh sometimes uh people tend to get full of themselves and figure that uh oh nothing can ever hurt them. Or you know uh something like that. Me staying here it's my reality check. Like uh you know maybe I haven't got all of it that I want yet. You know.

Carmine, a 27 year old man, expressed his opinion this way:

> And uh every experience changes you. Sure this has changed me. It's made me realize what I can live without. It's made me realize how much I don't want to live without it.

There were six subjects who remarked that staying at the shelter had not changed them at all. One resident commented:

I don't really think it's changed me. Not in any fundamental way.

Four of these six had been in situations like this before, so it was not really a "big deal" to them. The other two subjects in this group had not been there long enough for anything to change inside them, and one commented that a couple weeks there would not hurt anybody.

Five subjects suggested that staying in the shelter was a learning experience for them. All five realized they lost what they had before. As Whitey states:

Yeah definitely. Prior to being homeless I had everything I wanted. Everything. I had a good home, food on the table, friends. I was taking it all for granted. Losing it all and living on the streets and in hostels you really learn to appreciate it. You learn that it's (housing) essential in your life in order to be happy.

They have also learned about what living on the street was like because they had never experienced it before.

Two subjects commented that staying in the shelter has meant a positive change for them. One of them is an 18 year old man who said that he was getting into a lot of trouble before he became homeless. Since he has come to the shelter, he has been following the rules and trying to change his life by staying out of trouble. The other subject, a 41 year old drifter, said that living in the shelter has calmed him down and enabled him to line up a job and a place to live. He

looked at this as a positive because he has been drifting around North America for a few years.

Two subjects gave their opinion of how the shelter has changed them, but their report does not fit into any general category. One of the two stated the longer he stayed in the shelter the more he felt he was like the bums. The second man reported that staying in the shelter has made him more defensive and overprotective of his personal belongings. He has lent things out in the past, and they were never returned the items.

One subject that reported that living in the shelter (and in his case being literally homeless for many years in the past) had completely changed who he was. He said how he relates to other people has completely. This exchange demonstrates this fundamental alteration of his self:

Q-Do you think staying here or being on the street has changed you at all?
A-Oh yeah.

Q-How so?
A-Your outlook on things. Like my accident when I fell the 68 feet. Your whole outlook on life around you and your thinking is completely changed. But before the your way of being, your self is different than if you were just if you were away from the street and you were never on it. Especially when being on the street is one thing, but when you're on it 24 hours and it's your home.

C-Yeah.
A-Uh there's a big change in you. Approaching people. Uh talking with people completely different than like but that's individual. How bad dropping down.

C-Uh huh.
A-Like me I was fortunate. I never let it get me down that far. But I still had to admit hey I'm a junkie and I'm a drunk. I'll be that until I die.

This exchange brings back the issue of the core self and whether it changes or remain static. It is reasonable to argue that this individual feels that he has changed drastically due to his homelessness.

When analyzing the answers of the other subjects, the pattern of their answers revealed that who they "are" was not fundamentally changed. In other words, the results demonstrated that the subjects selves were not fundamentally changed due to the shelter experience. However, the other seventeen subjects who commented that living in the shelter had changed them from one degree to another. For example, one subject became more protective of his belongings because of his shelter experiences. Another subject stated that the longer he stayed in the shelter the more he related to the "bums."

Reference and Membership Groups

The concept of a reference group was refined by Tamotsu Shibutani (1955). Reference groups are:

> any identifiable group whose supposed perspective is used by the actor as a frame of reference in the organization of his perceptual field (Charon, 1995: 30).

Reference groups are groups that an individual psychologically identifies with. Membership groups (Sherif and Sherif, 1956: 176-177) are the groups that a person actually belongs to. In this study, the men's main membership group were the other homeless men living in the shelter. The reference group that

an individual psychologically identifies with may be different from their membership group.

The men may identify with their friends/family, or possibly with an occupational group they used to belong to. Interestingly enough, one does not have to be a member of a group to share a perspective with that group; the reference group can be real or imaginary. The important part is the real or imagined meaning that this reference group has for the individual.

Several categories emerged when membership groups were analyzed. The two questions that were asked in this section were: Who do you associate with the most? and Who do you think you are most similar to in the shelter? The underlying theory behind this is that people whom they associate with (just for social contact) may not be the same people that they feel they are most like. In other words, their reference group is not necessarily the same as their membership group (the group they actually belong to).

I felt they would tell me a lot about their personality by the type of people who they reported they were similar to. The reasoning is that an individual is not going to feel similar to someone whom they do not relate to. By telling me who they feel they are similar to, they could be telling me what they are like.

104

Five subjects reported that they did not associate with anyone in the shelter and that they were not like anyone else. An exchange with Rondell:

Q-Who do you think you most associate with?
A-I don't.

Q-You don't.
A-The only time I'm around is when I come down here to go to bed. Eat meals, out, go to bed, out.

Q-During the day you're mostly by yourself?
A-Yeah.

Q-Who do you think you're most like that stays here?
A-To be honest with you nobody.

Two subjects reported that they mostly associate with the shelter staff, and that they were most similar to the shelter staff. There were three other men who associated with other people than the staff, but they felt that they were most similar to the staff.

There was a group of three men who spent all their time together away from the other men. This pocket of subjects were all very similar to each other in their attitudes, background and ages. The three of them ended up gravitating to each other. They reported that they associate with each other, and they are like each other.

According to them all three do not belong in the shelter. They felt that they were going to be leaving the shelter very quickly, and they wanted to associate with people who are motivated and have goals. Sparkie sums up why he relates to them:

> Basically it's just ____ and uh ____ that's it. Like I
> knew ____'s family in _____ when I lived there. You
> know for those couple of years. They're good people.
> ____ 'cause he's the type of guy he don't belong in here
> either. You know some people you talk to you can see
> they have no business... you know they're not settling
> for this.

The general pattern of the results demonstrated that in many of the cases, the men associated with people who were different from the men they reported they were most like. Three men were found to associate with different people than they reported they were like. Four men said that they associated with certain people, but were not like anyone else that stayed in the shelter. Finally, eight subjects reported that they associated with people in the shelter who they felt were most like them.

Street Friendships

There can be a difference between the people whom the men associate with and those whom they feel they are most like. This issue was followed up by asking if they felt they had "friends" in the shelter. I did not provide a definition of friendship for them, because I wanted to rely on their perception of what friendship is.

I wanted to see if they felt they had friends in the shelter, because this can be an indication of the extent that they have related to people in the shelter. Furthermore, if they felt that they had friends then this would show that they were not totally trying to "distance" themselves from the role of being homeless.

106

Friendships on the street are tenuous due to the transient nature of the population. Some men spent days and weeks together and then one of them would leave and they would never hear from that person again. With men coming and going all the time, it can be very difficult to establish trusting friendships. Nine subjects reported that they did not have friends in the shelter. They only had acquaintances. A typical attitude was expressed by this subject:

> Not close friends but you know just uh acquaintances, amiable people. . . . You know I don't take them too seriously because I know I might not ever see them again."

Another man expressed a similar sentiment:

> . . . I think I probably won't see them after I leave here and if I do it will be like just passing on the street kind of thing. I don't really think once I leave here it's going to turn into anything.

It takes time to build friendships and trust, and that they have not had enough time to do that yet. Fred, a 42 year old told me:

> I don't know anybody that well. To me friendship is something you know that it takes time to build on. I don't know anybody here that well.

Five subjects reported that they are not friends with anyone at all. They did not mention if they felt that they had acquaintances. Based on my own observations, two of the four were very much loners, and the other two did associate with other men on a consistent basis. The reasons they gave for not building friendships were that they needed more time to build friendships.

The largest group of men (16) felt they did have friends in the shelter. In all but two cases, these friends were people whom they met after they arrived at the shelter. Skippie comments:

I consider some of them friends. If I can get along with them and uh they get along with me, help me out, I help them out as much as I can.

When I analyzed the reasons why they felt these people were friends, one major theme emerged. Fifteen of the sixteen men, reported they related to or had something in common with the other person.

The majority of the subjects felt that they had at least acquaintances in the shelter. They were not always "best" friends with the other men, but the majority had at least a few people that they associated with.

In-Group Strategies

Public Library

Anderson et al. (1994) draw on the work of Goffman (1961b, 1963) describing two broad categories of stigma management strategies the homeless develop and use in their interactions with other people. Three common in-group strategies used by homeless men to stave off the psychological impact of stigmatization: drinking, cheap entertainment, and hanging out (Anderson et al., 1994: 126). Examples of cheap entertainment are paperback novels and going to a public library. Except for drinking, I found ample evidence in both my fieldwork and interviews to back up this assertion.

Many of the men living in the shelter spend time at the library. Going to the library is an excellent activity for the men to engage in because it gets them off the street so they do not have to be exposed to the elements. It is also an excellent way of "killing" time until they walk back to the shelter for lunch.

An overwhelming theme with these men is "killing" time. They are extremely bored and have so much time in front of them, that they have to find something to do to fill in this time. As one man commented:

> It's extremely boring you haven't got anything to do. The best choice is always the library. You're on the streets from 8 o'clock in the morning and you don't do anything. You've got nothing to do but walk around.

Contrary to the evidence reported by Anderson et al. (1994), there was not overwhelming evidence to indicate that the men drink alcohol as a form of entertainment. Five subjects mentioned that alcohol was part of their activities or entertainment. However, the reason they drink was very similar to Snow and Anderson (1993). They drink to provide an escape or release from the daily grind of being homeless. When I asked one subject why he drinks he responded: "Uh you need a release once in awhile."

There is the perception in larger society that homeless men sit around on street corners drinking all day. I did not observe very much alcohol use amongst the majority of the men. Many of these men spend their time during the day doing the

same kinds of activities that nonhomeless people engage in.

Hanging Out

Other men remain at the shelter "hanging around" outside socializing, playing cards, reading etc. This is not the largest percentage of the men, but there are enough that it is noticeable. Snow and Anderson (1994: 127) argue that hanging out allows the men to have a support network of street friendships. They can spend time with a group which will not stigmatize them, and the group gives them a source of interpersonal validation (Anderson et al., 1994: 128).

During the time I spent in the field, there were two main cliques or groups that emerged. One group had several men at various times and the other group had a core of three men. In both groups, they discussed the theme of socializing and sharing resources when they were together. A typical comment was similar to this one: "Well when I'm playing cards it's to socialize with other people."

Related to the socializing aspect, there were several subjects who emphasised this theme of friendship and looking out for one another. A typical attitude is "everybody helps everybody." I mentioned a group of three men that spent much of their time together. One of them named Delroy, best expressed their attitudes when he told me what the three of them do while they hang around the shelter:

> . . . (we) just sit around and talk that's it. We talk about places uh pass some information on about jobs. Just trying to get some connections get some ideas how the system works I've never been on the system. So I

talk about that. Places to live. I bumped into when I
walk around I see a whole bunch of places so I pass it
on.

These social networks allow the men to share information with
each other and by providing companionship, they have a support
network which can allow them to better deal with the stress of
being homeless.

The pattern strongly demonstrated that the subjects in
this sample engaged heavily in two of the three in-group
strategies discussed by Anderson et al. (1994: 126). The men
spent much time at the public library. Many of the subjects
also spent time "hanging out" to pass the time. The only in-
group strategy that was not extensively observed was drinking.

Activity Avoidance

Related to in-group strategies, the subjects were asked
if there were any activities that they were specifically
avoiding. Eight subjects reported that they were not avoiding
anything. The general attitude is that if they wanted to do
something then they were going to do it. One subject stated:

No if I want to do something I'm gonna do it. You know
I mean regardless I'm here I'm gonna do it.

Due to the context of each interview, nine subjects did not
report directly on this question.

Thirteen subjects reported they avoided some type of
activity on purpose. Out of the thirteen, two were avoiding
getting into another relationship. Both felt that they were
not at the point in their life where they could handle a

111

relationship with someone else. Six of the thirteen were avoiding drugs and/or alcohol. Terry reports:

> Um well I'm not drinking or smoking up while I'm here. 'Cause um I know like I can't afford it I'm trying to get out of here. I quit smokin pot completely. But if I had money I would drink once in awhile. Party a little bit.

One was avoiding gambling, two were avoiding crime or getting into trouble, one was purposefully not looking for work, and the last of the thirteen was avoiding playing cards because he felt it was a poor way to kill time. The underlying theme for most of these thirteen subjects is that they were avoiding activities that prevented them getting back on their feet.

Two main patterns emerged in the activity avoidance section of the interview. Several subjects reported that they were not avoiding anything on purpose. They felt they would do anything they wanted. A larger number of the men were avoiding some activity. The reasons why they avoiding activities are varied. The underlying theme is that they are not engaging in activities that would prevent them from leaving the shelter.

Out-Group Strategies

The first major out-group strategy that the homeless men use to reduce the impact of being stigmatized as homeless is called passing. Passing essentially means that they try and "pass" themselves off as nonhomeless. If they can make people believe that they have a domicile, then they can avoid being stigmatized as homeless.

The second out-group strategy is the alternative to passing is covering. When the man covers, he is openly admitting his status as a homeless person. The result of this admission is to reduce the impact of their status. There are two ways they can do this. The first is by verbally casting themselves in a positive light. The other is to deflect attention from their status by the use of props.

The third out-group stigma management strategy is defiance. Defiant behaviours are actions and verbalizations that are meant to reject humiliating moral assaults or ridicule. Goffman (1961a) observed that defiance may be "open" or "contained." Open defiance is overt and directly confrontational, while contained defiance is a more subtle and covert expression of anger. Both types of defiance are meant to deal with humiliating encounters or situations.

The last out-group strategy is collective action which is employed to overcome material deprivations/powerlessness, and neutralize their stigma (Anderson et al., 1994: 136). With the help of the nonhomeless and organizations, the homeless have been able to protest against their situation. Collective action results in a sense of empowerment, positive group identity (Wagner and Cohen, 1991), and what Foss and Larkin (1986) have referred to as "disalienation" (Anderson et al., 1994: 138).

Passing and Covering

I choose to approach this issue by asking the men if they were open or admit to other people that they were homeless, or did they choose to hide it from other people. I had to analyze the area of covering with this question and by direct observation. If the men used props I would be able to view this activity. It would be difficult for me to ask them if they cast themselves in a positive light.

Three main themes emerged. In the first theme, subjects reported that they were open with some people but they would hide their status with others (nine men). The reason that men want to hide their status is that they want to avoid the stereotype or stigma of being homeless. This is a very important result because this shows that in some situations, the men are interested in reducing the stigma of being homeless. Ron explains why he is open with his family:

> I think it's o.k for them to know. Um difference is because they like they know more about it they understand how I got here and what like I went through. That I didn't just like like some just easy slip staying at the _____ _____ they won't see the part of how you got there what you went through. Troubles I've had.

In the second theme, thirteen subjects reported that they are open with everyone about their status as a homeless man. For example, two subjects said that they were not ashamed of where they were at. One of the two stated:

> If they ask me where I live I'll tell them. I'm not ashamed of where I live. It's my fault for being here all the things I've done to get here.

114

In the third theme, seven subjects reported that they hide the fact they are homeless. These individuals reported that they were not open with anyone. One subject told me this:

> I don't want nobody to know I'm stayin here. You know 'cause like I said you know you leave a job making you know close to 45,000 a year you leave your house and everything and stuff come down to something like this. Would you want to me to tell anybody that you live here?

In all seven of these cases, each subject was concerned that if they were open about being homeless then they would be stereotyped and judged by other people before they even had a chance to prove themselves. Here is an exchange that I had with one subject that demonstrates this opinion:

Q-Do you openly admit to people outside of the shelter that you're staying there?
A-No.

Q-Why? Do you try and hide it?
A-Yeah.

Q-Why do you try and hide it?
A-Well it's not socially acceptable.

Q-To be staying there?
A-Yeah you tell them that people be already have an opinion formed about you so you're sort of labelled after that.

Defiance

Each subject in the sample was asked if they ever got angry with someone outside of the shelter who did not have anything to do with the shelter, or that treated them in a way that they did not like or appreciate. Twenty four subjects reported that they did not experience any anger towards anyone from the public.

115

Six subjects became angry while living at the shelter. Two of the six were angry at someone working at the shelter, while the other four became angry at another resident or a nonhomeless person. In the following scenario, a subject was playing baseball and was not allowed to take his uniform home. As a result, he felt discriminated against:

> Because I stay here I can't take my uniform home. Everybody else gets to take their uniform home. I can't just 'cause I stay at the (shelter). I thought that was a real blow, a real low blow. I say to myself I can't understand why. They must have their reason I don't know. They just don't know me as an individual. I just took it as an insult.

Collective Action

The fourth out-group strategy is collective action. In the city that was studied, there was no advocacy groups that acted on behalf of the men. Furthermore, the men did not come together to fight for their rights. The out-group strategies that the men employed had nothing to do with collective action on each other's behalf.

There were three main patterns revealed when analyzing the out-group strategies of the sample. A group of men reported they were open about their status with some people but hid it with others. Other subjects reported they were open with everyone. Finally, a small number of subjects reported they hid their status with other people.

There was little evidence to suggest that the men engaged in open or contained defiance toward nonhomeless people. There was also no evidence to demonstrate any collective action by the sample or by other people.

Identity Talk

Snow and Anderson (1987: 1347) argue that homeless men engage in identity talk. Identity talk is verbal construction and assertions of personal identities which is their primary form of "identity work" of which homeless street people construct and negotiate personal identities.

Distancing is one form of identity talk whereby homeless men do not associate with other homeless men. Snow and Anderson (1987) argue that distancing reduces the stigmatization of being homeless because the men concentrate on "staying away" from the other men. By staying away from them, they can avoid a negative self-worth because they see themselves as different from other homeless men.

Perceived Reasons for Staying Away From Other Men

I asked the men if they stayed away from the other men when they first arrived at the shelter. I followed up by asking them if they still stayed away from the other men to examine change over time.

The results show that 14 men, as time passed, began to get a sense of the others and began to associate with certain people. For example, an eighteen year old subject told me that he had to figure out who the trouble makers were so he

117

could stay away from them. He wanted to stay straight from

then on. The following is a telling exchange:

Q-When you first came to this place, did you try and stay away
from the other guys at all?
A-Not really because I knew a few people.

Q-You knew a few people?
A-And then they know people. So that helped me out in a way
too.

C-What about now?
A-Some people I like to stay away from now that I know the
trouble makers and stuff like that I'll stay away from them.

They made a choice of who they wanted to be around. They

based this decision on men whom they felt they had something

in common with, or they could relate to. As you can see, this

section is directly related to the discussion of who the men

associate with, and who they felt they were like.

Ten subjects reported that when they first arrived at the

shelter, they did not stay away from anyone. Furthermore,

these ten men said that presently they were not staying away

from anyone. Their reasons for why they did not stay away are

varied. Six of these ten men said that they did not stay away

from others because they have been in similar situations in

the past. As a result, they were used to the type of people

who stayed in homeless shelters.

Two of the ten said that they simply wanted to make

friends and relate to the other men on a social level. One

subject did not stay away because when he arrived at the

shelter, he was working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Another subject said that he did not stay away because he felt

that they could help each other.

There were two subjects who reported that when they first

arrived at the shelter, they did not intentionally stay away

from anyone. They simply kept to themselves. Both said that

if people talked to them that they would talk back. Over

time, they became more comfortable and began to associate with

more men. One of the two said:

> Well it's not that I tried to stay away from them.
> I just uh kept myself. If they say hello I say
> hello I'm not stuck up or anything like that. Like
> I'm not afraid to say hello to any scum in the
> street or whatever. I don't think anybody's better
> than men, worse than me.

Still there was a decision involved with the type of people

that they eventually decided to spend time around.

Finally, there were four subjects in the sample who said

that they stayed away from the men when they arrived and they

still are staying away from them. These four are the best

example of men who wanted to distance themselves from others.

One subject commented that they had their own problems, and he

had his own. The other three said that the men staying at the

shelter were not their type of people, and did not want to be

around them. When I asked Herbert, a 33 year old divorced

student why he stayed away from them he responded:

> Well like I said earlier they're just they're not my kind
> of people. I can only take so much of, you hear a lot of
> whining. There's no other word for it. It's whining.

119

The general pattern that was revealed showed that the majority of the sample did not stay away from all of the men at the shelter. When they first arrived, several subjects made decisions as to who they wanted to associate with. Other men reported they did not stay away from anyone when they first arrived, and that they were presently not staying away from the other residents.

Short-Term Future Plans

Donald Ball (1972: 63) stated that sum total of all recognized information helps the individual engage in self-determined lines of action and interaction. As part of how the men define their situation, I wanted to discover their perception of their short and long-term futures. Their perceptions of the future are in part, based on their present context. This final section will cover five main areas: short and long-term plans, plans with family/friends, subjective interpretations of their future, and an open-ended question where they could discuss any topic they wanted. Each section will be summarized separately.

During the interviews, short-term plans were defined as plans the subjects might have in the next couple of days, or the next couple of weeks. I was interested in seeing what they wanted to do within this time span. The evidence was overwhelming in favour of finding employment and a place to live.

Twenty five subjects who were currently unemployed and living in the shelter reported that their short-term plans involved finding employment and/or housing. The following is a typical exchange:

Q-What are your plans in the short-term future?
A-Move out of here.

Q-Do you plan on finding a permanent place to live?
A-Yes.

Q-Do you plan on finding a job?
A-Yes in the really near future.

Q-What kind of work would you like to do?
A-Anything. Landscaping to babysitting.

One subject was currently working but he was not looking for a place to live because he was planning on moving out of the city to go back to college in the fall. One subject reported that his short-term plans were to go to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program at the shelter, so he was not looking for a place to live or a job. Three subjects said that they were not planning on doing anything in the short-term but continue staying at the shelter and carrying on what they are currently doing.

Two follow-up questions were asked in this section: "Do you plan on finding a permanent place to live?" and "Do you plan on finding a job?" These two questions turned out to be excellent cross-checks on the answers that the men gave to their short-term plans. When the answers to these two questions were analyzed, the evidence proved to reaffirm the answers given for short-term plans.

There were eleven subjects whom I did not ask if they planned on finding a job and a place to live. Nine of the eleven were not asked because they already answered these questions when discussing their short-term plans. The other two respondents already stated they had a job and a place to live.

Seventeen subjects all reaffirmed their short-term plans when asked about employment and housing plans. Two subjects reported that they would like to find a permanent place to live and a job, but for their own individual reasons, this would be difficult.

The two questions on employment and housing goals in the future served as a cross-check on the answers given in the short-term plans question. There was no way I could have predicted this connection before interviewing, because I was not sure how unknown subjects would answer. But in hindsight, this proved to be a very valuable connection because the employment and housing questions increased the reliability of the subjects' answers with their short-term plans.

In summary, the results showed that the majority of the men in the sample were intent on finding employment and/or housing in their short-term future. These two issues seemed to be of utmost importance.

Long-Term Plans

When examining long-term plans, there was one major theme that emerged. The foundation with this theme is that the vast

majority of these men are at the lowest position in their lives. This was an underlying issue in all of the men's answers. None of the men wanted to stay in their present situation. Some were more optimistic than others, but overall the subjects wanted to rise above their current position.

Twelve men reported that in the long-term they want to have a relationship with a significant other. Brett was open when he commented:

> I realize I couldn't have a relationship because of my drugs and so forth. That's the reason I've been single a lot. I do want to find somebody special. Hopefully if that works out we can have a family together. Bring up my children and give them what I never had. Be more supportive. My parents were kids when they had us. It's like kids having kids. I just had a bad upbringing and I won't have that for my kids.

Many of them have come from well-paying jobs in the past, or they have come from a lifestyle that was significantly better their current one. Therefore, they want to be able to climb back up to the level that they were used to living at. The key to their lives in the future is stability, as opposed to the relative instability they were currently encountering.

Six subjects reported that their main plans related to education. The education ranged from finishing high school, college/trade programs, up to completing university degrees. Connor replied: "I would like to go to university. I'd love to teach languages in different countries."

Four subjects reported that their long-term plans involved obtaining some type of permanent employment that would enable them to live the way they wanted to. Related to

123

this category, three subjects reported their long-term plans revolved around obtaining secure employment and building relationships with their family. One subject commented:

> Long-term. Get a job. Secure a job. Live. Spend time with my family and son.

There were four subjects who reported plans for their long-term future that did not relate to anyone else's in any category. Another subject suggested that he could not think about his long-term future until he had taken care of his present situation. His present situation had much more immediacy and importance than his long-term future. There was one subject who did not report on his long-term plans.

The general pattern in this section was that many of the men wanted to rise out of their present situation to where they were before. How they were going to do this and what strategies they would employ varied, but the vast majority expressed a desire to have a life that did not involve being homeless.

Plans With Family and Friends

There is a logical connection when analyzing future plans with family and/or friends and the individual's affiliation with significant others. I wanted to see if there was any correlation between the affiliation that they reported, and their plans with these people in the future. Again, this provided an excellent opportunity to cross-check their answers.

When I analyzed their answers according to plans with family/friends, I cross-referenced these answers with the extent of affiliation that they reported. The results from this cross-comparison proved to be very strong. In this section there were three subjects who did not provide a report.

On a general level, there were eighteen subjects' answers which matched exactly between the two sets of questions. These eighteen people are broken down into two categories. Of the eighteen, eight men had reported some level of affiliation before they became homeless. Their future plans with these people demonstrated a desire to maintain their current levels of attachment with family and friends. The types of relationships they wanted to maintain ranged from parents, to children, to friends whom they had before they became homeless.

The other ten men had no affiliation with significant others before they became homeless, and had no plans to increase this in the future. This snippet demonstrates this point:

Q-Do you have any plans with your family in the future?
A-Nope.

Q-Do you have any plans with your friends in your future?
A-Depends on what happens.

Those who reported a total lack of affiliation with significant others before they were homeless, proved to be a very good predictor of whether they would have any plans with

family and/or friends in the future. This leads to the next major category.

There were twelve subjects that reported that they had affiliation in the past, and not only do they want to maintain this level, but they want to build on it. The affiliation was not necessarily strong, but in the future they wanted to increase its strength. The types of relationships these people want to build are with their children, fathers, mothers, friends, and family members in general.

There were eight men who wanted to maintain the level of affiliation they had before they became homeless. There were ten men who did not have any affiliation before, and did not want any in the future. There were twelve men who had various levels of affiliation before they became homeless, and they wanted to build on these current relationships. Brad comments:

> My future plans are to finally get settled to the point where I feel comfortable again to go out and start looking again another relationship. And hopefully fall in love again. Hopefully.

When talking about building relationships with his family he adds:

> Actually I've been doing just that ever since I come back and even just before I left. It's uh long process but it's coming together.

Aaron, a 30 year old addict, perhaps best understands ways one can avoid landing on the street:

> ... keep in contact with your family. That is very important. I've received my most emotional support from my family.

There was not a single subject who reported plans that were drastically different than what they had reported with the affiliation questions. This strong association serves to increase the reliability of their answers.

When analyzing plans with family\friends, there is a strong connection between reported affiliation before they became homeless, and plans in the future. Generally speaking, if they had affiliation before they became homeless the men wanted to build on it or maintain it. If they did not have affiliation before, they did not express any desire to increase it.

Subject's Interpretation of Their Future

This section will examine the subjects' perceptions of what they think about their future. There were several similarities that emerged. Sixteen subjects felt their future was bright and were taking a very positive approach to it. These men all felt that whatever they had in place, and/or whatever agenda they had planned for the future, they would be successful. One subject stated:

> It will be better. Because this experience I learn a lot. And maybe not maybe sure if I have the possibility to help other people I'll help. If I have the possibility to become a counsellor in the part-time I don't know in the weekend something like that. When I don't work I wish to give my time for free. To help people out. I want to develop what I have the quality in mind. You know everybody's a diamond but must be smoothed.

Positive answers of these 16 subjects varied from comments of general optimism, to men stating that they would have to apply themselves to obtaining a better life.

127

Four subjects reported that their future was dependent on their own actions. Whatever they do to get themselves out of the situation would determine what would happen to them in the future. Five subjects reported that they had no future and were extremely negative. Generally these men felt that until they could get out of the shelter they would not have any future. Many of them would not even allow themselves to think about their futures because they had to concentrate on the present day.

Two subjects that reported that they could not think about their future. Their present situations were too pressing. They could not think about the future until they had dealt with the present. Finally, there were three men who did not report on their future due to the context of the interview.

The majority of the sample were positive about their future. They believed that good things would happen to them. Positive answers usually were comments of general optimism about their future. Five subjects gave negative reports. These men felt that until they could get out of the shelter they would not have any future. They had to concentrate on the present day rather than the future.

Four believed that their future was dependent on their own actions. Their own actions would determine what would happen to them in the future. Two subjects that reported that they could not think about their future. Their current

predicament were important so they could not think about the future until they had dealt with the present.

Open-Ended Question

Since the foundation for this thesis is the men's subjective interpretation of their situation, I wanted to give them a chance to talk about anything they choose. This is extremely important because I want to provide the men a "voice." Even though my interpretation is part of the thesis, I wanted to be able to provide the men a forum to express their opinions about their situation. I wanted them to be able to speak for themselves.

Twelve subjects reported that they did not have anything else to add to the conversation. They felt that we had covered everything that was important to them, and could not think of anything else to add. Two subjects took the opportunity to express critical comments about the shelter. In general, the men were critical of the service that the shelter provides, and they felt that shelter does not do enough to help the men.

Two more subjects reported that they were glad that the facilities were there to help the men (and themselves). Again this was discussed earlier. Four men expressed that the guys were human beings and should be treated that way. The four men simply wanted to express that they were no different than anyone else. As Freddie, a 22 year old commented:

> . . . like when you see people coming out of the
> shelter they're not going to hurt you. They need

129

help. They're like you they're human beings."
This attitude is really important because it
indicates that some men do feel that nonhomeless
people stigmatize them, and view them differently.

The last group of men (10) gave unique answers based on
their perceptions of shelter life. They shared the common
theme of commenting on how they got there, or some aspect of
living as a homeless person. One man wondered how people end
up falling that low, and another wondered how the staff deals
with all of the problems and different personalities.

A 20 year old man discusses the difference between living
on the street and living in a shelter:

> As far as homelessness goes this is not homeless. You
> can never understand homelessness through here, you may
> come across the odd person who has been truly homeless
> without a place to stay at all, but this isn't
> homelessness. Homelessness is sitting out behind the
> library in the dead of winter because you have no place
> to go.

> Homelessness is to scrounge for quarters just so you can
> get a cup of coffee to warm up before you freeze, Um
> homelessness is wandering the streets at 3 o'clock
> because you couldn't finds a place to stay or you've been
> moved on even when you're dead tired and been awake for
> sometimes days. That's homelessness.

Another subject expressed important concerns about things that
have gone wrong in his life, and what can be done to avoid
them.

> Number one is if you have plans on getting off the street
> you cannot do drugs or alcohol. Number one. Number two
> you have to find a positive crowd. As long as you stay
> around a crowd that is negative you're going to remain
> negative every single time. Number 3 keep in contact with
> your family. That is very important. I've received my
> most emotional support through family.

130

This subject discusses the role that drugs and alcohol can play in someone remaining on the street, and the need for affiliation with significant others.

The general pattern of those who gave responses revolves around the men contemplating aspects of homelessness. Sometimes it was their lives, other instances it was about homelessness in general. One subject wondered how the staff deals with the men, another wondered how the men had fallen this low, and another commented on the role that alcohol and drugs can play in someone landing on the street.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The first step in *Interpretive Interactionism* is the *deconstruction* and critical analysis of prior conceptions of the phenomenon (Denzin, 1989: 48). This is the literature review on homelessness. The second step is *capturing* the phenomenon, including locating and situating it in the natural world, and obtaining multiple instances of it (Denzin, 1989: 48). The third step is *bracketing* of the data, which means it is reduced to its essential elements and is cut loose "from the natural world so that its essential structures and features may be uncovered" (Denzin, 1989: 48).

Patterns Observed- Construction

The fourth step in *Interpretive Interactionism* is *construction*, or putting the phenomenon back together in terms of its essential parts, pieces, and structures into a coherent whole (Denzin, 1989: 48). The data that were collected from the thirty interviews, revealed several patterns or categories based on the subjects' interpretations of their homeless career. As a result, this concluding chapter will summarize the key findings of the study.

The two main macro causes of homelessness (unemployment and housing) will be presented first. They will be followed by micro issues covered during the interview. The discussion will then shift to covering the main issues related to symbolic interactionism and homelessness. Finally, the chapter will end

with the men's perceptions of the future and a summary of the open-ended question each subject was asked.

Unemployment/Underemployment

Unemployment is a key issue when explaining how men become homeless (Caton, 1990: 13; Rossi, 1989b: 134). Rossi (1989b: 134) claims that the homeless typically have not held steady jobs for several years. Calysn and Morse (1992: 122) discovered that in one study, 90% of the sample were unemployed.

Four major themes emerged. Five subjects believed that unemployment or underemployment were the most important reason why they became homeless. Nine men reported that unemployment played a role in their path to homelessness, but it was an effect of some other factor. Similarly, nine subjects reported that unemployment contributed to their homelessness, but was not the only factor. Finally, seven subjects reported that unemployment or underemployment played no role in them becoming homeless.

The pattern with this section of the data analysis suggested that un/underemployment is a major issue in many of the men's lives. However, there was not always a one-way causation between unemployment and homelessness. Often times, unemployment was directly associated with another factor such as alcohol abuse.

Housing

A lack of affordable housing is a very important issue when examining homelessness. Mallin (1987: 115) argues that the availability of low-cost rental housing has been drastically reduced in Canada. Rossi (1989b) and Burt (1992) argue that the

133

growth of homelessness during the 1980's has, in large part, been attributed to problems with the housing market.

Twenty five of the thirty subjects stated that housing was not a cause or issue in their homelessness. There was a common thread with these twenty five subjects. In order to become homeless there obviously had to be some problem with housing. However, housing only became an issue because of other factors.

One subject reported that a lack of affordable housing contributed to him becoming homeless. Finally, four subjects reported that housing problems were due to problems with receiving welfare. Essentially they did not have enough income from other sources, and when they had problems with welfare they quickly landed on the streets.

The evidence was overwhelming in this study that a lack of affordable housing was not a major issue in the men becoming homeless. This does not mean that it played no role, only that housing was tied to other issues.

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse has been argued as a major cause of adult men becoming homeless (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Burt, 1992). The literature also suggests that alcohol plays a major role in keeping them homeless either in a shelter or on the street (Anderson et al., 1994). This research demonstrated that alcohol and/or drug abuse played a role with some men, however the abuse was not nearly as prevalent as myths and stereotypes suggest.

134

Snow and Anderson (1993) argue that drinking is an activity that homeless men engaged in to help them deal with the psychological stress of being homeless. It is a way that they can escape the everyday problems of street life. Drinking is one in-group strategy that homeless men can employ to work against the social-psychological impact of stigmatization (Anderson et al., 1994: 126).

The general pattern in this sample with the men's perceptions as to why they drink is that drinking is connected with other aspects in their lives. Many men who do drink, do so to escape reality. Many view drinking as a way to cope with some issue(s) in their life. They felt that by drinking and/or taking drugs, they could get away from their problems. However, there was no evidence to suggest that the shelter experience led a great number of men to increase their drinking.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse, like alcohol, has also been argued as a leading cause of homelessness for men (Rossi, 1989a; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Milburn, 1989). Drug abuse can lead men to lose their jobs, and with meagre resources they can quickly become homeless. Furthermore, drug abuse can also work in tandem with alcohol abuse to cause men to become homeless.

The results for drug abuse were similar to those for alcohol abuse. For a few subjects, drug abuse were the main reason why they became homeless. For other subjects, there were other precipitating factors connected to their drug abuse. These other

135

factors and drug abuse were all interconnected.

Mental Illness

Mental illness can play a major role in causing people to become homeless, or in maintaining their homelessness (Greenblatt, 1992; Calysn and Morse, 1992; Rossi, 1989b). There were several subjects living in the shelter who displayed schizophrenic symptoms. These men were not interviewed because I felt that I would not have been able to gain much useful data from them. As a result, mental illness cannot be analyzed because a representative sample was not obtained. Consequently, I cannot make any inferences about mental illness and this sample.

Affiliation

The evidence is very strong in the literature that a lack of affiliation is a major issue in the homeless career of adult males (Crystal, 1994; La Gory et al., 1990; Rossi, 1989b). Burt (1992: 29) states that literal homelessness is the final step of a gradual process in which there is a loss of connection to family or friends who might help in a crisis. This research proved to be no different.

A lack of affiliation with significant others proved to be a very salient issue in many of the men's lives. A large number of men had no one in their lives before they became homeless. Generally if the men had no attachment before they became homeless, they lacked affiliation once they were living in the shelter as well. Other men had people in their lives before they became homeless, but they were unable to help for various reasons after

136

the men became homeless. Usually this pattern did not change after

the men landed in the shelter.

Finally, there men who did receive assistance at some point,

but this aid ceased for a variety of reasons. Like the previous

two groups, this group of men were receiving little or no aid while

living in the shelter.

Symbolic Interactionism and Homelessness

Definition of the Situation

A very important concept in Symbolic Interactionism is the

"definition of the situation." Donald Ball (1972: 63) argues that

the definition of the situation is the:

> . . . sum total of all recognized information, from the
> point-of-view of the actor, which is relevant to his locating
> himself and others, so that he can engage in self- determined
> lines of action and interaction.

The situations and actions that an individual takes are not

constant. The way an individual defines one situation may not

apply to another.

Defining the situation is also an interpretive process in

terms of collective action. People indicate their interpretation

of a situation not only to themselves, but to each other. The

result from this interpretation is the emergence of group

definitions of the situations. These interpretations are then

employed to guide an individual's behaviour.

During the interview, the subjects were asked what they

believed the other residents thought about them. Three major

categories were revealed. Several subjects expressed the other men

in the shelter had positive. Three of the seven said they are

137

liked by the other men, two said the others have respect for them, one said they view him as a gentleman because of the way he acts.

Other subjects stated the other men had negative comments about them. Two said they were viewed as obnoxious and arrogant because of the way they act. One said they think he is an idiot because he has given a lot of people "crap", and the final man said the others view him as competition for resources (jobs and housing).

Several subjects reported that they did not know and/or care what the others thought of them. Four of the five did not provide any information beyond this comment. The fifth subject said that even though he does not care, the men probably view him as a "prick" because he is a loner. Finally, four men commented directly on their own situation.

Each subject was also asked about their perceptions of the other men in the shelter. When answering what they thought about the other men, several subjects' answers fit into more than one category. Twenty four subjects responded in either a negative or positive manner. Several subjects responded they had their own problems and were not concerned with the other men. The final major pattern included a group of men who commented that the other men did not want to leave and did nothing to get themselves out of the situation.

Present Situation

Directly related to the definition of the situation, the subjects were asked about their perceptions of their present situation in the shelter. The major pattern revealed the subjects either being positive or negative. In fact, there were more men in the sample who had negative feelings about the shelter than positive. Many of the subjects expressed frustration with their circumstances and expressed a desire to leave the shelter.

Related to this, the subjects were asked about how the other men perceive living in the shelter. The pattern for this section of the data demonstrated that the subjects often had more than one opinion. They often commented that some men like it in the shelter, some did not like it etc. There were a wide range of answers in that many subjects generally suggested that the other men in the shelter had positive and/or negative opinions about the shelter environment.

Presentation of the Self

At the very heart of this research is the desire to study how the men in the shelter present themselves in their daily lives (Goffman, 1959). Individuals present themselves to others according to the identities that they have for themselves.

Goffman (1959: 1-2) argued that when people interact, what they say and do makes a difference to others so they can "figure" them out and act towards them accordingly. Therefore, people strive to act in a way that will influence the way others will think of them.

Twenty three subjects in this sample reported they present themselves the same to nonhomeless people as they would to other homeless people. They did significantly alter they way they interact with nonhomeless people just because they were living in a shelter. Essentially, they were trying to convey the impression that they were not homeless.

Definition of the Self

The self is an object that the actor acts toward (Charon 1995: 68). The development of the self is a creative and spontaneous process, governed by free will and it emerges through social interaction. The self is not passive, the individual can choose to accept, reject, or modify certain stimuli during social interaction. Charon (1995: 68-69) argued that the self has the form of a social object that is changed as it is defined and redefined during the process of interaction. This research, in part, wanted to discover if the men perceived their selves as changed due to the shelter experience.

Twenty five of the thirty subjects were asked the question- "Do you think staying at the shelter has changed you?" When analyzing the answers of the other subjects, the pattern of their answers revealed that who they "are" was not fundamentally changed. In other words, the results demonstrated that the subjects selves were not fundamentally changed due to the shelter experience.

Landing in the shelter did provide a life altering "reality check" for several subjects. They realized how low they had fallen, and what their future would be like if they did not get

out of the shelter.

Reference and Membership Groups

The concept of a reference group was refined by Tamotsu Shibutani (1955). Reference groups are:

> any identifiable group whose supposed perspective is used by the actor as a frame of reference in the organization of his perceptual field (Charon, 1995: 30).

Reference groups are groups that an individual psychologically identifies with. Membership groups (Sherif and Sherif, 1956: 176-177) are the groups that a person actually belongs to.

The general pattern of the results demonstrated that in many of the cases, the men that the subjects associated were different from those whom they were most like. Three men were found to associate with different people than they reported they were like. Four men said that they associated with certain people, but were not like anyone else that stayed in the shelter. Eight subjects reported they associated with people in the shelter whom they felt were most like themselves.

The data analysis also demonstrated that almost half of the sample (14) stayed away from the other men when they first arrived at the shelter. Over time, they choose specific people whom they wanted to "hang" around with. The other major finding was that ten subjects reported that when they arrived at the shelter, they did not stay away from anyone. As time passed they were still not staying away from anyone.

Street Friendships

Street friendships can be very tenuous due to the transient nature of the population. With men coming and going all the time, it can be very difficult to establish trusting friendships.

The data analysis showed that the majority of men felt they had friends (16 men), or at least acquaintances in the shelter (9 men). The men who reported acquaintances in the shelter also suggested that a shelter was not the best place to make friends because it takes time to build a friendship. On the whole, many of the men believed they could relate to the others because they were going through similar experiences.

In-Group Strategies

Anderson et al. (1994) draw on the work of Goffman (1961b, 1963) describing two broad categories of stigma management strategies the homeless develop and use in their interactions with other people. The first category is in-group strategies. Snow and Anderson (1994: 126) argue three common in-group strategies used by homeless men to stave off the psychological impact of stigmatization: drinking, cheap entertainment, and hanging out. Examples of cheap entertainment are paperback novels and going to a public library.

The pattern that was revealed strongly demonstrated that the subjects in this sample engaged heavily in two of the three in-group strategies discussed by Anderson et al. (1994: 126). The only in-group strategy that was not extensively observed was drinking. The men spent much time at the public library. Going to

the library allows the men to get off the street so they do not have to be exposed to the elements. It also helps them fight boredom.

Many of the subjects also spent time "hanging out" around the shelter and/or in the downtown core of the city to pass the time. While they are hanging out many played cards, read, or sat in coffee shops.

Activity Avoidance

Two main patterns emerged in the activity avoidance section of the interview. The first group of men reported that they were not avoiding anything on purpose. They felt they would do anything they wanted. The second group included a large number of the men were avoiding some activity. The reasons why they avoiding activities are varied. For example, some men were avoiding drinking and\or taking drugs. The underlying theme is that they are not engaging in activities that would prevent them from leaving the shelter.

Out-Group Strategies

Passing and Covering

The first out-group strategy that the homeless men use to reduce the impact of being stigmatized as homeless is called passing. Passing essentially means that they try and "pass" themselves off as nonhomeless (Anderson et al., 1994). If they can make people believe that they have a domicile, then they can avoid being stigmatized as homeless.

The second out-group strategy is the alternative to passing is covering. When the man covers, he is openly admitting his status as a homeless person. The result of this admission is to reduce the impact of their status. There are two ways they can do this. The first is by verbally casting themselves in a positive light. The other is to deflect attention from their status by the use of props.

The third out-group stigma management strategy is defiance. Defiant behaviours are actions and verbalizations that are meant to reject humiliating moral assaults or ridicule. Goffman (1961a) observed that defiance may be "open" or "contained." Open defiance is overt and directly confrontational, while contained defiance is a more subtle and covert expression of anger. Both types of defiance are meant to deal with humiliating encounters or situations.

The last out-group strategy is collective action which is employed to overcome material deprivations/powerlessness, and neutralize their stigma (Anderson et al., 1994: 136). With the help of the nonhomeless and organizations, the homeless have been able to protest against their situation. Collective action results in a sense of empowerment, positive group identity (Wagner and Cohen, 1991), and what Foss and Larkin (1986) have referred to as "disalienation" (Anderson et al., 1994: 138).

There were three main patterns revealed when analyzing passing and covering strategies. A group of men reported they were open about their status with some people but hid it with others. Other

subjects reported they were open with everyone. Finally, a small number of subjects reported they hid their status with other people.

There was little evidence to suggest that the men engaged in open or contained defiance toward nonhomeless people. There was also no evidence to demonstrate any collective action by the sample or by other people.

Identity Talk

Snow and Anderson (1987: 1347) argue that homeless men engage in identity talk. Identity talk is verbal construction and assertions of personal identities which is their primary form of "identity work" of which homeless street people construct and negotiate personal identities.

Distancing is one form of identity talk whereby homeless men do not associate with other homeless men. Snow and Anderson (1987) argue that distancing reduces the stigmatization of being homeless because the men concentrate on "staying away" from the other men. By staying away from them, they can avoid a negative self-worth because they see themselves as different from other homeless men.

The general pattern that was revealed showed that the majority of the sample did not stay away from all of the men at the shelter. When they first arrived, several subjects made decisions as to who they wanted to associate with. Other men reported they did not stay away from anyone when they first arrived, and that they were presently not staying away from the other residents.

Future Plans

Donald Ball (1972: 63) stated that sum total of all recognized information helps the individual engage in self-determined lines of action and interaction. As part of how the men define their situation, I wanted to discover their perception of their short and long-term future. Their perceptions of the future are in part, based on their present context.

The results for short-term plans indicated that the majority of the men in the sample were intent on finding employment and/or housing in their short-term future. These two issues seemed to be of utmost importance. The evidence was very strong in that almost every subject felt that their short-term plans were to find a place to live and get a job.

When the subjects were asked about their long-term plans, the general pattern suggested that many of the men want to rise out of their present situation to level they were at before. How they were going to do this and what strategies they would employ varied, but the vast majority expressed a desire to have a life that did not involve being homeless.

The subjects were also asked about their perception of what their future would be like. The majority of the sample were positive about their future. They believed that good things would happen to them. Five subjects gave negative reports and four believed that their future was dependent on their own actions.

When analyzing future plans with family\friends, there is a strong connection between reported affiliation before they became homeless, and plans in the future. Generally speaking, if they had affiliation before they became homeless the men wanted to build on it or maintain it. If they did not have affiliation before, they did not express any desire to increase it.

Open-Ended Question

As part of this research, I wanted to allow the men to discuss anything they wanted. I intended this to be one way in which they would be given a voice in this research. The general pattern of their answers revolves around the men contemplating aspects of homelessness. Sometimes it was their lives, other instances it was about homelessness in general. They often wondered how they ended up in their position.

Other men commented on the services the shelter provides, and other services provided by outside agencies. There was also a significant number of the subjects who did not add anything to the conversation because they felt everything of importance to them was covered in the interview.

Contextualization

The fifth and final step in the interpretive process is called *contextualization*. This step involves relocating the phenomenon back in the social world. "Contextualization takes what has been learned about the phenomenon, through bracketing, and fits that knowledge to the social world where it occurs. It brings phenomenon alive in the worlds of interacting individuals" (Denzin,

1989: 60).

By contextualizing the phenomenon, it gives the structure meaning. According to Denzin (1989: 61), the intent of contextualization is to show how lived experience alters and shapes the phenomenon being studied. This is very important because the participants alter the structure of their experiences based on how they describe, and give them meaning.

When examining homelessness amongst single, unattached males, researchers will find it very difficult to narrow down one pattern for any issue of homelessness. There are many variables and intervening circumstances which contribute to a man becoming, and remaining homeless. For the 30 men interviewed, common perceptions were found. However, each individual situation will differ from the variables of another's situation to some extent. The similarities in the subject's definition of their situation can be noted and discussed.

There is ample support for the argument of this thesis, which stated that when studying homelessness, both macro and micro causes have to be considered. More than one cause has to be considered when examining a man's path to homelessness. Many of the subjects in this sample attributed several factors that worked together to cause them to become homeless. For one man it might be alcoholism and unemployment, for another it might be death of a spouse and alcoholism. In many of the cases the factors were so interwoven together that cause and effect were difficult to distinguish.

The subjects shared similarities once they arrived at the shelter. For those subjects who recently arrived at the shelter, they were almost always positive and upbeat about their chances to leave quickly. Not many men were negative about their chances as soon as they arrived.

Most of the men employed strategies to deal with being homeless. Many were open with nonhomeless people about their status as a homeless person. By admitting their status, they were seeking to reduce the negative psychological impact of being homeless. Other men sought to hide their status. If they passed themselves off as nonhomeless, then people they came into contact with cannot stereotype them. As a result, the negative psychological impact of being homeless can be avoided.

When examining plans for the short-term, the evidence was very strong that most men wanted to find employment and housing. There were subjects whom expressed they could not think about their future, but they still were concerned with "getting out" of the shelter. The men in the sample were generally positive about their future. They believed that if they worked at their situation, their futures would be bright.

This research demonstrated there are many different psychological and sociological variables at work. Consequently, there are a number of different patterns that result in men becoming, and remaining homeless. However, it is the job of the researcher to attempt to narrow down these patterns with the hope of understanding, and potentially eliminating some of them.

Limitations of the Research

Even though there are positive aspects to this research, there are a few limitations. This research was conducted during the summer months. It is possible that the type of men that stay in the shelter could be different than the winter. There is much more seasonal farm work during the summer where men come from different communities in search of work. During the summer, there are many more men who are travelling. Some of these men may not travel as much in the winter so the type of men in the shelter could be different.

This study did not look at men who were literally homeless. The research only involved men who were staying at the shelter. The type of person that is literally homeless and does not go to a shelter is potentially different than those who will go to a shelter. As a result, I would be reluctant to extrapolate some of these findings to those men.

This study looked at only one shelter in one medium sized city. The nature and scope of male homeless population in larger cities such as Vancouver or Toronto are much greater. For example, the number of males who are literally homeless in the city that was studied was much smaller than a larger urban centre. Even though some findings from other studies were replicated (such as a lack of affiliation as a major cause of homelessness amongst males), I would hesitate to extend all of the findings of this study to a larger city like Vancouver.

This study was an exploratory study of one shelter. It is possible that some of the findings were specific to that shelter. Some findings could be applied to other shelters, but there may be some that are specific to this shelter (for example daytime activities) and cannot be extended to other hostels.

Future Research

I would like to make two future research recommendations. On a general level, there is much more work to be done studying homelessness from a Symbolic Interactionist perspective. Not only could the studies add to the work of Snow and Anderson (1987, 1993, 1994), but they could build on the research by delving into other areas of symbolic interactionism and homelessness.

This recommendation extends beyond homeless males. In the city that was studied, there is also a homeless shelter for females. This location is separate from the battered women's shelter. Even though it is on a much smaller scale than the male hostel, it would be beneficial to research their situation to see how it differs from the males. Until this study was undertaken, a complete picture of the homeless situation in the city studied could not be understood.

Concluding Remarks

The ultimate goal for this research was to give the men a voice about their experiences. This study allowed the men to speak about their interpretation and opinion of homelessness, instead of a me trying to write about their lives "objectively." I feel quite confident that I have "painted" an accurate picture of the type of

men who stayed at the shelter, and the challenges that they face on a daily basis.

This research can make an important contribution to the growing body of literature on homelessness in Canada. If successful, this research will also *add* to the literature that utilizes Symbolic Interactionism in the study of homelessness. Finally, the results will hopefully aid the shelter in the delivery of their services by coming to a greater understanding of the type of clients that they faithfully serve.

I would like to leave this thesis on a positive note. I hope that by writing this thesis, I have shed light on what it is like to be homeless. It is not an easy life and is much more complicated than most people realize. I also hope that this thesis reduces the traditional perceptions and stereotypes that many people have of homeless men. Finally, I hope that I given a voice to the men and made people realize that they only want a hand-up, not a hand-out.

Background Information

Where were your born?

How old are you?

Where did you grow up?

Who did you live with growing up?

What were some of the events leading up to you becoming homeless?

What was the final event that happened to you before you became homeless?

What was the most important thing that led to you becoming homeless?

What did you do when you first became homeless?

Present Homelessness

How long have you been homeless?

What do you do on the street during the day?

Do you always sleep at the shelter?

If not, where do you sleep?

Alcohol/Drug Abuse

Was drinking a reason you became homeless?

Does drinking keep you homeless?

Why do you drink?

Was drug abuse a reason why you became homeless?

Does drug abuse keep you homeless?

Why do you take drugs?

Unemployment

What kind of work did you do before you became homeless?

Was unemployment an important reason why you became homeless?

What kind of emotional impact did being unemployed have on you?

Mental Illness

Have you ever stayed in a mental institution?

Do you think this illness contributed to you becoming homeless?

Do you think this illness keeps you homeless?

Housing

Were you able to afford housing before you became homeless?

Do you think this contributed to you becoming homeless?

Affiliation

Have you ever been married?

For how long?

Can you please describe what the relationship was like?

Do you have children?

Can you please describe your relationship with them?

Who were the most important people in your life before you came to the shelter?

Did they try to help you before you became homeless?

What kind of assistance did they provide?

Do you have relationships with any other people outside of the shelter?

Do you think they will provide you with help in getting out of the shelter?

Who is important in your life presently?

Do they provide help for you?

Membership Groups

Who do you most associate with?

Who do you think you are the most like?

Definition of the Situation

When you first became homeless, did you try to stay away from the other men in the shelter?

What about now?

How do you think the other men in the shelter view you?

How do you view them?

Do you consider the men in the shelter your friends?

If so, why?

What do you think about your present situation in the shelter?

What do you think the other men feel about the shelter?

Stigma Management

In-Group

What kind of entertainment do you participate in while staying at the shelter?

Why do you participate in these activities?

What activities do you avoid?

Why?

Do you spend time hanging out?

What do you do when you are hanging out at the shelter?

Is there anything else that you do while you stay in the shelter?

Out-Group

When you come into contact with people from outside of the shelter, how do you act?

Do you openly admit to people outside of the shelter that

you are homeless?

Do you try and hide it?

Have you ever become angry with someone who thought you lived in the shelter?

If so, why?

Future Plans

What are your plans for the immediate future?

What do you think about your future?

Do you plan on finding a permanent place to live?

If you are not already employed, do you plan on finding a job?

What are your plans with your family?

What are your plans with your friends?

What would you like to do with the rest of your life?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to explore the lives of homeless men living in the _____ Men's Hostel. I am interested in studying homeless men from their perspective, and I will seek their interpretations and opinions about their lives. These interpretations and opinions will be based on experiences leading up to, and becoming homeless, experiences living in the shelter, and future goals/plans. My goal for this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of men living in the _____ Hostel. The information gained from this study could prove valuable to the _____ in the delivery of their services to the homeless population in _____ .

The questions will focus on events leading up to your homelessness such as past employment and attachment to family/friends. Other questions will focus on living in the shelter such as friendships and how you spend your time. Finally, the questions will explore your future plans and goals with family/friends, employment and housing. If you wish, I can discuss the questions I will ask you in-depth before the interview begins. You are encouraged to answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible.

All information obtained in the course of the formal interview and any informal interactions that occur outside of the interview will be upheld in the strictest of confidence. You have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions and you can end the session at any time. Participation is completely voluntary and no identifying information that may reveal your identity will be used in the write-up of my findings.

I will make myself available to you anytime after the interview ends should you require any feedback. Also, the findings of my study will be available for you to look at and discuss at the _____ Hostel. I encourage you to contact me at 253-4232 (extension 2191) should you require any additional information. You can address any concerns you have with this study to Dr. Alan Hall, chair of the Ethics Committee, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (253-4232). Please note that the phone number listed above will be given to the shelter staff should you require it.

Having read and understood the above stated conditions I, the undersigned, consent to participate in this study.

Signature:_____   Sincerely,

                                             Scott Rogers

157

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: SCOTT ROGERS

Please be advised that permission has been given for Scott Rogers to stay at ████████████████████Hostel for 7-12 days. The Hostel is located at ██████████████

Thank you

Description of the Shelter

The shelter that was studied is the only place in the city where homeless men can go when they land on the streets. It is located close to the downtown core on the main city street. One of the main nicknames the guys have for it is the "Ranch." The hostel is located in an old, rundown motel that has been converted to a homeless shelter. The building has three main floors. On the upstairs floor are single rooms where the men in the alcohol and drug rehabilitation program live. These rooms are very private and the men have their own bathrooms and showers.

The middle floor of the shelter is where the main office is located. There is a small lobby inside the front door and directly in front of it is the main office where the staff spend their time. Off to one side of the main office is a chapel area that mainly serves as sleeping quarters. Separating the office and the lobby is a large square piece of plexiglass with a small opening for the staff and resident's to talk through. The door in the lobby to gain entry to the hostel is locked at all times, and the men must be "buzzed" in by the staff.

Directly on the other side of the secured door is the stairs leading down to the basement, where the main part of the hostel is located. The bottom floor of the dormitory contains several parts. The two main sections are the dining hall and the dormitory. The dining hall contains enough tables and chairs for roughly fifty men to have a meal. Directly attached to the dining room is the kitchen where the other hostel staff prepare the meals for the men.

The main dormitory contains 20 single beds and is in one large room. The men assigned to these beds keep their belongings in this room as well. Connected to the dormitory is a hallway which leads to a television room, bathroom facilities, and a separate shower area or "rain room." When you walk through the bottom floor you are overwhelmed by a combination of a hospital sanitized smell, and human odour. At nighttime the odour in the dorm is quite pungent. Another unpleasant aspect to the bottom floor is that during heavy rain the entire floor floods.

There is one major problem with the shelter set-up. It was mentioned that there are only 20 beds in the main dormitory. During this study, there were an average of 55 men sleeping on any given night. So the obvious question is where do the rest of the men sleep? The simple answer to this question is that they sleep on mattresses wherever they can.

Several sleep in the chapel off of the main office on the middle floor. In the bottom floor, there are several men who sleep in the dining room. At night the table and chairs are taken down so all of the mattresses can be laid on the floor.

Outside the building there is an oval driveway and a laneway that leads to a parking lot which runs the length of the building. Along the laneway and in front of the building is where many of the men congregate to smoke and socialize. During the day, the men are allowed to stay on the property so there is usually some that do "hang" around all day.

The shelter has a staff of approximately fifteen people. Three work in the rehabilitation program, five are kitchen staff, two are maintenance and five are staff that deal directly with the men in the hostel. There is only one staff member on duty to help the men at any given time. The shifts are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to 12 a.m., and 12 a.m. to 8 a.m. The same person works the day shift Monday to Friday. The afternoon, midnight, and weekend shifts are rotated amongst the other staff.

The afternoon worker's job is to conduct the in-take of the men at 4 o'clock, and make the sleeping arrangements. The worker on the midnight shift mainly provides security for the building by making rounds every hour, and controlling the entrance to the building. This usually is an easy shift because most, but not all, of the guys are sleeping.

Appendix E

Typical Day in the Life of a Homeless Man

At the root of any activity, is the fact that these men have a lot of time that they have to fill up during the day. They are woken early, and between 6 and 7 a.m. the men go outside to smoke, while others have a shower, shave etc. At 7 a.m. breakfast is served (which usually consists of coffee, cereal, and toast). Before they disperse for the morning plans, many of the men hang around a donut shop that is close to the shelter.

The soup kitchen opens every day during the week at 8:30 a.m. Several of the men make their way downtown to this place where they can spend their morning playing cards, drinking coffee, and eating donuts. Lunch is served at 12 p.m. when the men are let back in the building. Usually around 11 a.m. they start to congregate outside the shelter waiting to be let in. Lunch usually consists of sandwiches, soup, coffee and donuts.

Once lunch is over, the men have to be out of the building by 12:30. Like breakfast, many of them spend time outside having a smoke and socializing. The activities that the men engage in the afternoon are very similar to morning activities. I did not observe any major differences.

Once the men are let in the building at 4 p.m., many lie down on their beds to rest. A lot of them are tired because they were woken really early and/or they have been walking around all day and are tired. For others, it is the sheer boredom that wears them out. When you have been on the street all day, lying down on your bed is a welcome reprieve from the boredom and monotony of street life.

Others watch television and the rest hang around outside or they have not come back yet. Dinner is served at 5 p.m. and the menu really varies as to what they eat. A typical dinner is a hamburger and onion rings.

The men are allowed to come and go as they please for rest of the evening. Again evening activities are very similar to daytime activities. The exception to this is that the men are allowed to stay inside so many take naps, read the paper, and/or socialize with the other men. Because it was summer time during the research for this study, the weather was nice and the men were able to go downtown and enjoy summer activities that always comes with nice weather.

The curfew at the shelter is 11 p.m. At this time it is "lights out" and the men are supposed to go to sleep.

Appendix F

Vignettes

One of the most important goals that I had for this research was to give a voice to the homeless men that I was studying. Since I was researching their lives and their experiences, it does not make sense not to include their voices in the study. One of the ways I can achieve this goal is by providing two short vignettes to give an idea of the type of men who stay at the shelter.

Simon

Simon is an excellent example of how some men are characterized by a lack of affiliation, and in large part, end up homeless. He is a 54 year old white male who has had two failed marriages and a long history of alcoholism. After each break-up, there was an increase in alcohol abuse, and he twice attempted suicide.

After his second marriage broke up, Simon began to isolate himself from his family, and the rest of society. He would go to work during the day, and then go straight home where he would lock himself up in his apartment for the rest of the evening. On the weekends he would unplug his phone and would not answer the door even if he knew his children were coming. Eventually the isolation started to bother him, and he began drinking after being sober for several years.

As Simon commented, "Because I went through all that other stuff before it never bothered me. Marriage breakdown, the overdose everything else. And uh that's when uh something just happened."

His alcoholism started to affect his job performance, and after a short period of time he left his job and his apartment, and began going from program to program. Simon is currently sober again but life in a shelter is wearing him out very fast. He is very preoccupied with finding a room and getting out of the hostel, but up to this point he has had a very difficult time doing so.

Jorge

Jorge is an immigrant from Western Europe who came to Canada as a skilled tradesman. He is in his mid-40's and his life has been characterized by many bouts of unemployment. There has been times in his life when he has been financially well off. However, his was hit with frequent lay-offs and underemployment. As a result, he has been travelling around Canada looking for work.

162

This subject is particularly interesting because his unemployment has been tightly entangled with alcoholism. Neither one of the factors has served as a single, direct cause to homelessness. According to Jorge, he would drink when he was working but it would not interfere with his employment. However, when he was out of work all he would do was "sit around and drink."

Both of these factors worked together to make him homeless, and to maintain him on the streets. When I left the field, he had just started a new job but much of his income was being taken up by his chronic drinking.

What these vignettes demonstrate is that for many of these men, their backgrounds and stories are complicated. The reasons why they land in the shelter are not always from a single, direct cause. In most cases, two or more major factors worked together to push them onto the street.

MAJOR THEME			LETTER CODE
1)	BACK-	Background of Subject	A
2)	FP-	Family Problems	B
3)	DEATH-	Death of Significant Other	C
4)	MI-	Mental Illness	D
	ALC-	Alcohol Abuse	
	DA-	Drug Abuse	
	PRO-	Rehabilitation Program	
5)	UNDER-	Underemployment	E
	UN-	Unemployment	
	HOU-	Housing	
	EMP-	Employment	
6)	LOA-	Lack of Affiliation	F
	HELP-	Help from Others	
	NB-	Most Important People	
	CHI-	Children	
7)	ACT-	Activities	G
	ENT-	Entertainment	
	AVD-	Avoiding	
	$-	Spend Money On	
8)	SA-	Stay Away	H
	ASC-	Associate With	
	SIM-	Similar to	
	FRI-	Friends	
	HO-	Hanging Out	
9)	ATOW-	Act Toward	I
	VT-	View Them	
	VH-	View Him	
	OTH-	Other Men	
10)	OPEN-	Open With Other Men	J
	HIDE-	Hide With Other Men	
11)	ANG-	Anger with Other People	K
12)	P.S.-	Present Situation	L
	CHANGE-	Change of Self	
13)	IF-	Immediate Future (Short-term)	M
	LTF-	Long-Term Future	
	FUT-	Interpretation of Future	
	PFAM-	Plans With Family	
	PFRI-	Plans with Friends	
14)	OTH-	Open-Ended Question	O

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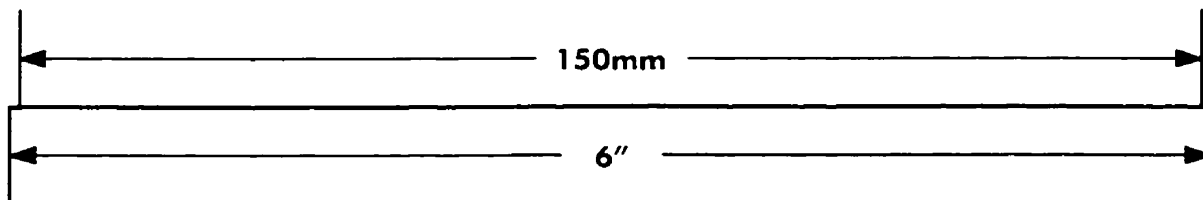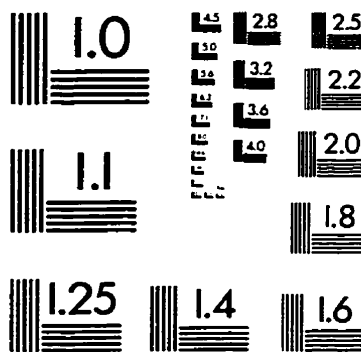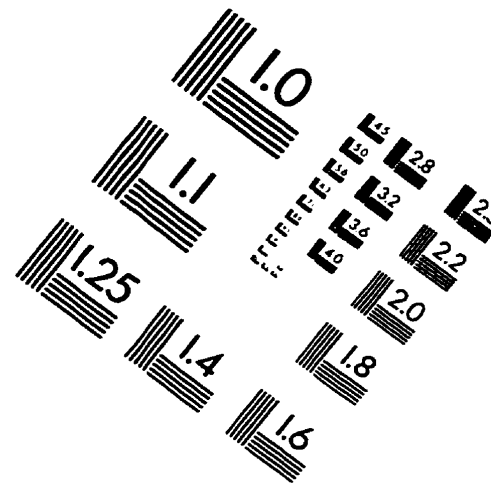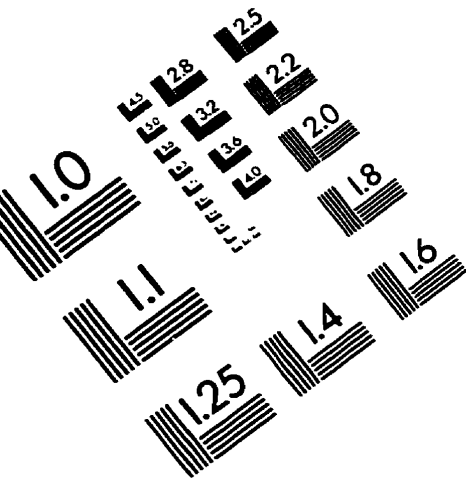|	
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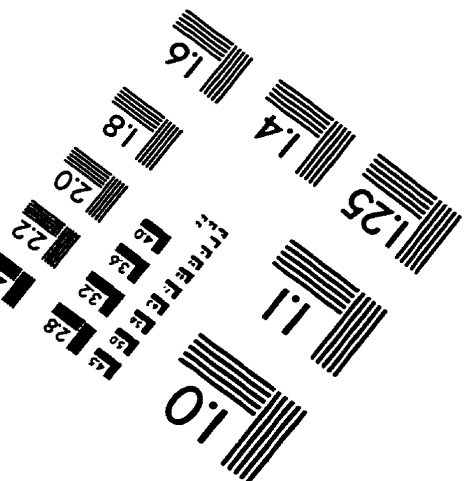
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