TOURING HOMELESSNESS?
THE REPRODUCTION OF RACE, CLASS, AND URBAN SPACE THROUGH
GRASSROOTS HOMELESS SERVICES IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation interrogates practices of grassroots homeless service organizations in St. Louis, MO. Like many other contemporary U.S. cities, St. Louis has struggled to cope with a large homeless population. According to the annual point-in-time count, 1,798 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in St. Louis City and St. Louis County on a single night in January 2017. Of those counted, 77% identified as black (HUD 2017a, 2017b). With city and county governments failing to provide adequate human services and shelter in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area, a number of grassroots homeless service groups have taken to "the streets" in an effort to combat the problem.

Based on participant observation of these efforts, this dissertation makes three interlocking arguments. First, much is known about the antecedents and benefits of volunteering, but little has been written about the actual practice of volunteering. I argue that volunteering should be seen as a practice of meaning making. Homeless service provision provided volunteers with an opportunity to interact with a poor and predominantly black population. Then, based on their service experiences and conversations with other volunteers, their ideas about race, poverty, and place could be reinforced and modified.

Second, the project draws attention to the limits of white ally discourse. I argue that even volunteers who saw their work as a form of anti-racist activism struggled to see how their race was important in daily life. When asked how their race might inform interactions with people of color experiencing homelessness, white, "color conscious" volunteers were usually quick to admit that it must. However, they were also unable to say exactly how or provide examples. This inability to speak about interracial interactions, despite many experiences to reflect upon, highlights the pervasive power and privilege embedded in the taken-for-granted nature of whiteness. Although this group displayed strong knowledge of systemic racism and/or antiracism literature, their own whiteness remained "invisible" to them.

Third, I argue that perception of, access to, and interaction in nonwhite, urban space was shaped by the privileges and power embedded in volunteers' social statuses (e.g. white, middle-class). While the slum/poverty tourism literature more frequently explores international tourism and volunteering (e.g., Frenzel 2015; Steinbrink 2012), I repeatedly observed volunteers profess interest in "urban decay" and take photos with such frequency that one volunteer jokingly asked another if she "ever feel[s] like a Japanese tourist." In these moments, volunteers sought to explore the poverty of their home city in a way few others of their class status would. Through this process, which was observed to be racialized, volunteers emphasized the difference between themselves and those "on the street."

For my parents

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:
A GRASSROOTS RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS IN ST. LOUIS

Like many other contemporary U.S. cities, St. Louis, MO has struggled to cope with a large

homeless population. According to the annual point in time count – a measure that underestimates

the number of people experiencing homelessness (Smith and Castañeda-Tinoco 2019; Stanley 2017)

– 1,798 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in St. Louis City and St. Louis County[1]

on a single night in January 2017, 77% of whom were black (HUD 2017a, 2017b).[2] Although public

and media interest in homelessness has waned since the 1980s, that interest has not totally vanished

(Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). Homelessness as a social issue is covered fairly frequently by news

organizations around the United States. Many churches and volunteer organizations mobilize to

provide meals and nonperishable food items for "the most vulnerable among us" during the holiday

season. Many city dwellers and business owners complain about the visibility of homelessness in

their towns and cities. Others sympathetically nod or scrounge their pockets for change as they pass

by panhandlers. Others still have taken it upon themselves to respond to what they see as the failure

of city governments. This dissertation considers the day-to-day service of the latter group.

Among grassroots homeless service groups in St. Louis, Missouri, it was common to hear

volunteers complain about lack of city resources made available to people experiencing

homelessness, police treatment of people experiencing homelessness, and the recent closing of the

New Life Evangelistic Center, a service center that, among other things, offered overnight shelter.

Recognizing the failure of city and county governments to provide adequate human services and

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[1] In 1876, the State of Missouri officially split the City of St. Louis from St. Louis County, meaning that St. Louis City and St. Louis County governments, tax bases, and land areas do not overlap (Gordon 2008).
[2] I have included the 2017 numbers in the main text because this was the year data collection began. In 2019, HUD reported 1,518 people were experiencing homelessness on the night of the annual count. About 74% (1,127) of those counted were black (HUD 2019a, 2019b).

shelter in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area, a number of grassroots service groups have taken to "the streets" in an effort to combat the problem.

These groups, comprised of well-intentioned, mostly white, and otherwise privileged members, are increasingly important subjects of analysis. If racial demographics continue to change at current pace, less than half the population will identify as white by 2043 (Lichter 2013). With this transition to a "majority-minority" country underway, it is necessary that researchers examine the ways in which American whites encounter and regard people of color, as well as how they interact in predominantly nonwhite spaces (Burke 2012; Hartigan 1999b). In turn, this research project examines predominantly white grassroots organizations providing services to a predominantly black population. Doing so highlights how the power and privilege associated with whiteness are maintained in nonwhite contexts, even if inadvertently.

Research Question and Outline of the Dissertation

A 400-year social history of the United States would prominently feature an array of mechanisms designed to cement the social position of privileged groups (especially elite, white men) (Feagin 2013). Volunteering, on the other hand, is commonly thought of in altruistic terms, best defined as helping activities engaged in without expectation of reward (Snyder and Omoto 2008). Keeping these two things in mind, it is seemingly strange that volunteer organizations are disproportionately comprised on people with privileged racial, class, and education statuses (Foster-Bey 2008). While this definition of volunteering may have more to do with framing than with the actual practice of volunteering, juxtaposing these two ideas is where this dissertation begins. Put succinctly, how do the relatively privileged group positions of volunteers impact homeless service provision in St. Louis, MO? Based on this question and approximately one year of participant observation, I make three interlocking arguments (presented in the findings chapters, 4-6).

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I provide a review of relevant literature. Principally, this project is situated at the intersection of ethnic relations, social inequalities, urban sociology, civic engagement, and tourism. In particular, I dedicate significant space to conversations about whiteness, volunteering, homelessness, and poverty tourism. By doing so, I not only carve out the space in which I make an academic contribution, but I also highlight the importance of understanding the social world relationally. In other words, this means understanding unhoused status in relation to the housed, whiteness in relation to blackness (and other minority statuses), the "formal" city in relation to the "informal" city, and so on. Approaching the social world in this way lends itself to a better understanding of intergroup power dynamics and how meaning is defined. In Chapter 3, I situate my study within the context by providing a short description and history of St. Louis. From there, I describe my data, methods, and approach to data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 4, the first substantive chapter, I help fill a notable gap in the volunteerism literature. While much is known about the antecedents and benefits of volunteering, little has been written about the actual practice of volunteering (Wilson 2012). I argue that volunteering should be seen as a practice of meaning making. Although race and racial conceptualization is the product of a long and ongoing social process (Morning 2011; Omi and Winant 1994), participants of this study showed that their understandings of race, urban space, and poverty were up for negotiation. Homeless service provision provided volunteers with an opportunity to interact with a poor and predominantly black population. Then, based on their service experiences and, more importantly, their conversations with other volunteers, their ideas about race and its relation to poverty and/or urban space (Anderson 2015; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991) could be reinforced and modified.

In Chapter 5, I focus on color-conscious volunteers as a means of highlighting the limits of service and allyship when conducted without critically examining the position of the volunteer. I

argue that even the most color-conscious volunteers, many of whom spoke about structural inequality and systemic racism without prompting, struggled to see how *their* race was important in daily life. When asked how their race might inform their interactions with people of color experiencing homelessness, white, color conscious volunteers were usually quick to admit that it must, but also unable to say exactly how or provide examples. This inability to speak about interracial interactions despite much practice with it highlights the pervasive power and privilege embedded in the taken-for-granted nature of whiteness (Doane 1997; McIntosh 1990). Despite displaying strong knowledge of structural racism and/or anti-racism literature, their whiteness remained invisible to them.

In Chapter 6, I examine how volunteer understandings of homelessness, race, and urban space impact motivation, practice, and the reproduction of marginality. I argue that the privileges and power associated with volunteers' statuses, especially of being white and middle-class, shape perception of, access to, and interaction in nonwhite urban space. Again, volunteer understandings of homelessness were intimately intertwined with notions of blackness and urban space (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). And while the slum/poverty tourism literature more frequently problematizes international tourism and volunteering (e.g., Frenzel 2015; Steinbrink 2012), I repeatedly observed volunteers, both black and white, both "color-blind" and color conscious, profess interest in "urban decay" and take photos with such frequency that one volunteer jokingly asked another volunteer if she "ever feels like a Japanese tourist." In these moments, volunteers sought to explore their home city in a way few others of their class status would, and in the process, emphasized the difference between themselves and those "on the street." Furthermore, stereotypes about the danger of black neighborhoods and black men experiencing homelessness shaped the movements of volunteers, with color-blind volunteers often avoiding "the North Side"

after dark in favor of mostly white homeless camps and color conscious volunteers seeking out black neighborhoods in order to challenge "the beliefs that I was taught."

Finally, in Chapter 7, I review the major findings of this dissertation and consider the implications of these findings on future voluntary practice. While this dissertation has shown that volunteers of privileged statuses pose significant challenges to providing socially just solutions to homelessness, I am not ready to throw the baby out with the bath water. These volunteers have recognized a real problem in their community and sought to do something about it, even as the city failed. Their actions, in my view, are both commendable and require critical interrogation. In addition to pointing out the need for greater reflexivity, even among well-intentioned, social-justice oriented volunteers, I suggest the need for intergroup coalitions and collective action and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:
RACE, VOLUNTEERISM, HOMELESSNESS, AND URBAN SPACE

Introduction

This chapter reviews and unites several bodies of scholarly literature, including race and whiteness studies, poverty and homelessness, civic engagement and volunteerism, and urban studies. In so doing, I aim to highlight three major gaps in the literature.

First, much time and effort has been spent developing a sociology of whiteness, and theories of color-blind racism have been profoundly influential in the field of racial and ethnic studies. However, moving forward, scholars must move beyond fixation with white identities and ideologies. While important to understand each within any given context, studies often neglect to connect ideology to the racialized social system that produced them. According to Hughey, Embrick, and Doane (2015: 1350), the next step is to identify and understand the mechanisms of racial inequality, or "the constellation of properties and actions of whites and activities that are organized to regularly bring about a particular type of outcome." Hughey, Embrick, and Doane were referring specifically to color-blind ideology, but the point can also be applied to the study of those with salient white identities (e.g. white anti-racists), their adjoining ideologies (e.g. pro-diversity), and the contexts that produce them. *How* do whites maintain their privileged/advanced social status in almost any setting? What actions construct and reinforce the racialized social system in which they exist?

Second, voluntary labor is widely practiced throughout the United States, with more than 62 million Americans engaged in some form of volunteering (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). The variety of volunteer activities that exist is wide ranging, with many services aiming to provide for marginalized or "needy" populations/communities. Indeed, volunteers are often crucial in meeting the needs of the disenfranchised. Yet, little work has focused on the *practice* of volunteering (Wilson

2012). In particular, this review of the literature highlights the need to understand how the practice

of volunteering is affected by social positioning. Put differently, how do race, religion, and class

impact service provision and interactions?

Third, much of the work on the stigmatization of the poor takes the poor themselves and/or

legal institutions as central objects of analysis (e.g., Beckett and Herbert 2010; Duneier 1999;

Herring 2019; Reutter et al. 2009; Wasserman and Clair 2010). As a result, their findings are often

framed in terms of "us versus them" ideologies and their objective is to undermine the stigma of

poverty (Wacquant 2002; Wasserman and Clair 2010). Because these studies place the volunteer and

the service provider either on the periphery or outside the field of study, full understanding of the

context and the process of stigmatization has yet to be apprehended. There is a tension among

volunteers and service providers, as the groups are, on the one hand, attempting to engage in work

popularly viewed as altruistic (Snyder and Omoto 2008) while, on the other hand, protecting

privileged statuses (e.g. middle class, college educated, and white) – even if unwittingly (Hughey

2014). Although it is known that service learning and civic activities can foster commitments to

social justice (Einfeld and Collins 2008), it is seldom mentioned in studies of volunteerism. Instead,

studies of service delivery readily frame interactions with the poor as expressions of authoritarianism

and/or religiously motivated saviorism (Butler and Drakeford 2001; Dimick 2016; Wasserman and

Clair 2010).

Defining Race and Whiteness

Race is a contextual construct *and* a relational construct. Race is a product of a series of socio-

historical projects (Levine-Rasky 2002; Omi and Winant 1994; Roediger 1991), but is

also based upon one's (or one's group's) relationship to other groups (Blumer 1958; Frankenberg

2001) and relationships within one's own group (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006). As actors

enter racialized places, there is a give and take. On the one hand, people, and in the case of this study, volunteers, enter places that have preexisting social structures that help define meaning. On the other hand, they enter with and act on preconceptions cultivated through a lifetime of social experiences, and do not necessarily interpret any given place or interaction in the same way as those around them.

Starting in the late 1980s, whiteness was oft referred to as an invisible identity, meaning that it has been largely taken for granted or ignored, both in the academy and in general (Dalton 2008; Doane 1997; McIntosh 1990; Rodriguez and Villaverde 2000). By and large, whiteness in the United States, has been (falsely) equated to racelessness, with only people of color being seen as having a race (Lewis 2004). For these academic works on whiteness, invisibility is intimately tied to privilege. Doane (2003: 7), for example, argues that whiteness is largely able to operate as "invisible" or normative because "whites have historically controlled the major institutions of American society, they have been able to appropriate the social and cultural 'mainstream' and make white understanding and practices normative." Likewise, much of what constitutes public space can also be termed "the white space," with whites serving as moral authorities over people of color regularly forced to navigate these spaces (Anderson 2011, 2015).

While important, these findings cast a long shadow over the field of whiteness studies. Of course, whiteness and its associated privileges have never been invisible to people of color (e.g., Du Bois' (2015) conversation of double consciousness). Even among whites, the invisibility of whiteness is situational, if not selective. Frankenberg (2001: 74) argues that whites are keenly aware of their positionality and privilege. Whiteness is neither invisible nor passive; it is "in a continual state of being dressed and undressed, of marking and cloaking." Whiteness is defined by its dominance. She asserts that whiteness, thanks in large part to its colonial construction, will periodically mark its difference in order to protect its superiority and privilege.

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Of course, race must be understood by situating its conceptualization within social, political, and historical context, as not every place can be characterized by the same set of interracial interactions and racial ideologies (Hartigan 1997, 1999a). Furthermore, an overemphasis of white invisibility reduces the white subject position solely to one of privilege and neglects to consider its social, cultural, historical, and political formation (Winant 2004a, 2004b). As such, studies within the field have done well to shift to a paradigm that acknowledges the existence of multiple whiteness*es* as well as the visibility of white identities (McDermott and Samson 2005).

Likewise, it is imperative that race and racism be understood through an intersectional lens of analysis, recognizing that "systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" (Collins 2000). In other words, interlocking systems of race, gender, religion, social class, etc. work in combination to create unique structural positions of subjects. In turn, these structural positions affect the way the subject experiences and interprets the social world. Middle-class whiteness, for example, places someone at a different structural location and encourages different practices, values, attitudes, capital, and habitus than does working-class whiteness (Levine-Rasky 2011).

In situations where whites find themselves as the minority racial group, they often display a heightened sense of racial identity awareness (Gallagher 1995, 1997; Schneider 2018). Gallagher (1995), for example, found that white college students in a largely black city displayed a heightened awareness of their racial identity when they were operating in spaces that were predominantly nonwhite. In such situations, whiteness does not act in the background as a taken-for-granted construct, but is instead brought to the front of white consciousness as they try to explain/justify their presence in or near nonwhite groups or in order to protect/claim advanced social position (Frankenberg 2001; Hughey 2014; McDermott 2006; Schneider 2018).

Detailed accounts of the complexities of location and racial composition can be found in Hartigan's (1999b) and McDermott's (2006) ethnographic studies of poor and working-class whites who share neighborhoods and/or neighborhood boundaries with racial minorities. Both found that whites were conscious of their white identities and understood their position in relation to their black neighbors. Importantly, McDermott (2006) also showed that sociohistorical context is important in shaping identity and racial ideologies. After observing interracial interactions in convenience stores in white working-class neighborhoods bordering black working-class neighborhoods for nearly a year (six months in Atlanta, five months in Boston), McDermott (2006: 2) argues that whites in Boston used their European ethnic roots as a way to lay claim to certain spaces, such as schools, workplaces, and the neighborhood, as "theirs." In comparison, working class whites in Atlanta viewed their proximity to a predominantly black neighborhood was a mark of their "failure for having not lived up to the affluent, suburban, privileged connotations of whiteness." In the cases presented by McDermott (2006), whites, especially in Boston, attempted to maintain segregated white spaces that they could retreat to, but because of the size and close proximity of the bordering black neighborhood, whites could not simply ignore their existence. In these contexts, whiteness could not simply act as a backdrop or as an unnoticed and inconsequential personal trait (McDermott 2006).

Research has also shown that political context affects racial attitudes, perhaps to an even greater degree than the racial demographics of the context (Campbell, Wong, and Citrin 2006). Much of the literature on racial attitudes is about minority groups moving into white neighborhoods, existing in close proximity to whites, or competing with whites over resources (Berg 2015; Espenshade 1995; McDermott 2015; McDermott and Samson 2005). Alternatively, other studies focus on people living in segregated white communities. Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick (2006), for example, suggest a white habitus forms in communities isolated from frequent minority contact

and their thoughts and opinions about racial minorities are informed by the accounts of other whites. On a larger scale, Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo (1985) track change in U.S. racial attitudes over the course of the 20th century, finding that racial attitudes improved in some respects over the course of the second half of the century. Croll (2013) shows that American racial attitudes have continued to change through the 21st century, with Americans, now, largely willing to acknowledge black structural disadvantage, especially relating to the education system (even if they sometimes struggle to recognize the white racial category as an advantaged group).

In terms of social and political formation, there is a growing literature that explores what leads whites down paths toward anti-racism (Feagin and O'Brien 2004; Hughey 2007; Warren 2010). Winant (2004a) outlines five forms of whiteness that have resulted from various racial projects. He argues that the far right, the new right, neoconservatives, neoliberals, and new abolitionists have each embedded their own political views into their interpretation of whiteness and race. Somewhat similarly, Knowles and colleagues (2014: 595) outline how whites, forced by the contemporary social climate to confront the privileges of their racial position, manage their identities by "denial of white privilege, distancing from whiteness, and dismantling of privilege."

While it is necessary to understand that there are multiple forms of whiteness, both in terms of identities and positionalities, this is not to say there are no commonalities across the "white" category. Indeed, the common thread across white groups is the ability to claim the "superior and righteous subject position regardless of the external changes around it" (Hughey 2014: 7). In fact, building upon a concept of hegemonic whiteness, first proposed by Lewis (2004), Hughey (2010: 1292) argues that "meaningful racial identity for whites is produced *vis-à-vis* the reproduction of, and appeal to, racist, essentialist, and reactionary *inter-* and *intra-*racial distinctions: (1) through positioning those marked as 'white' as essentially different from and superior to those marked as

'non-white', and (2) through marginalizing practices of being white that fail to exemplify dominant labels."

Color Blindness and Color Consciousness

In the post-Civil Rights Movement era, racial attitudes began to shift dramatically, and by the 1980s, Americans were rarely willing to profess explicitly racist attitudes on issues such as school and residential segregation, intermarriage, employment discrimination, etc. (Schuman et al. 1985). Instead, racism took a turn toward subtlety. "The color-blind perspective removes from personal thought and public discussion any taint or suggestion of white supremacy or white guilt while legitimating the existing social, political and economic arrangements which privilege whites. This perspective insinuates that class and culture, and not institutional racism, are responsible for social inequality" (Gallagher 2003: 26). More specifically, Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that color-blind racism operates through four ideological frames that can be deployed singularly or in combination: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.

First, the abstract liberalism frame can be understood as an attempt to justify racism by misrepresenting the ideals of liberalism. Through this frame, color-blind Americans deploy notions of equal opportunity, choice, and freedom to oppose progressive social policies, like affirmative action, and to dismiss racial inequalities, like segregated neighborhoods. "By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral,' while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality" (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 28).

Second, the naturalization frame "allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 28). Segregation and social inequality are dismissed as "just the way things are" (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006: 240), unavoidable, or the simply

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the result of wanting to be near people who are like you (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Burke 2012). As one particularly offensive man in Bonilla-Silva's (2010: 38) study put it, "Just as animals in the wild, you know. Elephants group together, cheetahs group together. You bus a cheetah into an elephant herd because they should mix? You can't force that [laughs]."

Third, the cultural racism frame is deployed to argue that any inequalities that exist among racial groups are due to cultural inferiority. When whites are not able to explain away existing inequalities, they often turn to common stereotypes and tropes about minority "cultures," making claims like, "'Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education' or 'blacks have too many babies' to explain the standing of minorities in society" (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 28).

Fourth, the minimization of racism frame is based off the suggestion that "discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances" (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 29). Those who deploy this frame will often argue that success can be attained by working hard; "playing the race card" is an "excuse" for personal or minority culture failures.

While the literature indicates whites interacting in predominantly nonwhite spaces tend to become more aware of their whiteness/difference (Gallagher 1995, 1997; Schneider 2018), this does not necessarily mean that they adopt color-conscious ideologies. Burke (Burke 2012: 25) finds that even among liberal whites living in "stably diverse" communities, "Residents are both color-blind and pro-diversity." In other words, while white residents expressed an interest in maintaining their communities' diversity, they often undermined this sentiment through practice or expressions of color-blind racism. Common among whites in these diverse communities were expressions of cultural racism (e.g., black families don't care about the well-being of their children), Naturalization (e.g., minority groups *choose* to segregate themselves), and minimization of racism (e.g., race *used* to be an issue, any inequalities are class-based, not racial). So, while color-conscious, they selectively and regularly deployed three of Bonilla-Silva's (2010) frames of color-blindness.

The pervasiveness of color-blind ideologies has come with a "rule book" of sorts, regulating speech, policy, and interactions. The near ubiquity of color-blind ideologies has set rather strict boundaries on discourse, even if it sometimes impairs effective communication (Norton et al. 2006) or encourages whites to skirt around important racialized social problems (Burke 2012). Burke (2012) finds that even among color-conscious whites living in diverse Chicago neighborhoods, expectations of color-blind discourse limit residents from engaging with the subject of race in even in mundane ways. Instead, whites speak in (often racist) coded talk as a way of simultaneously adhering to a "color-blind rubric" for discourse while still discussing race (Burke 2012: 91; Myers 2005). Furthermore, Burke (2012: 92) argues that incoherent talk "underscores the desire to say something outside of the bounds of legitimate discourse, something real and important to the actors in concrete environments."

The pervasiveness of color-blind ideologies can also affect the behaviors and interactions of people of color, as well. Burdsey (2011), for example, finds that British Asian cricket players endure various forms of racism from teammates, but regularly dismiss the prejudice as "banter" in order to best navigate their social world. To do otherwise would breach the boundaries of appropriate color-blind discourse. As one player put it, "They [British Asian players] don't want to make an issue of it just in case it blows out of proportion, so a lot of it is then just quashed and, you know, pushed aside" (Burdsey 2011: 271). Furthermore, research has shown that color-blind social environments can take a toll on the psychological well-being of people of color (Plaut, Thomas, and Goren 2009) and promote or justify racial and ethnic discrimination (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2008; Knowles et al. 2009; Saguy, Dovidio, and Pratto 2008).

The literature on color-blindness makes it clear that color-blindness does not indicate race is *actually* perceived to be invisible or inconsequential. Color-blind whites do, in fact, take notice of

race, and race does communicate meaningful symbols to color-blind actors (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2010; Krysan 2015; Lewis 2001, 2003). Color-blind ideologies view and interpret the world in a way that follows a pattern similar to that laid out above. Notably, people who engage with the world based on color-blind ideologies are less likely to act against racial prejudice (Yi, Todd, and Mekawi 2019). Color-conscious ideologies, in contrast, interpret race and its consequences differently, taking open notice of racial inequalities and socially constructed differences (Appiah and Gutmann 1996). While white nationalists/supremacists loosely fit into this definition, this literature review principally considers the case of anti-racist ideologies.[3]

In her seminal work, *White Women, Race Matters*, Frankenberg (1993: 157) outlines three types of racial discourse among white women: essentialist, color and power evasive, and race cognizant. This third form, race cognizance, engages with race as a social, political, and historical construct that "makes a difference in people's lives" and "is a significant factor in shaping contemporary U.S. society." Race cognizant women, Frankenberg (1993) shows, interpret the world in a way that defies mainstream thinking, recognizing the power and privilege embedded in whiteness by racist social systems. Often, this led race cognizant women to engage in both anti-racist discourse and political action. This characterization of color-consciousness is a fairly common one. Knowles and colleagues (2014: 594), for example, argue that working to "dismantle systems of privilege" is one way for whites to manage their white identity.

Somewhat similarly, Warren (2010) details a process rooted in the contact hypothesis, or the idea that, under the right conditions,[4] interracial contact between individuals will lead to positive

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[3] One key distinction between white supremacist/nationalist ideologies and other color-conscious ideologies is the tendency to view race and racial inequality as "natural" (Ferber 1998).
[4] Allport (1954) specifies four conditions must be met for improved attitudes to occur: 1) the two parties in contact must be of relatively equal status; 2) there must be support for the relationship from the institution in which the interracial parties are operating; 3) the two parties must be in pursuit of a common goal; and 4) there needs to be cooperation between the parties as they pursue the aforementioned goal.

feelings and opinions about the race with which they have contact. Through contact, whites learn to recognize their privileged and advanced position (Allport 1954; Sigelman and Welch 1993; Warren 2010). Specifically, Warren (2010) argues that when anti-racist activists are confronted by the reality of racism and determine that reality does not align with their values, they subsequently strive to become better white allies and anti-racists.

This is not to say that anti-racist ideologies are without their shortcomings. Despite good intentions, color-consciousness, and an awareness of structural racism, whites can often find themselves cementing their advanced and dominant positions within the systems they seek to reshape. Specifically, Hughey's (2007, 2010, 2012) work with white nationalists and anti-racist activists highlights the overlap in the ways each group defines and deploys whiteness. With regards to white anti-racists, he finds that racist social structures are reinforced or reproduced by centralizing their experiences, re-establishing racial boundaries within their "inclusive" framework, and essentializing and consuming minority group cultures.

Likewise, Kowal (2015) documents the ways in which white structural advantage leads anti-racist aid workers to inadvertently reinforce their structural positions. Through their attempts to protect aboriginal cultural identity and minimize the unequal health outcomes in the Northern Territory, these aid workers "find themselves trapped in the gaps they seek to close; the gap between remedial difference and radical difference, between sanitised difference and unsanitised difference, between improvement and assimilation, and between anti-racism and racism" (Kowal 2015: 159). More specifically, romantic imaginings of aboriginal Australians lead these white anti-racists to believe in a system where the community is able to determine its own direction. However, only by communicating that direction to white aid workers and representatives of the Australian government is that vision able to be enacted. White anti-racist involvement is further complicated by the fact that indigenous imaginations and political viewpoints are, of course, quite diverse, and to advocate or

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implement any course of action would mean disagreeing with portion of the indigenous community. In other words, despite the intent to place power and choice in the hands of the community, power continues to rest with those who have held them for generations, again, despite the best of intentions (Kowal 2015).

Religion and Views of (Racial) Inequalities

Scholars of race and religion have done well to show that understandings of race and poverty are tied to religious ideology and practice, with white Evangelicals more likely to interpret the world through a color-blind and meritocratic lens. Conversely, Catholics are more likely to be sympathetic to structural limitations and to be supportive of state welfare policies (Edgell and Tranby 2007; Emerson and Smith 2000; Tranby and Hartmann 2008; VanHeuvelen 2014). This dissertation advances the conversation by showcasing *how* groups, both religious and secular, reinforce and modify the meanings of race for its members.

Given that religious organizations head the majority of service projects (Wasserman and Clair 2010), it is likely that religious ideologies work in conjunction with race and class statuses in volunteer settings. Edgell and Tranby (2007) complicate the relationship between religious subculture and racial attitudes/beliefs. Notably, they find that gender, education, and race, in conjunction with religious involvement, shape beliefs about racial inequality. For example, Hispanic Catholics and blacks with orthodox religious beliefs are more likely than other groups to attribute racial inequality to structural causes. Similarly, (Tranby and Hartmann 2008) build off the work of Emerson and Smith (2000: 354) to argue that the individualism espoused by evangelical Christians works to "not only [blind] white evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race, but it also assigns blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and normalizes and naturalizes cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege white Americans over others." Because volunteering is a

practice that is often offered through religious institutions (Wasserman and Clair 2010), more frequently engaged in by whites (Foster-Bey 2008; Rotolo, Wilson, and Hughes 2010), and crucial to meeting the needs of the poor, it is of vital importance that this juncture be further explored.

Volunteering

Over the course of the last 40 years, the study of volunteering and volunteerism has rightly carved out a place for itself in the social sciences (Wilson 2012). Snyder and Omoto (2008: 3) define volunteer work as "freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation and often through formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance." Even Snyder and Omoto (2008) readily admit this is a working definition, that it is something of an ideal type. Volunteering is considered "formal" when conducted through an organization, but volunteering can also be done informally (Littlepage et al. 2005). Those who identify as volunteers may engage in the activity only briefly, expect compensation (a line on their résumé, an opportunity "to grow," a small living stipend, etc.), and/or operate without purpose or request. In fact, rewards are openly expected in some arrangements. Service years that include small living stipends and/or accommodation (e.g., AmeriCorps) are increasingly available and volunteer tourism opportunities are often portrayed as *mutually* beneficial (Lasker 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), about 24.9% (62.6 million) of people in the United States volunteered for an organization between September 2014 and September 2015, providing a median of 52 hours of voluntary labor. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) (2017) provides a more liberal estimate, reporting that 41% of people in the U.S. volunteered for an organization in 2016. Working on the assumption, at least momentarily, that volunteer participation speaks to the health of a civil society, such numbers would indicate that the U.S. is rather healthy.

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Indeed, the CAF (2017) reports that the U.S. ranks seventh in the world by percentage of people volunteering, and the CAF's World Giving Index -- a score based on rates of volunteering, donation, and helping strangers -- ranks the U.S. as the world's fifth most generous country in 2016.

As a form of civic engagement, volunteering has been touted as an important social activity because it represents an opportunity to build social capital (Putnam 2000) and its popularity, therefore, serves as one indicator of the strength of U.S. civil society (Eliasoph 2013; Putnam 2000; Sundeen, Garcia, and Wang 2007; Tocqueville 2006). However, not all groups are equally represented in activities of civic engagement. The highly educated and those with higher incomes are more likely to participate in traditional forms of civic life, for example (Armingeon and Schädel 2015). In an increasingly diverse U.S. context, it must be asked: who is volunteering and in what contexts? To deny that individuals have personal motivations that lead to volunteering would be to deny agency (Thoits and Hewitt 2001), but it must nonetheless be recognized that volunteer work is patterned and predicted by racial status, gender, family status, religion, and socio-economic status.

Skocpol (2004) argues that civic engagement has been transformed by the privileged, particularly the highly educated and those with higher incomes. Across the Western world, groups with higher levels of income and better education participate at higher rates in political processes (Armingeon and Schädel 2015) and generally participate in civic activities at higher rates (Foster-Bey 2008). In the United States, the education system and churches play especially important roles in mobilizing volunteer workforces. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the well-educated are more civically active, as universities have historically fostered social environments that encourage community action and civic engagement. Some have noticed that educational institutions have transformed education into a commodity to be consumed by students looking to improve their position on the job market (Boyte and Kari 1996). In turn, there has been renewed pressure on

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universities to cultivate a climate of civic engagement and to contribute to their host communities (Boyte and Kari 1996; D'Agostino 2008; Marullo and Edwards 2000; Ostrander 2004).

Likewise, Elder and Conger (2000) found that educators that encouraged volunteering in rural communities believed that such activity correlated with students' sense of responsibility to their schools and communities. But the relationship between community engagement and the education system is intertwined with class. Ballard, Caccavale, and Buchanan (2015: 90) argue that high schools that require community service and benefit from a "culture of privilege" were more successful in promoting civic orientations in their students compared to schools that lacked a culture of privilege. Other scholars have found that private and Catholic schools are more likely to have students that volunteer than public schools (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme, and Zajdow 2003; Nolin, Chapman, and Chandler 1997).

The "core" of volunteers come from the middle-class, meaning that the number of volunteers and number of hours spent volunteering are most likely to come from middle-income homes. This is true in both the United States (Lee and Brudney 2009; Pho 2008) and the United Kingdom (Dean 2016; Mohan 2010). The educated and the middle-class may be more likely to participate in traditional forms of civic life because they feel they have greater stake in the community's wellbeing. This sense of stake may come from something as simple as owning a home in the community (McBride, Sherraden, and Pritzker 2006; Rotolo et al. 2010), but it may also be tied to social capital. Kersh (2007), for example, suggests that those who belong or have access to large social systems and networks might experience a heightened sense of responsibility to their community, national or local.

This is not to say, however, that the poor and those without post-secondary education lack a sense of civic responsibility; the relationship between class and volunteering is a complicated one. McBride, Sherraden, and Pritzker (2006) found that the poor and less educated face challenges that

often exclude them from civic engagement, or at the very least, make engagement more difficult. While, the middle-class maybe disproportionately represented in formal volunteer organizations, prosocial behavior (i.e. helping behavior) is more common among the lower-class (Kraus and Callaghan 2016; Miller, Kahle, and Hastings 2015; Piff et al. 2010; Van Doesum, Tybur, and Van Lange 2017). More specifically, Kraus and Callaghan (2016), by way of comparing three studies, argue that upper-class individuals are more likely to display prosocial behavior in public settings, while lower-class individuals were more likely to display prosocial behavior in private or anonymous settings.

Gender differences in volunteer rate do exist in the United States, although they are not as pronounced as one might expect. While women place more value on volunteering, they are only slightly more likely to engage in informal helping activities. No significant relationship exists between gender and formal volunteering (Wilson and Musick 1997). Likewise, teenage girls surveyed by Wuthnow (1995) were not more likely than their male counterparts to volunteer. However, Musick and Wilson (2008) explain that the gap between men and women's volunteer participation grows when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. This difference is partly explained by church attendance; attending church is positively correlated with volunteer participation and women attend church more frequently than men. Furthermore, activities counted as voluntary labor are wide ranging, including but not limited to political activism, volunteering with sports and recreation clubs, volunteering with Parent Teacher Organizations, and hospice care. When looking across domains of volunteering, it can be seen that compared to men, women are more likely to volunteer in human services, education, and religion (Musick and Wilson 2008).

In terms of race, those engaging in volunteer activities are more likely to be white than nonwhite (Rotolo et al. 2010), and Hispanics and Asians are less likely than whites and African Americans to volunteer (Foster-Bey 2008). While there is disagreement over the causes of this

disproportion, it nonetheless exists (Musick and Wilson 2008; Wilson 2000, 2012). The most popular explanation for the difference in volunteering activity between racial groups is differences in human capital, social and cultural resources, parental influence, and homogenous social networks (McAdam 1988; Musick, Wilson, and Bynum 2000; Mustillo, Wilson, and Lynch 2004).

Homogenous social networks are likely the most popular explanation of demographic differences in volunteer rate (McAdam 1986, 1988; Musick et al. 2000; Mustillo et al. 2004) -- a reasonable explanation given that Americans are more likely to volunteer if they are asked. According to Bowman (2011), the likelihood of volunteer participation increases by 126% if recruited (e.g. being asked by a friend or acquaintance). Because religious congregations often see themselves as communities and not just organizations, members feel a social pressure to volunteer when the church organizes volunteer events (Becker and Dhingra 2001; Cnaan and Boddie 2002). Similar to the role of universities and secondary schools, Maton (2008) argues that religious belief systems shape norms and practices and thus have the opportunity to foster commitments to the community and social justice. Religion and religious communities can be influential in shaping one's understanding of social inequalities and racial attitudes. Todd and Rufa (2013: 324), for example, found that for many of their participants, social justice development meant "integrating their justice perspective with their religious beliefs."

Also well studied, especially by psychologists, are the benefits of volunteering *to the volunteer*. The assumption that volunteer projects benefit the host communities has perhaps led to the neglect of volunteerism in research until rather recently (Raymond and Hall 2008; Wilson 2012). This study does not make such an assumption, nor does it assume volunteerism is completely altruistic in nature. Despite my working definition and recognition that volunteers are often acting upon personal values, volunteerism should not be thought of *only* as an attempt to help a group in need. In fact, there are many motivations and benefits to volunteering. Volunteers, for example, often claim

to be motivated by the prospect of gaining career related experience, life experience, social capital, and/or marketable skills, and a chance to develop useful or marketable skills (Akintola 2011; Clary and Snyder 1999; Eliasoph 2013; Germann Molz 2017; Putnam 2000; Skocpol 1997, 2004). This is especially true of younger volunteers (Okun and Schultz 2003). In addition, volunteering is associated with a number of other personal benefits, including a bolstered sense of solidarity in the volunteer, a strengthening of one's personal identity, improved self-esteem, reduction of negative feelings like guilt, and new or strengthened social relationships (Butcher 2010; Clary and Snyder 1999; Marta and Pozzi 2008; Matsuba, Hart, and Atkins 2007; Prouteau and Wolff 2008). Volunteering has also been found to have a positive impact on quality of life, resulting in better health, better psychological wellbeing, a sense of purpose, and positive emotions (Cattan, Hogg, and Hardill 2011; Larkin, Sadler, and Mahler 2005; Piliavin and Siegl 2007).

Despite the growth of academic literature relating to volunteering, there remains a notable gap. Much remains to be known about the actual practice or experience of volunteering, leading Wilson (2012: 20) to ask, "What can be said about the relationship between volunteer, client, professional staff, and other volunteers?" Only scattered answers exist. Much of the research that has been done is this area focuses on the limits of the volunteers' roles (Fox 2006; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008; Mellow 2007), the impact of volunteers on clients (Wuthnow 1995), and how particular contexts affect volunteer performance and feelings (Hustinx and Handy 2009; Kreutzer and Jäger 2011; Kulik 2007; Taylor, Mallinson, and Bloch 2008).

A number of studies explore race as an *antecedent* to volunteering, but similar to the study of volunteering as a whole, little attention is devoted to the role of race during the actual practice of volunteering (Wilson 2012). Research has shown, however, that in the course of volunteering, volunteers are more likely to encounter other racial/ethnic groups (Astin, Sax, and Avalos 1999),

although there is no guarantee that volunteers will be culturally sensitive as they provide their service (Katayama 1992). In what ways does race inform volunteer interactions and practice, if at all?

Furthermore, volunteering is a particularly interesting form of civic engagement to study because of the contradiction it poses. One the one hand, volunteering is typically thought of as an altruistic activity, engaged in without expectation of reward (Musick and Wilson 2008; Snyder and Omoto 2008). On the other hand, there are clear benefits and advantages to be gained through volunteering. While traditionally thought of as an activity that fosters civil society, (Carpini 2000: 346) argues its purpose has shifted. Volunteering was once about working to solve large social problems but has been recast as an individual experience in recent decades: "Civic engagement has become defined as the one-on-one experience of working in a soup kitchen, cleaning trash from a local river, or tutoring a child once a week." Given these contradictions, it is important to ask how volunteers see themselves and their projects, as well as how they are viewed by others. But perhaps most important is the task of situating their actions, behaviors, and impact within their social contexts.

Homelessness and Homeless Services

In the 1980s, the public ranked homelessness among the most important domestic problems. While the public's interest in homelessness has declined, it remains an important subject of inquiry for social scientists because "homeless persons anchor the low end of a vast and growing wealth disparity in the United States" (Lee et al. 2010: 502). While a number of definitions for homelessness exist, I follow Rossi (1989: 10) by defining homelessness as "not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling." Beyond this basic definition, scholars typically understand homelessness as taking three forms: transitional/temporary, episodic, and chronic (Lee et al. 2010). Furthermore, the history of homelessness is a long one, but in the 1970s, homelessness takes a new

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character. Before the '70s, the word "homeless" would have referred to the "hobo," a population of mostly men traveling around the country and frequently staying in single room occupancy housing (SROs) (Bloom 2005; Hopper 2003). The "new homeless," on the other hand, typically lack shelter altogether (Bloom 2005).

Despite the diminished public interest, homelessness remains a major social problem in the United States. The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that on a single night in January, 2016, 549,928 people were estimated to be homeless. Only 68% were being sheltered and 39.1% of the estimated population was African American (Henry, Watt, and Shivji 2016). While the point in time count underrepresents the number of people experiencing homelessness (Smith and Castañeda-Tinoco 2019; Stanley 2017), it does show that African Americans are overrepresented (see also Burt, Aron, and Lee 2001) in the homeless population and that the problem is of notable scale. Also of note, is the fact that children, women, families, and blacks make up larger percentages of the homeless population today than they did historically (Bloom 2005; Lee et al. 2010).

Explanations of extreme poverty vary, but popular subjects in the literature include segregated networks (Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Massey, Gross, and Eggers 1991), structural changes (e.g. de-industrialization) (Moller et al. 2003), inadequate welfare systems (Benjaminsen and Andrade 2015; Edin and Shaefer 2015; Moller et al. 2003), and social exclusion (Newman and Massengill 2006; Zuberi 2006). Other explanations identify micro level processes or events as a reason for homelessness (e.g., being laid off, substance abuse) (Crane et al. 2005; Main 1998; Rossi 1989). Of course, the paths to homelessness are not fixed. Instead, any given individual has likely found themself experiencing homelessness after experiencing some combination of structural constraints and personal events. Structural conditions, such as high unemployment or rising housing costs, often accentuate individual circumstance, be it illness, a death in the family, etc. (Crane et al. 2005; Main 1998).

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Out of this ongoing conversation about poverty and homelessness in the United States, two things become clear. First, the welfare state and other government institutions are not equipped to meet the needs of the poor (Benjaminsen and Andrade 2015; Moller et al. 2003), and other social institutions (volunteer organizations, churches, local service providers, etc.) have become vital to the delivery of services to the poor. Second, the poor have been stigmatized in ways that reinforce their plight (Beckett and Herbert 2010; Duneier 1999; Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2015; Lyon-Callo 2000; Reutter et al. 2009; Wasserman and Clair 2010).

Homelessness is associated with many negative social and health outcomes. In terms of health, experiencing homelessness is associated with shortened lifespan, places individuals at elevated risk of cancer through sun exposure, cigarette smoking, and alcoholism, and a number of chronic medical conditions ranging from cardiovascular disease to tuberculosis. Psychotic and affective disorders are also fairly common (Goodman, Saxe, and Harvey 1991; Schanzer et al. 2007). These heavy health burdens leads many experiencing homelessness to turn to emergency departments at a rate higher than the general public, even if they are receiving primary care in public shelters (Ensign and Santelli 1997; Schanzer et al. 2007).

In terms of social risks, homelessness has been highly stigmatized. This is especially true in the United States where homelessness is seen as a personal trouble, where people experiencing homelessness are blamed for their plight (Belcher and DeForge 2012; Lyon-Callo 2000; Mills 2000; Phelan et al. 1995). Local governments often seek to regulate the lives of those experiencing homelessness. In many towns and cities across the country, many activities of daily living, like sitting on the sidewalk, sleeping in public, and public urination, have been criminalized in an effort to exile homelessness from public view. In turn, people deemed to be misusing public space can become subject to harassment by police, local business, and other residents (Amster 2003, 2008; Aykanian and Lee 2016; Beckett and Herbert 2010; Mitchell and Heynen 2009). Complaint-oriented policing, a

system in which police respond to calls from the public, can result in frequent, if not constant, movement through urban public spaces (Herring 2019). Even "therapeutic policing," which aims to "cure" people experiencing homelessness by instilling "moral discipline" in them, infringes upon the simple right to exist in public space (Stuart 2016b). Wasserman and Clair's (2010) chapter on religious institutions, likewise, suggests that Christian service groups still rely on Calvinistic notions of work and morality in a way that stigmatizes the homeless. Meanwhile, increasing income disparities between the poor and the wealthy mean that even when people experiencing homelessness participate in the formal economy, they can struggle to find affordable permanent housing (Lyon-Callo 2001).

This is not to say that public views of homelessness are monolithic. On the one hand, the public expresses substantial interest in policies that exclude people experiencing homelessness from public space (Clifford and Piston 2017). On the other hand, recent surveys have shown public attitudes toward those experiencing homelessness have become more compassionate and liberal in recent years, and that Americans are increasingly supportive of governmental support (Clifford and Piston 2017; Tsai et al. 2017, 2019). These attitudes toward the homeless are not mutually exclusive, as Clifford and Piston (2017) found that many of those who support exclusionary policies that target those experiencing homelessness are not significantly less likely to support policies of homeless support. Even among volunteers who came into contact with people experiencing homelessness, opinions about how the government should respond to the problem of homelessness – this in spite of adopting more structural view of homelessness after making contact (Knecht and Martinez 2009).

Similarly, at the structural level, despite the increased use of exclusionary policy by criminal justice and legal systems (Beckett and Herbert 2010; Desmond and Bell 2015), both the local and federal government have invested in meeting the needs of those experiencing homelessness (even if it can often be argued that these programs are underfunded). For example, homeless emergency

services and shelter have been a staple of the service industry since the 1980s, and "housing first" initiatives continue to gain momentum in the United States, at both local and federal levels (Lee et al. 2010; Rossi 1989; Shlay and Rossi 1992). Given this contradiction in which those experiencing homelessness are simultaneously viewed as public nuisance and subjects of sympathy, how do service providers (and volunteers) interact with people experiencing homelessness and work toward meeting their needs?

While some studies of homeless service provision focus on the caring atmosphere provided by shelters (e.g., Conradson 2003; Johnsen, Cloke, and May 2005; Parr 2000) or on improving service practices (e.g., Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet 2010; McGraw et al. 2010), the literature is largely critical of the industry. Lyon-Callo (2000: 332), for example, argues, "that routine, everyday practices undertaken by shelter staff and guests to resolve 'diseases' actually re-produce and reinforce dominant imaginings about homelessness and homeless people and, thus, contribute to producing particular subjectivities, experiences, self-images, and behaviors among homeless people." More specifically, medicalized treatment calls for a diagnosis of the subject; both individuals experiencing homelessness and service staff look to identify the "cause" of someone's homelessness, with substance abuse and/or mental illness being common diagnoses. Doing this individualizes a structural outcome. Rather than mobilize around efforts to reduce poverty in the community because doing so would be "unrealistic," service staff devise "treatment" plans that emphasize finding (typically low wage) work, managing mental illness, and otherwise reforming oneself. Such plans, Lyon-Callo (2015, 2000) argues, train service recipients to blame themselves for their position.

Lyon-Callo's (2015, 2000) observations were specific to one shelter in Massachusetts, but the critique is a common one. Critiques of the homeless service industry routinely describe intuitions and workers intent on disciplining homeless subjects (e.g., Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2001; Stuart 2016b; Willse 2015). Similarly, Gowan (2010: 287-288) explains that within the shelter system,

"system-talk" is discouraged in favor of "sin-talk" and "sick talk," meaning that individuals in a shelter program are expected to accept an individualistic and "moral" perspective as they are "extorted to take responsibility, deal with their issues, and remake themselves fit to the rigors of the economy" if they wish to stay sheltered. Willse (2015: 46; see also Willse 2010) adds that the social welfare industry, "serves[s] the economy directly as *part of the economy*," meaning that through neoliberalizon, welfare has become a system of economic investment. By managing the homeless population – what Willse (2015) terms surplus life – through state and local institutions, especially under the federal Continuum of Care (CoC),[5] "nonprofit industries leave in place the social, economic, and political conditions that produce massive inequality and diminish life chances in the first place." Objictified, infantilized, and rendered powerless by the industry, many people experiencing homelessness grow frustrated with the service industry opt out of receiving service (Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Lyon-Callo 2000; Wagner 1993).

Poverty Tourism and Urban Space

While poverty/slum tourism has a history dating back more than one hundred years in the United States, the recent body of literature has primarily focused on the growth of global slum tourism, especially since the 1990s (e.g., Freire-Medeiros 2013; Frenzel 2015). Indeed, as the world took a neoliberal turn in the 1970s, international slum tourism, as well as care tourism, development tourism, and volunteer tourism, became a viable industry. Viewed as less corrupt than the state, the private and voluntary sectors began working in the arena of development (Frenzel 2015). Such

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[5] The continuum of care plan was passed during the Clinton administration as way of providing a centralized and organized system of funding and program development. Based in the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the CoC focuses on mental and physical health (as well as addiction) and privatized job training, education, and employment. The plan embraced a neoliberal view of poverty and, in turn, worked against "government dependency" by emphasizing work over housing and other traditional forms of welfare assistance (Lyon-Callo 2015).

tourism is not inherently negative. Work by Deller (2010) suggests that jobs created by tourism in the rural U.S. are not poverty level jobs. Furthermore, volunteer tourism has been marketed and perceived as beneficial to both volunteers and host communities (Frenzel 2015; Lasker 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007).

Yet, such practices also come with the risk of "re-signify[ing] poverty as an object of rational consumption capable of reinforcing class boundaries and distinctions" (Freire-Medeiros 2013: 23). Scholarship has shown that international volunteerism is largely motivated by romantic imaginings of the "other" and otherized places (Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Schneider 2018). Furthermore, volunteer interactions through service activity can exercise cultural influence over the space (Schneider 2018).

While little has been written about such practices in the U.S. context, Stuart (2016a, 2016b) explains how "therapeutic policing" efforts on Skid Row in Los Angeles have altered the social geography of the area. As residents of Skid Row make their way through a hyper-surveilled and stigmatized context, they develop what Stuart (2016a: 307) calls "cop wisdom," meaning that they are able to interpret "their physical and social environment through the eyes of passing officers." In turn, those coming into contact with the police, especially those experiencing homelessness, attempt to manage how they would be perceived by police and volunteer workers, alter their movements through the neighborhood, or even avoid spending time with "suspicious looking people" (Stuart 2016a: 307). Might volunteers similarly impact local communities and places?

Furthermore, how might volunteers interpret and interact in poor urban spaces? How are their interactions mediated by previously held understandings of urban poverty? Work like Kirschenman and Neckerman's (1991) chapter, "We'd Love to Hire them, but…" and Anderson's (2011) *Cosmopolitan Canopy*, allow a glimpse at racist and classist assumptions made within urban contexts – to see where and how social boundaries are formed.

It is well established that race is of critical importance in people's perceptions. Literature on race and employment has long made a convincing argument that race shapes the perception of minority job candidates. Time and again studies have suggested that employers perceive whites not only as more employable, but as having superior "hard" skills, better communication skills, greater intellect, and as harder workers (e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009; Pager and Quillian 2005). Scholars have also found that such perceptions are applied to minority children long before adulthood. For example, Rios (2011) argues that Latino boys and teens are labeled as deviant by agencies of social control, including the police and the education system. Likewise, Lewis (2003: 79), demonstrates how teachers often perceived black boys as "unruly," and in turn, imposed stricter rules upon them. In society at large, many Americans – especially whites – explain away racial inequality through assumptions about work ethic and/or cultural deficiencies among people of color – and especially among blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Burke 2012). At times, "black," "poor," and "urban" are even used interchangeably (Hunter and Robinson 2016; Wilson 1987).

Consequences of these perceptions and assumptions are often spatial. Much has been written about redlining and white flight (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Crowder 2000; Crowder and South 2008; Hirsch 1998; Massey and Denton 1993; Renzulli and Roscigno 2007). As the population of the United States continues to diversify (Lichter 2013), it is especially important to focus on interracial interactions taking place in diverse, often urban, spaces. In so-called cosmopolitan spaces, interracial interactions are often civil, although it is generally clear that whites serve as the moral authority in these spaces and that navigating the spaces as a person of color can be perilous (Anderson 2011, 2015; Feagin 1991).

Furthermore, white, middle-class interpretation of space is tied to social understandings of the space and who (might) occupy or make use of it. In other words, normative ideas about race,

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class, gender, and other identities inform actors' views of neighborhoods and locales (Mayorga-Gallo 2018; Merry 1981), with black neighborhoods seen as dangerous and/or poor (Harris 2001). When forced to navigate these spaces, whites display higher awareness of their white identity, if not of their elevated social positioning, and express unease or discomfort (Gallagher 1995; Schneider 2018). Mayorga-Gallo (2018) even describes how white, middle-class women living in a racially diverse, mixed income, North Carolina neighborhood only express that they feel safe when they walk the neighborhood with their dogs.

But while poverty, especially extreme poverty among blacks in urban contexts, is heavily stigmatized and black urban space viewed as dangerous, there is a contradictory desire to see "slums," and poor contexts in general, as places of vibrant culture, self-organization, and political life (Roy 2011; Schneider 2018). As MacCannell (1992: 42) puts it, "Modern man has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others." But again, this conversation has been largely limited to the Global South. As we shall see in Chapter 6, I argue that volunteering to help those suffering from extreme poverty is, at least in part, motivated by desire to explore the urban Other through firsthand interaction – the same desire that has helped make international poverty tourism so popular (Freire-Medeiros 2013).

Taken Together

As the reader has likely noticed, this dissertation seeks to integrate diverse academic fields. Melding together scholarly work on race, slum tourism, and voluntary practice is, of course, part of my contribution. This literature review, however, also provides necessary foregrounding for the chapters to come. In addition to providing a broad introduction to topics that will arise again in the substantive chapters, this review highlights a common theme across literatures: the importance of

relationality. To understand whiteness means understanding how it exists in relation to, in the case of this dissertation, blackness. It means understanding whiteness as group position. Similarly, service provision can only be understood within a context in which that service is needed – or at the very least, interpreted to be needed. Understanding slum or poverty tourism, then, means understanding how the subject of the tour exists in relation to residential urban and/or suburban space. Framing the dissertation in this way serves to highlight the process of meaning making among volunteers (see Chapter 4), the power embedded in white, middle-class, and volunteer group positions (see Chapter 5), and how the relationship between these constructs informs volunteer perception and action (see Chapter 6).

CHAPTER THREE

CONDUCTING AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF HOMELESS SERVICE PROVISION

On a cold night in February, I found myself weaving between downtown St. Louis and the infamously segregated black north side of the city. I was sitting in the passenger seat of a small black Fiat, searching for anyone who "looks homeless" with Fran, the founder of Citywide Outreach. The goal was simply to get those without housing to shelter for the night. When in downtown, we peered into covered bus stops looking for anyone that did not seem to fit into the surrounding scene of hip bars and restaurants. We checked popular homeless congregation sights, including steam grates, fast food restaurant lobbies, parks, and social service centers. On the North Side, we circled around crumbling red brick buildings and peered into any nook that might offer shelter from the wind. As we cruised around the city, conversation between Fran and I varied. She was quick to laugh, and the two of us exchanged funny stories and small talk as relevant. She also gave me a history lesson on homelessness and welfare in the United States – unprompted and from memory. At another moment, I asked her what she knew about the locally famous Merfred paintings. With a hint of pride in her voice, she announced that she knew the artist. She explained to me that the artist aimed to provide the community with something to enjoy together, rather than to fixate on perceived group differences. While a "sweet, sweet man," she doubted that he, nor she for that matter, understood "the depth of racism." At a later point, she expressed to me that she hoped to establish a coordinated network of services available across the city. Fran was incredibly thoughtful, caring, and dedicated to providing relief, even if only temporary, to people experiencing homelessness.

As we drove along, passing the time through conversation, we kept our eyes peeled. If either of us spotted someone in potential need, conversation would stop at a moment's notice, her "tin can car" would whip into a U-turn, and we would be parking or rolling down a window to ask about that person's housing arrangements for the evening. When she engaged people, whether she knew them

or not, the tone in her voice was soft and meant to communicate that she cared. It was clear to me, and I assume to those she approached "on the street," that she was there to help if needed.

In the Spring of 2015, I worked with an Episcopalian service house on an occasional basis, and over the course of about 12 months (August 2017 – August 2018) of near daily ethnographic research, I worked alongside five grassroots homeless service organizations. Through this work, I met dozens of well-intentioned volunteers committed to meeting the needs of their "friends on the streets." While Fran sticks out in my mind as exceptionally kind and civically minded, the other volunteers I met were also, time and again, willing to sacrifice their free time, money, possessions, and arguably safety to respond to what they saw as a pressing problem in their city: homelessness. What pushes (or pulls) these volunteers toward this sort of service? While the literature on volunteering offers a few scattered answers about the motivations and rewards for volunteering, analysis rarely relies on ethnographic data. These studies are of prime importance but provide an incomplete picture. In addition to providing a rich understanding of the contexts of volunteering and service, ethnography responds to the need for additional study of volunteering in practice (Wilson 2012). Still more, ethnography presents an opportunity to study how interpersonal interactions and relationships shape, reproduce, and/or undermine social inequalities and boundary making processes (Desmond 2014). This project offers an opportunity to explore the connected nature of interaction, ideology, and structural inequality.

Before any fieldwork was conducted, and before a field location was chosen, this project started with a broad question: if whiteness is best understood as a dominant group position (Blumer 1958), and racism as any set of practices, projects, and ideologies that reproduce that group position (Wellman 1993), how might the practice of volunteering/helping predominantly poor, black populations be affected by a largely white, middle-class participation? This made St. Louis, a city/metropolitan area with a long history of white flight, systemic inequality, and racial tension

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(Gordon 2008; Heathcott and Murphy 2016), an attractive field site. Additionally, the large presence of grassroots homeless service groups attractive made St. Louis ideal, because these groups would be coming into regular, interpersonal contact with people experiencing homelessness.

The St. Louis Metropolitan Area
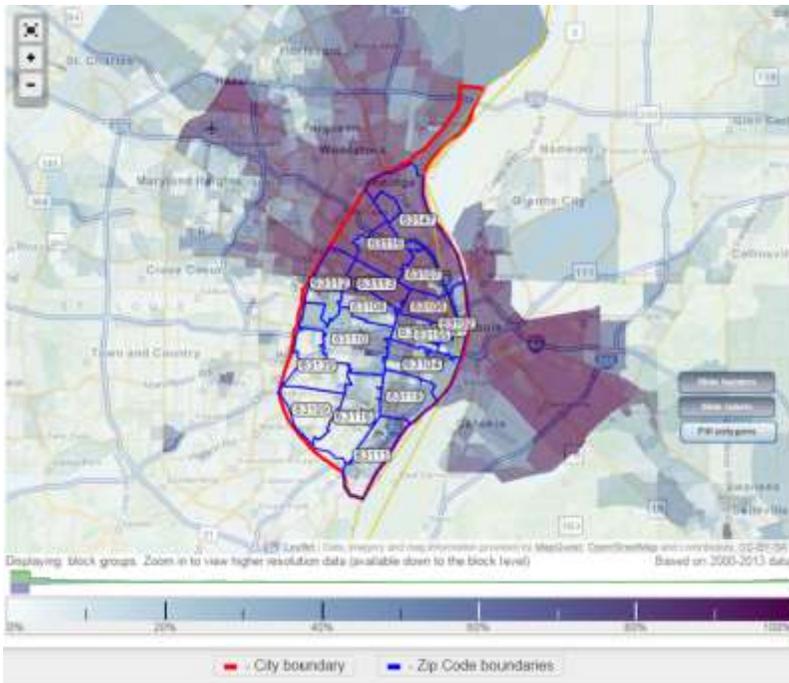
Figure 1: Map of St. Louis and surrounding towns by % black (city data 2016).

St. Louis once stood out as a booming metropolis and as America's fourth largest city. Those days are gone. In the post war period, St. Louis has experienced an incredible decline in population. In 1950, the population of the city of St. Louis was about 850,000 people, and about half of the metropolitan area lived within the city limits. By the 2000 census, the population had dropped to less than 350,000 and could claim only 13% of the metropolitan area's population (Gordon 2008). Out migration has been normal for U.S. industrial cities since the 1950s, but St. Louis finds itself in exclusive company with only Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh as cities to have lost more than half of their population (Hollander et al. 2009). Sitting immediately across the Mississippi river, East St. Louis has experienced sustained economic and population decline, as well, with Hollander et al. (2009: 230) even calling the city "a poster child for shrinking cities" because of it crime record, large unemployed labor force, and struggling school system (see also Gordon 2008; Reardon 2000).

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In addition to the economic strife, the city has experienced substantial racial strife and remains a heavily segregated city, with North and East St. Louis housing black residents and the south and west suburbs housing mostly white residents (see figure 1). Of course, racial tension in St. Louis predates the end of WWII (think Dred Scott v. Sandford, the East St. Louis Race Riots of 1917, the murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy, and Bleeding Kansas), but the current demographic map was formed during the era of white flight (Gordon 2008; Heathcott and Murphy 2016). And while this, in part, means that the urban landscape lacks the tax base of the St. Louis suburbs, Farley (1991, 1995, 2005) argues that the continued segregation is, first and foremost, an issue of race and not class. According to Farley (2005), socioeconomic status only explains a small percentage of black-white housing segregation in St. Louis metropolitan area (15-35 percent by his measures). In his view, housing segregation is better explained by white preference for predominantly white communities, and by white and black families being directed to view and buy houses in racially homogenous communities.

More recently, the St. Louis metropolitan area has been pushed into the national spotlight for its problems with racism and police violence. Most notably, in August 2014, weeks of protest followed the police shooting of an unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, MO, a St. Louis County town that lies just a few minutes north of the city. When it was announced that Darren Wilson, the white officer who had killed Brown, would not be charged, further protest erupted (Lockhart 2019). The events brought to a head two century of racial tension in St. Louis (Cooperman 2017). While newspapers generally produced a narrative that was sympathetic to the ensuing protests, and many responded to the Brown's death by calling for police reform (Elmasry and el-Nawawy 2017; Kochel 2015; Lockhart 2019; Smith 2019), others fixated on the protester disruption, crimes, looting, arson, and the potential divisiveness (Kochel 2015).

The tension has not dissipated with time. Early during my time in the field (September 2017), a white police officer, Jason Stockley, was acquitted of a 2011 first-degree murder charge after he shot and killed Anthony Lamar Smith, a black man Stockley and his partner, Brian Bianchi, reportedly suspected of engaging in an illegal drug transaction. Massive protest again erupted after the acquittal (Dakin and Karimi 2017). However, it is important to note that racial justice protests did not only occur following major events, and issues of race and racism remain salient in the minds of many St. Louis residents in 2020. In fact, many of this study's participants reported belonging to a number anti-racist, activist, and community organizations that take open notice of racism. Even a number of the participants who generally operated out of color-blind ideologies would surprise me from time to time, noting their participation in racial justice protests or their awareness of problems with our criminal justice system.[6] Other color-blind volunteers showcased their struggle to understand what race means in a time where color-blind discourse encourages them to avoid conversations about race and racism (Burdsey 2011; Burke 2012), but also in a place like St. Louis, MO where issues of racism are oft discussed in personal conversation and through the media.

Within this broad context, there is also a subtheme: St. Louis' "dying neighborhoods [are] in need of middle-class technical salvationists" (Wilson and Mueller 2004). Wilson and Mueller (2004) identify this subtheme as one way in which newspapers represent struggling urban neighborhoods en route to legitimating gentrification efforts, but to what extent has this theme been internalized by volunteers who are entering poor urban communities? If they have, how do race, class background, and religious affiliation work together to affect volunteer-service recipient interactions?

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[6] This person, John, actually referenced Michelle Alexander's (2012) *The New Jim Crow*, in a late-night conversation with me.

The Volunteer Groups

As a participant observer, I worked alongside volunteers from the six sampled organizations. Four of the groups conducted homeless outreach, which meant driving around the city to either random or regular spots to share meals, snacks, nonalcoholic drinks and water, blankets, sleeping pads, tents, batteries, propane, and just about anything else needed to survive without shelter. During the cold months, two of the groups, Citywide Outreach and Fam in the Streets, scoured the city, asking people experiencing homelessness if they needed a ride to overnight emergency shelters. Four of the organizations can be identified as a having religious character – at some point, all four had been officially affiliated with a church or larger religious organization. The other two groups were officially secular. Prayer was not a regular part of their outreach, but group prayer did happen on (very rare) occasion and a number of group members credited their faith for spurring their participation in these secular organizations. As the literature on volunteering would have predicted (Foster-Bey 2008), a large majority of the volunteers I met and interacted with were white, although Fam in the Streets was, by comparison, fairly diverse and Citywide outreach relied heavily on partnering emergency shelters located in black churches spread across the north side of the city.

Two of the six groups I observed, Fellowship Outreach and Right Choice Ministry and Outreach, included religious practice as a part of their service. Fellowship Outreach originally operated as a part of a larger evangelistic center, but even after the closing of the center, the group continued to conduct outreach on a year-round, weekly basis. At the time of observation, they had been providing the "friends" with sodas, snacks, meals, clothing, batteries, tents, and other supplies for about five years. Right Choice was primarily composed of members of a nondenominational congregation and provided similar outreach services. Both relied heavily on prayer, although Right Choice was known to regularly consider whether or not they were doing enough promote God's word as a part of their outreach missions, and this rarely came up as an issue for members of

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Fellowship.[7] Importantly, though, members of these groups tended to espouse ideologies that emphasized individualism, hard work, and color-blindness. Although the degree to which volunteers were willing to acknowledge the continued importance of race and racism in American society varied, Bonilla-Silva's (2010) four frames of color-blind racism, especially abstract liberalism, minimization of racism, and cultural racism, were commonly deployed during volunteer interviews. Emerson and Smith (2000) detail the association between the Evangelicalism, individualism, and color-blindness. Although neither Fellowship nor Right Choice were comprised of practicing Evangelicals, Protestant notions of the individual and achievement (Berger 1990; Weber 2011) were well represented and paired well with the color-blind disposition of the group.

Four groups, Citywide Outreach, Mercy House, Service House, and Fam in the Streets, made a conscious effort to operate out of social justice frameworks or identified as progressive activists and viewed their volunteer activities as an enactment of their activism. Citywide's primary focus was dedicated to organizing a network of "pop up shelters" on nights when the temperature if forecasted to drop below 20°F (or below 25°F with precipitation) and to transporting unhoused individuals to these shelters. Fam in the Streets often joined in on this mission on cold nights and gained limited local fame for their, as many group members called it, "caravan of love" that travelled around the city serving hot meals on to people experiencing homelessness on Thursday nights. Mercy House is a Catholic Worker House and shelter located on the predominantly black north side of the city. In addition to offering a few one-night beds on extremely cold nights, they also provide short-term shelter for women, families, and people who are transgender, a free weekend breakfast, free sandwiches for anyone who comes to the door, and free donated clothing. Service House was a

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[7] A few of the longtime members of Fellowship mentioned that in previous versions of the group, this issue had come up. The current leadership, however, was unconcerned about ensuring the group maintained an explicitly Christian character. In fact, despite the clear importance of religious practice on a nightly basis, Peter regularly suggested that religion was not a central feature of the group.

group of young Episcopalian adults who had committed themselves to a year of service. They lived in an intentional community on the North Side and spent their days serving at local nonprofits, three of whom directly or indirectly provided services to people experiencing homelessness.

In contrast to the other two groups, members of these groups generally tended to be color-conscious. While members of the other two groups usually needed to be asked how they felt about the importance of race and racism in St. Louis, these volunteers generally broached the subject as they provided analysis of poverty and homelessness and St. Louis. Although they may not have (always) used the exact same language as sociologists of race and ethnicity, they articulated race as a system of oppression. Thus, they viewed racism not just as individual prejudice, but also as a combination of practices and ideologies that could be embedded in institutions like the city government, the criminal justice system, and the education system.

Homelessness in St. Louis

Depending on which volunteer was asked, a person experiencing homelessness can be identified by the clothes they are wearing, how they are acting, or the bags they carry. Few, if any, have the gall to suggest they stop more frequently for black pedestrians, and some even doubt that the unhoused are disproportionately black. The data suggest otherwise. Despite the limitations of the annual point-in-time count (Smith and Castañeda-Tinoco 2019; Stanley 2017), it can at least be seen as useful for understanding the general demographics of the homelessness population, especially when looking specifically at who is being temporarily sheltered on the night of the count. On the night of the count in 2017, St. Louis City and St. Louis County[1], 77% of those counted were black (HUD 2017a, 2017b). In contrast, St. Louis City's black population accounts for only 45.9% of the total population, and St. Louis County's black population accounts for only 24.9% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau 2019b, 2019a). Borrowing data from the American Community Survey, the

City of St. Louis's own website estimates that black residents are nearly four times more likely to be homeless than white residents (City of St. Louis 2020).

"Homelessness" can refer to a wide range of experiences. In this study, observation was generally of people who lived precariously without access to permanent housing, frequently spending their nights in abandoned buildings or tents, on the street or ground, or in a shelter bed. The one exception to this was those who were living at Mercy House. In addition to serving people living more precariously, they also housed a small number of women, families, and transgender people for comparatively long periods of time (usually a few months). The people experiencing homelessness I interacted with were mostly black men of varying age. That said, there was a segregated nature to St. Louis' homeless geography. It was common to see large congregations of black men spread throughout the city, and especially in the downtown area near social service centers. But volunteer groups also had a knowledge of a number of camps that were less obvious or totally hidden to the average passerby. Most of these camps were small, just one to three people, and most of the camp residents were white, but these camps were well served by a number of volunteer groups, including Right Choice and Fellowship.

Homelessness in St. Louis, MO does not command the academic or popular attention that is given to other places (e.g., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, New York) (e.g., Beckett and Herbert 2010; Duneier 1999; Gowan 2010; Herring 2019; Stuart 2016). Even the problem of rural homelessness commands a fair amount of attention (Lawrence 1995; Meehan 2019; Wiltz 2015). But homelessness in smaller, declining industrial cities like St. Louis are important to consider. While these cities deal with many of the same problems that large cities deal with, homelessness is an expensive problem to address, and these cities may not be willing/able to dedicate the necessary financial resources to productive solutions. While not necessarily unique to smaller cities, outreach and volunteer activities may be of greater significance to the context (Ashwood et al. 2019).

The six groups with whom I worked were chosen based upon their accessibility. Two groups, Mercy House and Fellowship, were found online and responded when I reached out. Three others, Citywide, Right Choice, and Fam in the Streets, were added to the study through mutual contacts established once already in the field. The sixth organization, Service House, was made accessible through a personal friend.

More challenging was gaining access to people experiencing homelessness. There were many people experiencing homelessness that I regularly came into contact with, most of whom were black, and I had good rapport and relationships with them. But my interactions with them were mostly limited to the context of service provision. In order to attain a better understanding of the groups I was observing – principally, how they were perceived by the people they served – I attempted to conduct interviews with these regular contacts met during the course of service. This proved challenging. First, any ethnography of homelessness or extreme poverty will highlight just how busy (and exhausting) life is for those subject to the conditions of poverty. "Making it" in neoliberal times often requires constant movement around the city (Herring 2019) and regular response to the demands of police and shelter policies (Lyon-Callo 2015, 2000; Stuart 2016) while balancing the need to (find) work (Edin and Shaefer 2015). Frequently, I would set up a time and place to conduct an interview with a person experiencing homelessness only to be "stood up." When I would reencounter that person days or weeks later, they usually explained that they had been forced to move, heard about an opportunity to earn money (e.g., metal scrapping), or simply forgot. One of the men I was closest to was arrested the night before we were set to meet. He was eventually incarcerated, and I was never able to interview him.

When I did manage to interview people experiencing homelessness, they were usually less than forthcoming. In addition to the great social distance that existed between us, they knew me as a

volunteer. When interviewed, they generally only offered vague, positive opinions about the volunteer groups. It is certainly possible that they spent minimal time reflecting on their relationships to the service groups or that they did, in fact, only think positively of the service groups. If not – and I suspect that they did not have *only* positive feelings about the groups – what incentive would they have to express negative feelings, detail microaggressions, or otherwise critique the groups who provide them with essential supplies to someone they knew as a member of that group?

Throughout the data collection process, I tried to remain cognizant of my social statuses and how that might be impacting the data gathered (Heyl 2001). Certainly, my status as a white, male researcher presented limitations on my ability to access and attain rich interview data with those experiencing homelessness. However, my similarities to the volunteer groups and the fact that most of the groups treated me as a full participant, despite knowing that I was also conducting a research project, undoubtedly served as an asset when interacting with groups of predominantly white, middle-class volunteers. Here, my similarities and my regular participation in group activities seemed to grant me an "insider status," rapport, and trust. This likely contributed to the rich data collected during field observation, and especially during interviews. In fact, it seemed as though interviewees shared information with me under the impression that I would have similar, complimentary, or at the very least, sympathetic view of their opinions (Goffman 2016; Greene 2014; Sherry 2008).

Data and Methods

For this project, data were collected through participant observation and interview. The membership of most volunteer groups was predominantly white, middle class, and college educated. In turn, the data collected reflect this demographic makeup. Preliminary research was conducted in the spring of 2016, and primary data collection was conducted between August 2017 and August 2018. This paper

utilizes 50 semi-structured interviews with 48 group volunteers and people experiencing homelessness.[8] Interviews generally lasted about an hour and focused on volunteer interactions and the problem of homelessness. Although I always brought an interview guide with me to interviews, conversation was largely free-flowing and dictated by the interviewee. Through 250+ hours of participant observation, I came into contact with countless other volunteers, service groups, and people experiencing homelessness; observation of these encounters was first recorded as jottings and then elaborated on as field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Tables with information about each of the groups and the demographic breakdown of participants and their organizational affiliation has been included in Appendices A and B.

The bulk of observational data comes from my participation with the outreach groups (Right Choice, Fellowship, Fam in the Streets, and Citywide). These hours were spent caravanning around the city, either on the lookout for people who might be without shelter for the evening or traveling to places where people experiencing homelessness were known to congregate. It was normal for these drives to be filled with small talk or conversation about local events, but it also gave volunteers and opportunity to discuss things they had observed during the course of service. Knowing that I was a researcher, some also used it as a platform to share their opinions about homelessness in St. Louis. I also frequently made use of the time to ask follow-up questions. When we made our stops, I had the opportunity to observe volunteer interaction, both with other volunteers and with those experiencing homelessness. I also observed group meetings (both internal meetings and meetings with city officials), helped serve breakfast at Mercy House, shared meals with a number of groups/participants, and passed time talking about Pokémon video games with Paul as we waited

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[8] Three people (Barbara, Paul, and Bernard) provided two interviews. Cecelia and Thomas were interviewed together.

for people who needed access to Mercy House's clothing room, stock of sandwiches, and/or hygiene supplies.

Methodological Approach

The project was approached with the grounded theory method. Rather than enter the field with a specific hypothesis to "test," grounded theory's approach is to allow findings to "emerge" from the field of study (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Miles and Huberman 1984). As the researcher navigates, interprets, and analyzes the field in which they operate, jottings and detailed field notes are taken. From these notes, themes, concepts, and theories are explored and further questioned, with field notes and memos providing an opportunity to capture "indigenous meaning." Because grounded theory (and ethnography in general) encourages an interpretive process, the nature and content of field notes and memos evolves over the course of the project (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Emerson et al. 2011; Geertz 1994; Miles and Huberman 1984).

For this project, background research was conducted before entering the field, continued throughout my time in the field, and it was expected that project findings would relate to race, whiteness, and urban space. Interview questions were, in turn, designed to explore such issues. Interview guides with specific questions can be found in appendices C and D. Memos were written during the course of fieldwork, but all interview transcription and systematic data analysis was conducted at the conclusion of field work. Data were first coded for general themes, then again line-by-line. The themes presented in this paper emerged during this process (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Miles and Huberman 1984; Weiss 1994).

Furthermore, this project sought to intertwine the principles of critical race theory (CRT) with the practices of data collection and analysis. Although more widely used as a theoretical framing device in the fields of law and education, there has been a push to more explicitly engage with CRT

in the social sciences, and especially in sociology (Christian, Seamster, and Ray 2019; Delgado and Stefancic 2012). The major tenets of CRT are:

1. Racism is a normal and ordinary part of everyday life, even as color-blind understandings of the world mask the importance of all but the most severe and obvious forms of discrimination and prejudice (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Burke 2012; Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

2. Racism is to the material, social, economic, political, and psychic benefit of the United States' largest racial group (whites), meaning that there is little incentive to addressing persistent racial inequalities unless it further benefits those in the dominant group position (Blumer 1958; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Doane 1997; Omi and Winant 1994; Wellman 1993).

3. Race is a social construction, and is not grounded in biological reality, but rather produced through complex networks of social interactions and institutions (Blumer 1958; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Omi and Winant 1994).

4. Social groups are racialized differently across time and place (Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

5. Intersecting identities/social statuses must be considered jointly, as the combination of statuses better speaks to a person of group's the structural position, and therefore patterned social opportunities and resource access, than race alone (Browne and Misra 2003; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991; Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

These five major tenets were kept in mind at every stage of data collection and analysis. This project represents an attempt to engage with the issue of volunteering critically, dually acknowledging the tangible (positive) impact volunteers bring to the lives of the unhoused and the power imbalance inherent in volunteer-service recipient relationships.

On Working with a "Vulnerable Population"

To protect the confidentiality of people who directly participated in the project, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms (including volunteers). Additionally, the problem of homelessness is one that is fraught with social and spatial tensions between the unhoused, law enforcement, city governments, business owners, pedestrians and other social actors. In order to safeguard the right of simply existing in public space for people experiencing homelessness, I speak of common gathering spots, encampments, places of stay, and other geographic locations in purposefully vague terms. Specific locales, organizations, and volunteer group names have also been replaced by pseudonyms. However, socio-spatial boundaries are important to understanding volunteering in context. For example, North St. Louis and East St. Louis (Illinois) have been subjects of numerous historical and racist projects that have resulted in concentrated poverty, crumbling infrastructure, and intense racial segregation (Gordon 2008). Recognizing the importance of this legacy, I (as well as interviewed volunteers) still make reference large areas of the city (e.g., Downtown, the North Side, South City, West County), but not specific neighborhoods.

CHAPTER FOUR

"IT'S NOT *JUST* THE WORK, IT'S THE COMMUNITY": MEANING MAKING AMONG VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Citywide Outreach is a group of volunteers who do the bulk of their work in the winter months. During these months, the group works with a number of local churches to open as emergency shelters when the temperature drops below 20°F, or below 25°F if there is precipitation.[9] On these nights, the group meets at a South City coffee house owned and operated by one of the group's more involved members. From there, they break into pairs and spread across the city to look for people who are in need of blankets, stocking caps, gloves, handwarmers, snacks and/or transportation to emergency shelter. On this night, like most others, the coffee house served another purpose. It served as a place for volunteers to iron out their understanding of the mission, as well as of homelessness. On any given night, new attendees are paired with a veteran volunteer and a set of rules are provided for them to sign.[10] But it is also a place and time at which volunteers can meet and trade stories from the field. On one particular occasion, the night of December 28, 2017, the group expressed frustration over their inability to impose their well-intentioned will upon the people experiencing homelessness they encounter.

Vincent was the most animated in his complaints. Speaking of a group of four people experiencing homelessness, he told a story of how he was close to getting the group to go in for shelter and a meal. In his words, he was trying to convince "one A-hole to let three other A-holes" go in for the night – the group wanted to stick together, but one of the people in the group did not desire to stay in the shelter for the night. He believed that he would have been successful in

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[9] A branch of Citywide, which I did not work with, also operates a number of "semi-permanent" housing units in which tenants pay a small monthly rent.

[10] A literal set of rules, which asks them to agree to a number of safety precautions, including refraining from entering dwellings, avoiding interrupting the illegal transaction of drugs, leaving if one feels unsafe, etc.

convincing them to go in, but someone from another outreach group had recently given the group a small amount of kerosene for their lamp. He expressed frustration over their logic and desire to stay out because, if they had agreed to come in, they could have made their kerosene last longer. He then added, "*And* you'll have food and security." A sarcastic man with somewhat dry sense of humor, Vincent's use of the term "A-holes" was partly rooted in his personality but, it was also rooted in his frustration. On multiple occasions, Vincent expressed to me that he really *believes* in what he is doing, and he is committed to this cause; he sees shelter as the most important thing that outreach groups can offer, and by airing his frustrations publicly, he also made a case for his vision of homeless service – as well as what he imagines life to be like for those experiencing homelessness.

As the meeting progressed, each volunteer was assigned a partner and told which area of the city to search. A number of volunteers mentioned that there were people experiencing homelessness they hoped to encounter or areas of the city they were familiar with, so assignments were made through a combination of Vincent's choice and volunteers' expressed interest. After assignments were completed, partners began moving toward the staircase so that they could collect supplies from the storage area in the basement. Before I left with Gabriela, however, she wanted to pass on information to another volunteer, Aaron, about a recent encounter she had with Miss Alberta. She told Aaron to check on a woman who would likely be bundled up under a bus stop near a downtown park. She described the woman as "really psychotic," and noted that "She really believes she might be Hillary Clinton." Like Vincent, she intended for her comments be partially humorous, mocking the idea that an older black woman who sleeps underneath a bus stop would believe she is Hillary Clinton, but also relay some information she deemed valuable. In addition to eliciting a laugh or two, her comments spoke to her understanding of people experiencing homelessness, communicated to Aaron that he should know that the woman is "really psychotic," and expressed concern for the person. Included in this information was a subtext. She was suggesting to Aaron

that he should dedicate extra effort and attention to making sure the woman was accounted for and that her most obvious needs (warmth and supplies) were being met.

Interactions like those described here were commonly observed among volunteer groups during my fieldwork. The academic literature has convincingly argued that homeless service provision is largely based on the beliefs that homelessness is "caused" by individual choices and (im)morality (Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2015; Wasserman and Clair 2010; Willse 2015). It has also been suggested that interpersonal interaction with people experiencing homelessness does little to change one's opinions about approach to homeless services (Knecht and Martinez 2009). However, the process by which service approaches are entrenched is not well discussed. Interactions during the course of service, I argue, provide volunteers an opportunity to work out their understandings of race, poverty, homelessness, and urban space, and in the case of Vincent and Gabriela, service provision and mental health. More important than observation of poverty and the spaces they encounter are their conversations with people who have (1) a similar social position to their own and (2) similar "evidence" to draw upon as they try to make sense of the social world and/or support their worldview.

In particular, volunteer groups help reproduce discourses about the immorality of homelessness ("sin-talk"), systemic oppression of the poor ("system-talk"), and homelessness as a product of disease, sickness, and/or addition ("sick-talk") (Gowan 2010: 27). Based on these within group conversations, volunteers' ideas about inequality and mobility are modified and/or entrenched. In other words, I argue that volunteering, especially in group settings, serves as a process of meaning making. Ultimately, groups seemed to attract volunteers of similar position and view of the world, engaged in regular discourse to iron out any competing differences, and approached their service work with the same or similar goals.

Meaning Making

Understanding the world from a symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective equates to understanding the process of meaning making. The SI perspective is, perhaps, best articulated by Mead (1962) and Blumer (1969). For Mead (1962), the social world is constructed and reconstructed through shared understanding of symbols exchanged between socialized members of society. Because people are subject to this process, each individual is able to see their socialized self, the "me," as an object and are able to anticipate the expectations of those around them – what Mead refers to as the generalized other. Meanwhile, the actions of others, including gestures, language, facial expressions, etc., serve as symbols to be continuously interpreted, reinforced, and negotiated.

Similarly but more explicitly, Blumer (1969: 2) outlines the theoretical approach by breaking it down into three parts:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

In short, symbolic interactionists believe interpreted and shared meaning to be central to understanding social construction. Meaning is shared in, derived from, and altered through a process of social interaction. Rather than seeing social structure as a rigid abstraction that determines behavior and thought, symbolic interactionism views social structure as the result of interaction of people or social groups. Symbolic Interactionism as outlined by Mead (1962) and Blumer (1969) makes a move away from structuralism by emphasizing agency, situational interaction, subjectivity, and interpretation. In any given moment, a person thinks before they act (although not always). In that given moment, the actor contemplates a response to those they interact with and their response is ultimately determined by their interpretation of the others' symbolic gestures. There is no objective reality, only what is produced, reproduced, and altered through interpretation and

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interaction. Likewise Goffman (1959, 1967) emphasizes the situational nature of interactions. He writes, "Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored" (Goffman 1967: 21).

Although the SI perspective is often treated as a paradigm distinct from and in contradiction to structuralism, symbolic interactionism is better understood as a reorientation of the structuralist perspective. Mead (1962), for example, argues that while an actor's actions cannot be predicted, even by themself (the result of a spontaneous "I"), and humans are capable of choosing which action to take, action is often contained by their sense of the generalized other (the "me"). The actor is not passive, but generally recreates the social conditions in which they reside, nonetheless. In this way, social context and social structure are important. It must not be forgotten that in order for Mead's actors to interpret the actions of and respond to others, they must first be socialized in a way that allows them to understand the generalized other. Thus, through their understanding of the social world around them, they choose from limited number of options for (re)action.

Similarly, Goffman (1959: 7) acknowledges that social structure severely limits human ability to act as true free agents as it informs interactants of their roles: "during contact of a particular type, an interactant of known or visible attributes can expect to be sustained in a particular face…given his attributes and the conventionalized nature of the encounter, he will find a small choice of lines will be open to him and a small choice of faces will be waiting for him." Put differently, based on the field in which one operates, interactants have only a few choices in how they present ourselves; their position and role within the structure still suggests individual action. While Goffman might be hesitant to argue social structures dictate human interaction or that humans embody the social structures to which they belong, he would certainly agree that the social structures we occupy place heavy constraints on action and thought.

Furthermore, Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experiments showcase the ability of non-normative action drastically impact the process of interpretation, meaning making, and response, but also highlight the boundaries of social structure. While it is true that actors have the ability to act independently and to interpret new and unexpected action, breaching social norms also showcases an unspoken expectation of structural conformity. As Garfinkel (1967: 53) explains "the features of a real society are produced by persons' motivated compliance with these background experiences." This chapter (and dissertation as a whole) thus proceeds to argue that volunteering acts as a process of meaning making (and meaning reinforcement). Interactions with other volunteers and people experiencing homelessness help inform the beliefs and actions of those participating in group activities. In particular, I argue that interactions with other volunteers serve to cement common understandings of homelessness as sin, systemic oppression, and/or mental illness.

Understandings of Homelessness in the United States and Homeless Service Provision

Homelessness has been highly stigmatized in the United States. As already mentioned, homelessness is often viewed as an individual or personal problem. It is often treated as a consequence of poor choices, character flaws, vice, and/or personal affliction. People experiencing homelessness are framed as being responsible for their own plight (Belcher and DeForge 2012; Lyon-Callo 2000; Phelan et al. 1995). In turn, at the governmental level, homelessness is treated as problem that can be managed through punishment. In many towns and cities across the country, activities of daily living are criminalized when conducted in public. Urination, sleeping, and even sitting on the sidewalk are common examples. Likewise, people deemed to be misusing public space can become subject to harassment by police, local business, and other residents (Amster 2003, 2008; Aykanian and Lee 2016; Beckett and Herbert 2010; Mitchell and Heynen 2009). Even measures that are seen as merciful and well-intentioned, like "therapeutic policing, which aims to promote "moral

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discipline" in homeless subjects, undermines their ability/right to simply exist in and make use of public space (Bayat 2010; Stuart 2016b). Of course, even if these measures are "successful," they do nothing to quell homelessness. Rather, they simply dislocate homelessness from desirable urban space (Beckett and Herbert 2010; Herring 2019).

The anti-homelessness agenda pushed by the state is not necessarily reflected in the opinion of the public, but public opinion about homelessness is also somewhat contradictory. Even as the public increasingly voices support for government intervention into homeless service provision and housing first initiatives, the public also maintains interest in excluding those experiencing homelessness from public space deemed desirable (Clifford and Piston 2017; Herring 2019; Tsai et al. 2017). This extends down to the level of the individual, with Clifford and Piston (2017) showing that individuals can support exclusionary homeless policy *and* more liberal homeless welfare policy initiatives. Furthermore, Toro et al. (2007) find Americans remain less compassionate and more likely to attribute homelessness to personal failings, drug and/or alcohol addition, and criminality than other Western industrialized countries like Italy, the UK, Belgium, and Germany.

In her seminal work, *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders*, Gowan (2010) provides a framework of three discourses deployed to interpret and manage homelessness: sin-talk, system-talk, and sick-talk. In the United States, homelessness is viewed a product of moral deficiency, disease, and/or systemic injustice. The moral constructions of homelessness frames people experiencing homelessness as *individuals* who have either chosen to be homeless or have rejected the rules and moral underpinnings of society, with those buying into this framework of understanding viewing homelessness as a product of sin and individual fault. She terms related discourse as "sin-talk." Conversely, those who participate in discourses of "system-talk" construct homelessness as an outcome of systemic conditions, like unemployment or an inadequate welfare system. Last, "sick-

talk" frames the problem of homelessness as one of (mental) illness, although the focus remains on the individual and their willingness/ability to receive treatment.

There is no shortage of academic work dedicated to studying the caring atmosphere provided by shelters (e.g., Conradson 2003; Johnsen, Cloke, and May 2005; Parr 2000) or on improving service practices (e.g., Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet 2010; McGraw et al. 2010). However, critical studies of homelessness usually criticize the homeless service industry. At best, the industry contributes to the continued stigmatization of the homeless. At worst, welfare institutions are framed as tools of neo-liberalism, utilized to devalue the lives of those experiencing homelessness in relation to those doing "productive: work." Wasserman and Clair (2010), for example, suggests that Christian service groups and religious institutions deploy Calvinistic notions of work and morality in a way that stigmatizes the homeless. Somewhat similarly, Lyon-Callo (2000), draws attention to the mundane practices of service workers that are meant to discipline homeless *individuals* and/or reproduce homelessness as a medical condition; both individuals experiencing homelessness and service staff look to identify the "cause" of someone's homelessness, with substance abuse and/or mental illness being common diagnoses. By individualizing homelessness, discourse about homelessness as a structural outcome is deemphasized and/or discouraged (Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2000). Rather than mobilize around efforts to reduce poverty in the community because doing so would be "unrealistic," service staff devise "treatment" plans that emphasize finding (typically low wage) work, managing mental illness, and otherwise reforming oneself. Such plans, Lyon-Callo (2015, 2000) argues, train service recipients to blame themselves for their position.

Willse (2010; 2015) adds that the social welfare industry functions as an extension of a neoliberal economy. Willse (2010, 2015) argues that the contemporary welfare system manages "surplus life" (i.e., people experiencing homelessness) as an extension of the economy. Local, state, and federal policies are projects that devalue those human life by based on narratives about the

morality of work. In this view, so called "spaces of care" (e.g., shelters, resource centers), serve as places that (1) reform/discipline homeless subjects and (2) contain people experiencing homelessness (Willse 2015). With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that many people experiencing homelessness avoid "utilizing" services offered by the homeless service industry (Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Lyon-Callo 2000; Wagner 1993).

But while there has been limited study of how volunteers and other service providers understand homelessness, discussion about the ways in which those ideas are shared, developed, and/or reinforced is even more scant. In the remainder of this chapter, I break down the process by which volunteers (re)learn to understand homelessness. In this study, volunteers spoke of finding a group that was roughly in line with their ideological viewpoint, learning to fit in, and staying fit in. Through this process, they leaned heavily on the "expertise" of their peers and ultimately helped reproduce discourses about homelessness as sickness, sin, and/or systemic oppression (Gowan 2010).

Volunteer Socialization: Finding a Group, Fitting-in, and Staying Fit-in

Undoubtedly, volunteers entered their respective groups with preexisting ideas about race, poverty, homelessness, and/or how to best provide service. However, it was also clear that volunteering served as a process of further socialization. As will be demonstrated in the coming sections, observation of homelessness, as well as interactions with their peers, provides volunteers with fodder to revise and solidify their views about the world around them. The process of meaning making through volunteering starts with the search for a home organization. Volunteers are not entering volunteer activities as random or as blank slates. They are looking for groups that will expose them to palatable messages about the service they hope to perform. Mary, for example, described her choice to join Service House in this way:

I decided to apply to [Service House] in general, because I had a gap year. I wanted to do something that kind of went along with the social services field, that way I could test my hand at some sort of work in that area before I invested in it and found out that I hated it, and was stuck with a Master's [in social work]. And also, I wanted to do the *Episcopal* [group] because there are very few people my age that are Christian, but also like kinda cool Christian. Like, I had done the whole Christian thing in University. I tried to join some of those groups, but it was very much like Evangelicals, super emotional, really conservative, and not my jam. So, I wanted, like, something that was Episcopal and with people my age, which are two things that usually don't coincide. So, that's why [Service House] in general.

In addition to the desire to "test [her] hand" at service work before committing to a master's degree, Mary desired to be a part of a group that would share her worldview. She explained that she had tried joining Christian groups in the past, but because they were not Episcopalian and/or "kinda cool Christian," she did not enjoy the experience. By her estimation, Service House, on the other hand, seemed to offer a particular experience and progressive ideology. Because Service House was part of a national program that all but guaranteed the chance to form relationships with young professionals, Episcopalian teachings, and a liberal political ideology, Mary felt like the group would be a good fit for her socially. Put differently, she was not looking for a group that would challenge her understanding of poverty, inequality, religion, etc. She sought people who could help affirm or develop her worldview in a way that was palatable to her preexisting sensibilities.

Once volunteers found a group with whom they "clicked," the next step was to learn to how to fit into the group's mission and worldview. Whether they were freshly new to the group or seasoned veterans, volunteers often spoke about learning from each other. Often this was in reference to one or two volunteers they respected, volunteers who they thought were taking "the right" approach to serving people experiencing homelessness. Of course, volunteers with more experience and time served were among the most influential and respected. Veronica, who was among the most active members of Right Choice, explained that she follows the wisdom of the group's leader, John. In an interview, Veronica mentioned the existence of two supposedly

competing philosophies for homeless service: relationship building versus provision of physical

items (e.g, blankets, propane, food, water, etc.). When asked about *her* philosophy, she explained:

> *Veronica*: Probably the relationships. I'm always going to back the leadership. I mean, John's really into – I mean, he's the one, I think, that started the group, I believe. You know if that's true?
>
> *Interviewer*: I believe that's true. He's certainly led me to believe that's true if it's not.
>
> *Veronica*: So obviously I trust him as, you know, the leader, at his word. I know he spends lots of time praying for the outreach and seeking help, talking to the pastors and other organizations. And I believe relationships are important, because if you don't have – you can have all the things in the world, and they can be taken care of, but if you don't, in the end, have Jesus, then, I mean, all that means nothing. So I think relationships are important.

During my observation of Right Choice, this "debate" was always one sided. Everyone agreed, either

verbally or by nodding to the comments of others. During their conversations, group members

would echo various versions of the same idea: necessary items should be provided, but the group

should be careful about how much they give and to whom they give. They feared that they were

enabling people experiencing homelessness to continue to be homeless – the logic being that if they

give more than the minimum, people experiencing homelessness, or at least some of them, would

not be motivated to "change their situation." However, fairly regular conversation about the issue

allowed group members to stay on the same page about what homelessness meant, and how they

should respond to it. For Right Choice, they felt they could skirt around the issue of "enabling" by

dedicating the bulk of their time and effort to forming and deepening relationships with people

experiencing homelessness, and the provision of supplies should not play a central role in this

mission. Rather than simply say why she felt relationships should be the group's priority, Veronica

felt it was necessary to explain how she came to this conclusion: through her respect for John's

expertise.

In other cases, volunteers spoke of ongoing dialog. Fellowship Outreach, for example, came

to similar conclusions about the importance of relationships after several years and a number of

leadership changes. Alena, a co-leader of the group along with Peter, explained it in this way:

> *Alena*: I think so. I mean, it's a lot of people are used to us just handing out the stuff. So you
> know, they [people experiencing homelessness] just want stuff, and they'll leave, but there
> are those people who appreciate our presence. They just want to talk. They just want to see
> us each week, know that somebody's coming out there to see them. Lately, we had a lot of
> people coming out. There's other groups that do what we do. There always have been other
> groups that do what we do, so yeah. It's getting back to that, and that's what Peter and I
> agreed that it should be at all points. Yeah.
>
> *Interviewer*: So you guys do still hand out supplies. Is there a reason that you…
>
> *Alena*: Don't just stop doing it?
>
> *Interviewer*: Yeah.
>
> *Alena*: We always have. Whether it was a little or a lot. So in the beginning it was a little. In
> the middle it was a lot. And currently it's dwindled down to a little bit. They still need stuff.
> If we come along some – whenever it's coldest, you know, they need it. We try not to get
> into that mentality of being stingy with it. However, we want to be conscientious with it,
> because they're in survival mode, a lot of 'em, and they figure if "I don't get as much as I
> can, from as many people as I can, I won't go without." And they know that better than any
> of us. A lot of us who have homes and have food, you know, readily available, we don't, we
> don't think that way.
>
> So, it's also a conduit to even open up conversation with them, even meeting them there.
> They expect that we'll have things, but like I said, a lot of 'em, just, they want to see us. So,
> both are necessary: the fellowship and the supplies.

Alena and Fellowship, like Right Choice, saw their primary mission as relationship building. Over

the course of several years, the group went through phases, considering what the function of their

group should be. Should they primarily concern themselves with meeting as many needs as possible

or should they focus on the relationship building? Together, Alena and Peter decided that they

needed to prioritize relationship building, but they would continue to provide "a little" supplies and

food to serve as a "conduit" to "open up conversation." Although she would go on to discuss being

"hustled" by people experiencing homelessness, and the need to sometimes limit the amount of

supplies they provide, Fellowship learned to see this as a cost of doing business. Compared to Right

Choice, Fellowship worked out a more moderate stance on the meanings and causes of homelessness. Yes, there were people experiencing homelessness that were simply after their supplies, and being "hustled" does not feel good, but engaging with these people was part of the process for identifying the people who desired fellowship.

Other times, the socialization into group beliefs was more informal. Paul, a live-in member of Mercy House, recounted their[11] early induction into the group as a teenager:

> We were just there from 9:00 to like 4:00 every day for the month of January in 2012. Fran gave me my first tour of Mercy House. She is my idol slash inspiration [chuckles] slash hopefully my mentor. But I don't really know how that works. So, work on that.
>
> But yeah, we hung out. We played with the kids. We cooked a lot of lunches, which is really fun. I learned how to cook [pause] and forgot. Forgot all of it, because I went to college and didn't cook anything for myself for like three years. But we also had a lot of down time, so read a lot of [Mercy House Newsletters].[12] Yeah. We watched documentaries. We even watched TV on one of the house-person's laptop computer. He had a bunch of files of episodes of *How I Met Your Mother* just like on his computer. So, we would just chill upstairs and watch that sometimes, cuz there was a good amount of downtime, and it was awesome. I learned a lot about [the] Occupy [movement], which was happening at that time, and about the neighborhood, the North Side the -- what do you call it -- the Pruit-Igoe. Have you heard of that?... We watched a movie about that. I was just really inspired by what they were doing, like living with, you know, formerly homeless people in their home, and it just seemed really really radical and awesome.

Similar to Veronica, Paul mentions their respect for Fran, a senior (former) member of Mercy House. Just as importantly, however, Paul delves into the details of their socialization process. Their socialization did not *only* happen through formal volunteer outings, but also through informal time spent together at Mercy House. In this setting, their exposure to "radical" thinking took a number of forms. Reading issues of the quarterly newsletter would have exposed Paul to writings of other house members.[13] Watching documentaries, like the mentioned documentary about the infamous

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[11] Paul used they/them pronouns.

[12] Mercy House publishes a quarterly newsletter. It is mainly composed of op-ed style essays, organized around different themes each quarter. Some of these essays are self-reflection pieces. Others are well-researched histories of local, regional, or national social issues.

[13] While Paul did not mention which issues of the newsletter had left an impression upon them, issues that I read engaged with topics like displacement (e.g., gentrification), "Ferguson: Voices from the Movement," and Climate

Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project, would have exposed them to conversations about systemic racism, housing, policy and urban planning (Birmingham 1999; Heathcott 2012). Even the watching of sitcoms, like *How I Met Your Mother*, may have functioned to help Paul feel included in life at Mercy House or spurred conversations that would have otherwise not occurred. Furthermore, once Paul and other members joined Mercy House as live-in, "core-community" members, they were required to read the "welcome wagon" materials, which exposed new members to the activist works of Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day, as well as other social justice writers.

Although the specifics of the socialization process varied across the three provided examples, one feature was routine: volunteers were learning from each other. Although they could have developed opinions about homelessness and homeless service provision based upon their interactions with those experiencing homelessness, it was discussion of other volunteers that dominated my conversations and interviews with them. Both interviews and field observation suggested that volunteers heavily weighed the opinions of their co-volunteers, and conversations with the group at large served as opportunities to iron out common understandings and service approaches. At times, this took the form of jokes and stories, as was the case with Vincent and Gabriela. Other times meaning was conveyed through casual conversation with, observation of, and/or developing dialog with other volunteers, as was the case for Paul, Alena, and Veronica.

Last, once volunteers had become socialized into the group, they expressed interest in maintaining their membership within the group. When asked if there was something about homeless service provision that kept Sixtus working at Mercy House for more than 20 years, he explained that it was more about the relationship to other volunteers than anything else. It was about having like-

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Change. Opinions expressed generally had a progressive activist bent and attempted to engage with structural level social issues, either by trying to place their own experiences within larger social contexts or by engaging with historical legacies of inequality.

minded people around. They may not have shared his exact view, but it was close enough that he

felt at home when volunteering at Mercy House:

> Well, I don't, I'm always amazed when I think back on, that I've lived in St. Louis for the better part of 30 years, so, like, it just seems amazing. I never planned on living, I didn't plan on being here that long. And I think the reason I stayed around was being involved in a community where – and probably most Catholic Workers will say some version of this – where you know you're not alone. Like, when I lived here, when I came home, there were always people who if I started talking a little bit about how my day went, would have been thinking about that day or work on that day, there's always somebody who would understand, and you know, get it. And the same thing me for them. Like, if people came in, and you know, we all didn't all feel exactly the same way about everything, but we were very close in, you know, proximity about, you know, our heads and hearts and all that. You know, so, that was – that really was something I needed. Probably still do…

> [Later in the interview] Well, I think the work, and it happening alongside the community, is why I'm still around at Mercy House. I've met some really fine people and want to continue to meet really fine people here who come to share the work in some way. So, I think all of that is why I'm still around. It's not *just* the work, it's the community. It's not *just* the community, it's the work, and it's all wrapped up.

Similar to the initial draw, volunteers desired to stay in the group because the ideas and worldviews

expressed by their peers mimicked their own. Additionally, though, Sixtus adds that his desire to

work with Mercy House, and more generally, to be a Catholic Worker was tied to the sense of

community. Sixtus' case was extreme in so far as he had maintained membership to Karen House

for more than 20 years, but the sentiment he conveyed was not. While the work was important – in

this case homeless service and shelter provision – the work's meaning was amplified for volunteers

because they were able to do it alongside people they knew, people they could relate to, and people

they respected.

Knecht and Martinez (2009) find that coming into contact with people experiencing

homelessness did little to alter their beliefs about government response to homelessness – although

they became more likely to adopt structural views of homelessness after making contact. Focusing

on the meaning making process that happens amongst volunteers, which starts even before they join

the group, might help explain why exposure to homelessness does little to change volunteers' ideas

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about the best way to address homelessness (or service worker ideas). Because volunteers were generally joining groups of like-minded people, their interaction with other volunteers generally served to strengthen and entrench their opinions about homelessness and, relatedly, homeless service provision. For some (e.g., Fran, Sixtus, and Barbara), this process could stretch on for decades.

Producing Sin-Talk and Responses to "Sin"

The night of February 12 was not especially cold, but with the temperature hovering around 30°F, it certainly was not a comfortable night, either. In spite of the cold weather, Right Choice dedicated their Monday night to "doing good" by "sweeping the streets" for people experiencing homelessness in need of food, water, blankets, and/or clothes. In addition to the somewhat random "street sweep," we made a number of stops at known hangouts and camps for people experiencing homelessness – places where the group, more or less, knew who would be found there. Through this work, grassroots homeless service organizations save lives. After a several hours of service that included stops at a Downtown shelter, an uneventful street sweep, and a visit to "our homeless friends" at two separate homeless camps east of the Mississippi River, most of the group departed for home. At the suggestion of the group's leader, John, however, I joined him and Gregory, another volunteer, for a final stop on the North Side of the city. John wanted to visit Stan, a tall, middle-aged, white man who lived in a dilapidated warehouse on the North Side of the city. At the time, it was very important to John that Right Choice make regular contact with Stan because another member of the group, a man named Raymond that I had only met once very briefly, had identified Stan as a person that would be receptive to and benefit from a relationship with Right Choice.

Upon arriving at the seemingly abandoned warehouse, John quickly paced toward it and rapped on a large metal door once used for loading supplies onto large delivery trucks. After a few silent moments, we heard someone working his way toward the door, and a moment later the large door loudly slid upward revealing the gray-haired white man I came to know as Stan. Toward the back of the dark, damp warehouse, we could see wooden pallets being burned for warmth, surrounded by a handful of chairs, a mattress, and whatever junk had been abandoned with the building.

After John explained to Stan who we were and that we were friends of Raymond, he asked Stan if he wanted to talk. Stan said he would, and he motioned for us to enter the building. We hopped up and through the door, and Stan closed it behind us as we worked our way back toward the fire. He told us to pull up a chair, and it worked out that there were exactly four. As I sat quietly, thankful to be in front of the warm fire and observing that the roof was largely missing, John questioned him about how he was getting along, if he needed anything, how he found the building, and if he had any family. He was getting along fine; he was just waiting to find work, preferably in HVAC or doing assembly, like he used to do at Chrysler; he could use more coffee, but otherwise he did not need anything; a friend of his had scoped the building out in case they ever lost their space at the nearby shelter; he has a daughter in Shrewsbury, but he does not get to see her. He answered all of John and Gregory's questions, but generally kept his replies short and simple. John made sure to let him know that Raymond was disappointed to have missed him on Sunday – from what I was able to gather, Raymond was going to pick him up for church but they missed each other – and eventually John announced that we would not take any more of Stan's time. We walked back to the door, guided by Stan's flashlight, and Stan slid the door shut behind us after we hopped down on to the empty, dead end street.

Once we were standing out in the cold, John lead an excited conversation amongst the three of us. He found the interaction with Stan to be very encouraging. He explained that he was not expecting Stan to be so open with him, he did not expect to be invited in, and he did not expect Stan to share anything about his family life. He then continued to explain why he emphasized Raymond's disappointment; he wanted Stan to know that Raymond was interested in a relationship with him and that he had made an effort to meet up with him on Sunday. He added that he could see why Raymond was drawn to Stan. Based on our short conversation with Stan, he claimed that he could see that Stan did not *want* to be on the streets, and that he was "meek." (Interpretations of) People like Stan are why John does this, and he contrasted Stan, a supposedly motivated and deserving man who was down on his luck to two other white men from an East Side camp, Enos and Willie, whom he and other group members regularly accused of being too comfortable with their homelessness and of being unwilling to work toward changing their lot in life. He kept noting that "Willie is on camera saying he *likes* living outside."

John then returned to again emphasize that it was the Stans of the world – the people he perceived to be interested in working hard, staying clean, and finding permanent shelter – are the reason he does this work. In his exact words, "I wanna help those that want help. We didn't start this back in 2012 to see people stay where they're at." He didn't want to give up on Enos and Willie, but they would not and could not be the center of his attention. Through all of this, Gregory did not advance the conversation or add an opposing opinion, but by regularly echoing John's sentiment verbally and by enthusiastically nodding his head as John talked, it was clear that he agreed.

On this night, two things were clear. First, and most obviously, it was clear that although volunteers did not exclude the possibility that homelessness might be linked to structural changes or social problems (e.g., layoffs due to changes in the economy or deindustrialization, as was Stan's

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circumstance), these few examples served as mechanism for criticizing those they perceived as comfortably and immorally homeless. Such "sin-talk" (Gowan 2010) was prevalent among volunteers in Right Choice Ministry and Outreach and Fellowship Outreach. In relation to the deserving poor, John and Gregory reinforced a narrative about how many people experiencing homelessness are highly agentic, but rather than making the moral choice to "pull on their bootstraps," they choose to be poor.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, sin-talk amongst volunteer group members functioned as meaning making. Throughout the conversation, John made a series of claims, all of which were met with approval from Gregory. But interestingly, both John and Gregory treated a relatively brief, rather shallow interaction with Stan as evidence of why Willie and Enos were bordering on a lost cause. Put differently, "evidence" was deployed selectively to confirm their preexisting understandings of homelessness, and the truly meaningful interaction was that among volunteers, and not the interaction between volunteers and people experiencing homelessness. These conversations allowed members to cement their social understandings of homelessness through an ongoing process of socialization. Although actors are provided space in the conversation to offer competing discourse, structural constraints generally encouraged people like Gregory (and John) to reinforce social patterns (e.g., popular homeless discourses), rather than attempt to undermine or modify them (Goffman 1959).

Producing System-Talk and Responses to the System

Although Gowan (2010) and (Lyon-Callo 2015) have noted that system-talk is, generally speaking, discouraged in the social service industry, it was rather common among members of Citywide Outreach, Fam in the Streets, Mercy House, and Service House. As will be discussed in the next chapter, members of these groups were often eager to discuss sys

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temic racism and structural inequalities. Using a rather funny alteration of a biblical metaphor, Fran, a leading member of Citywide Outreach and former member of Mercy House, framed homelessness as a consequence of structural barriers:

> People need to be able to get stuff without asking for it. I always had this great, I have created what I think -- it's a great, I think I've made it up, and it's this: If you give someone a fish, you feed him for a day, you teach him how to fish they'll eat for a lifetime, but if you give them access to the lake or river, they don't need your help at all! We won't even have to teach them how to fish. People have a right to access to those things. And so, that's the gap. So, I try to give access. That's why I always have to work for justice while doing charity.

Fran's analysis comes in sharp contrast to the most paternalistic volunteers who feel that people experiencing homelessness need someone to help guide them out of homelessness, someone to help them make better choices. Fran instead suggested that those living in extreme poverty were there because they could not gain access to resources like health care, housing, jobs, etc. In her view, these resources should be freely available to everyone, in which case people experiencing homelessness would no longer need charity. Fran and others who engaged in discourses of system-talk articulated homelessness as the result of systemic oppression, control of resources, and injustice. However, volunteers with this mindset were also under no illusions that the social systems that discriminate against the poor and people of color would change tomorrow, so they embraced their roles as direct service providers in the meantime – even if they often expressed frustration about the inability to focus on structural change because they were consumed by a never ending queue of direct needs to address. But in general, they did their best to change the system.

On January 11, 2018, Fran penned an open letter to St. Louis Mayor, Lyda Krewson. To open the letter, Fran reminded Mayor Krewson of the two men had died of hypothermia in the winter of 2017-2018, one found in a porta-potty and the other in a dumpster. She was quick to note that "the full responsibility for ending homelessness does not rest with the City," but she proceeded to outline what she saw as the specific failures of the city government, as well as next steps she

believed to be reasonable and necessary. Among her grievances, she shamed the city for the closing

of the New Life Evangelistic Center, saying, that

> By taking this action, the City showed a preferential option to respond to those with money
> and power over those who have been left in poverty. One can debate much about the
> strengths and weaknesses of any shelter, including New Life, but there is no denying that
> much of the reason for closing that shelter was to 'protect' the business area around it from
> those who are unhoused. New Life stood unimpeded in its work for close to 40 years until
> the downtown became a more fashionable place to live and do business, making New Life's
> presence unwanted.

She also criticized the city for displacing people sleeping in tents and in parks and for reducing the

budget of the Affordable Housing Trust fund by $500,000 per year. With these criticisms in mind,

she proposed a number of solutions. She advocated for the reopening of a walk-up emergency

shelter, additional funding for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the establishment of a St. Louis

Homeless Bill of Rights, and community dialog.

Fran's letter, along with her quote included near the opening of this section, portrays

homelessness as a structural problem and calls for the city to make institutional changes that will, at

the very least, better meet the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness and establish

some measure of legal protection for their rights. She accused the city government of preferencing

the interests of business owners and those able to afford apartments in the increasingly

"fashionable" Downtown-West neighborhood that used to host the New Life Evangelistic Center

and shelter. Perhaps more important than the contents of the letter – at least in the case of this

argument – was what this letter would mean to Citywide Outreach and a handful of other

collaborating groups (including Fam in the Streets and Mercy House).

While the letter was crafted and signed by Fran, Fran's system-talk (re)provided a roadmap

for members of the group, communicating that this was how homelessness should be understood

and addressed. This includes people like Paul (quoted above) who saw Fran as a mentor, but it also

meant that when Citywide and others gathered to discuss how to advocate for changes, they knew

where to start discussion. For example, when the group managed to secure a meeting with Mayor Krewson in May, the group held a number of preparation meetings. At the preparation meeting, the group unsurprisingly jumped directly into conversation about the criminalization of homelessness and the Housing Trust Fund. Together, over the course of two hours, the group decided that the objective of the meeting would be to show the mayor that (1) the police were criminalizing the homeless (despite Mayor Krewson's past insistence to the contrary) and (2) that it is more expensive to invest in public safety (e.g., police wages, emergency room bills, court costs for tickets issued, etc.) than to invest in affordable public housing. And while members of the group were typically disappointed when these meeting failed to produce commitments from Mayor Krewson, the shared experience in advocating for systemic change affirmed their belief in homelessness as a systemic problem. Put differently, their work was a project (Omi and Winant 1994), simultaneously serving as an interpretation, representation, and explanation of homelessness. Homelessness was interpreted to be the result of social structural forces – e.g., not having access to affordable housing. Their objective was to frame, represent, and explain homelessness in this light for the mayor and other observers, calling attention to it as a problem of affordable housing, rather than as a problem solved by expensive "public safety" investments.

Producing Sick-Talk and Responses to Sickness

Sick-talk, which was already exemplified by Gabriela in the opening section of this chapter, was witnessed across all observed groups, with conversations about alcoholism and drug addiction being the most common forms. Seemingly, volunteers took a well-known fact, that people experiencing homelessness were at elevated risk of mental illness, alcoholism, and/or drug dependence (Fazel et al. 2008), and used it to explain particular cases without much reflection or consideration of alternative possibilities. For example, on the night of October 5, Fellowship Outreach made their

first stop of the night at common meeting spot just outside the main Downtown area of the city. Per usual, the group kicked things off by circling up for a prayer. Lou, a white man who was frequently in attendance at the weekly gathering, offered to lead the prayer. Among other things, he prayed for a friend of his who had recently been mugged, which resulted in broken ribs and prevented her from joining the group for the evening. But outside of this rather unfortunate news, the time spent at the first stop was uneventful. Jude, a dedicated Fellowship volunteer, fixated on the streetlights, wondering why they did not flicker on until well past sunset. An unaffiliated group of young men on motorcycles roared up and down the relatively empty street as people commented on how loud they were and how dangerous their tricks (mostly wheelies) were. Alena showed me pictures of her dog. Once conversation began to peter out, volunteers made their way back to their carpool. For me, this meant joining a car driven by Michael, another of Fellowship's most consistent members, and Jude. In the car, Michael quickly turned to Jude to share his thoughts. He was surprised to hear of the woman who was mugged. "They think it was drug related," he added. Jude agreed without question and without advancing the conversation.

Coincidently, just one day prior, I had the opportunity to interview Jude one-on-one. During that interview, he offered an interpretation very similar to Michael's by concluding that "without a doubt," a majority of homelessness was caused by an addiction of some sort (alongside criminal history):

> Hmm. I guess a lot of it [the "causes" of homelessness], from what I've seen, is drug related. Not necessarily drugs, but I consider alcohol a drug, too. I know quite a few of 'em are either full blown alcoholics or addicts of one type or another. In fact, I'd say, without a doubt, most of 'em are.

> From my experience. Now my limited experience, and I see the same group every week, so I don't. But in that group, I guess there's probably a total, let's see, 20, maybe not quite 50, I guess we see when we go out on Thursday night. Maybe 50 people, and I say most of 'em, alcohol, drugs, or maybe a past criminal history make gettin' a job hard. I see that a lot, too.

> Now that's my limited knowledge of their past. I really don't ask 'em a whole lot, but I know what I see. Yeah. When one guy says, you ask a question about where's Jed – you know, he

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> might know Jed – and they say well he's meeting his man right now to get his drugs, you know. That's a pretty good indication.

And while Jude meant to hedge his bet by adding, "that's my limited knowledge of their past," he was also highlighting how speculative these "causes" of homelessness are. Rather than base his conclusion on conversations with people experiencing homelessness, he relied on a singular example in which he was told that Jed was "meeting his man to get his drugs." Yet, these conclusions commonly made their way into conversation on a regular basis to explain a wide range of cases.

Connecting Jude's interview to his interaction with Michael is not meant to suggest a cause and effect. Rather, it is meant to suggest a shared understandings of homelessness are affirmed through intragroup discourse, in this case, sick-talk. Over the course of a year observing Fellowship outreach, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other forms of mental illness were deployed frequently by members of Fellowship Outreach, as well as other groups. Such sickness helped them "explain" cases ranging from joblessness to mugging. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this sort of discourse veered into sin-talk for members of Fellowship and Right Choice, with Jude one night openly pondering the idea that Gibby, a hard-working man with an "alcohol problem," would not put down the bottle in order to "better himself." But with this common understanding of the "causes" of homelessness in mind, Fellowship Outreach felt that meeting people where they were was part of their mission. As Alena explained to me one night that, in her view, most of the people living on the streets have some sort of mental issue, which could be an addition, alcoholism, an intellectual disability, or some sort of "psychological hang up." So, while they brought food with them, that was not primary mission for Mind the Gap. Instead, it was about the going out and talking to people, many of whom are waiting for a platform, for someone to listen to them tell their story. "Normal people don't need that," she claimed, but it was precisely because of this perception that her group's mission took on meaning. Whether they viewed this sickness as something that could be overcome (e.g., getting

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treatment for addiction) or something permanent (e.g., an intellectual disability), sick-talk helped them frame and give purpose to their volunteer practices.

Discussion and Conclusion: Making Meanings about Homelessness

"Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored" (Goffman 1967: 21).

Volunteering is often treated as an opportunity for volunteers to learn, to cross cultural barriers, and to alter their perspective (Clary and Snyder 1999; Clayton 2004; Einfeld and Collins 2008). But given that the social and cultural gap between volunteers and service recipients often widens, rather than shrinks over the course of service, shifts in volunteer perspective and practice cannot be assumed under all conditions (Godfrey et al. 2019; Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Sin 2009). In the case of homeless service provision, contact with people experiencing homelessness does seem to have some effect on one's understandings of homelessness as a social phenomenon. Again, Knecht and Martinez (2009) have shown that people who participated in a one-day homeless service project became less likely to understand homelessness in individualist terms while their opinions about how to address the problem of homelessness were not subject to significant change. Why might this be?

This chapter suggests that volunteer groups serve as a mechanism for reproducing understandings of homelessness and approaches to homeless service provision. As volunteers searched for a group with whom they meshed and observed the claims made by their fellow volunteers, they participated in a process of socialization. Through a combination of group selection, practice, observation, and discourse, this process either affirmed their understanding of homelessness or helped them learn to see homelessness in a way that was in line with their group's common discourse. Often, this meant leaning on the "wisdom" of mentors and senior group

leaders. Little research has directly explored practices of volunteering (Wilson 2012), but in many ways, social interaction among volunteers is much like most social interaction. Volunteering must first and foremost be understood as a practice of meaning making (Blumer 1969; Mead 1962). In particular, this process focused on developing an understanding of homelessness. Volunteers were prompted by their peers to entrench or revise their understanding of what homelessness means. What "causes" homelessness? How can homelessness be best addressed? Although the first finding, that volunteering is a form of meaning making, may be unsurprising, it lays the groundwork for the second finding. The process of socialization that occurred within the groups allowed volunteers not only to build common understandings of homelessness, but also to frame, justify, and inform their continued volunteer work. In a more abstract sense, volunteer missions and discourses highlight the structural limitations of their positions.

In the case of volunteer homeless service provision, it was routine to see and hear volunteer conversation and comments rooted in the discourses described by Gowan (2010): sin-talk, system-talk, and sick-talk. Such forms of discourse, while social constructions in their own right, communicates meaning to social subjects (e.g., volunteers attempting to navigate homeless and urban spaces) (Saussure 2011). While volunteers could conceivably generate their own understandings about homelessness, their actions and opinions were ultimately modeled after (or alongside) that of other group members. To be sure, volunteers would have entered their respective volunteer groups with their own understandings of what homelessness meant, and their decision to stay with any particular group was likely intertwined with how palatable the message of the group was to them. It was *also* true, however, that volunteers spoke of their respect for mentors and co-volunteers, especially with regards to framing the group's work, in explaining why the group chose to focus on relationships, meeting direct needs, and/or advocating for those experiencing homelessness at the level of city government.

While chapter has focused primarily on the phenomenological meaning making process that happens among people with similar status, the next two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) will delve deeper into the complexity of group position, meaning, and action. Specifically, in Chapter 5, color-conscious white volunteers are highlighted as a means of critically examining how privilege and power coincide with understandings of the social world they help undermine and/or reproduce.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S RACIST":
WHITE INVISIBLITY AMONGST COLOR-CONSCIOUS VOLUNTEERS

During nights of service, "Fam in the Streets" was easy to identify to passersby because at least a few of their members could be counted on to wear their yellow and black "Fam in the Streets" branded t-shirts as they caravanned around St. Louis providing Styrofoam containers of hot meals. More interesting than the group logo and name on the front, was the quote on the back: "Yes, all lives matter, but until mine matters as much as yours, I'm gonna be specific." The quote, attributed to "Mama" Germaine, a charismatic, middle-aged, black woman who served as the undisputed black leader of the group, was commonly cited in casual conversation by the predominantly white members of the group. The group conceptualized their service to St. Louis' homeless population as a form of activism. In fact, many of the longer-term members of Fam in the Streets met through the Ferguson protests following the death of Michael Brown in 2014, and many of the current members belonged to other activist organizations, especially racial justice and anti-racist organizations. Most importantly, they followed Mama Germaine's lead in her recognition of inequality as a product of overlapping systems of oppression – in this case, race and class. For her and Fam in the Streets, it followed that service to the unhoused was an act of community and community building. As she explained it to a group of visiting Girl Scouts on December 14, 2017, 95% of people experiencing homelessness in St. Louis are black,[14] so doing outreach is her "love[ing] her community."

Although not all volunteers I observed were willing to directly engage with conversations about systemic racism and structural inequalities, it was common discourse among Fam in the

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[14] I heard her cite this statistic on multiple occasions, but it is unclear where she gets this number. Based on my observation of Fam in the Streets, it is possible that she is making a rough estimate based on the people experiencing homelessness with whom she interacts/encounters. According to HUD (2017a, 2017b), about 77% of the St. Louis' (city and county combined) homeless population are black. Regardless, Black St. Louisans are overrepresented in the homeless population.

Streets, Citywide Outreach, Mercy House, and Service House. While all four of these groups were comprised of predominantly white volunteers, their color-consciousness should not be seen as surprising. Americans are becoming increasingly aware of structural racial disadvantages, and especially aware of black disadvantage. In fact, when asked which factors were important in explaining black disadvantage, 80% of Americans identified prejudice and discrimination, 45% identified laws and institutions, and 85% identified schools and social connections (Croll 2013).

Recognizing that racial inequality has become a common subject of conversation in the United States, this chapter broadly asks: how does recognition of racial disadvantage shape the ways in which white, color-conscious volunteers understand race and poverty? In particular, how do color-conscious volunteers understand their own social positioning? While a number of scholars have suggested that regular contact with racialized "Others" is associated with a heightened color-consciousness among whites (Gallagher 1995, 1997; Hartigan 1999a; McDermott 2006; Schneider 2018), this chapter showcases the limited depth of such consciousness. I argue that among the sampled, color-conscious homeless volunteers, homelessness – and overlapping understandings of poverty – was framed as a symptom of systemic racism while notions and consequences of their own whiteness remained underexplored. Conceptualization of blackness was a useful ideological tool that could be used to understand a world rife with social and economic inequality. Their own whiteness, on the other hand, was acknowledged only in passing, if ever, as a characteristic to be suppressed or managed. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this view of racialized inequality meant volunteers did not take their group position into account as they performed their service, which in effect, has impacts on the services they provide and the interactions they have.

In contrast to studies that seek to understand the path to color-consciousness and anti-racism (e.g., Feagin and O'Brien 2004; Warren 2010), this chapter examines enduring patterns of white invisibility, even among those who openly contemplate problems of racial inequality, racism,

and whiteness. More specifically, I argue that even the most color-conscious volunteers, many of whom spoke about structural inequality and systemic racism without prompting, struggled to see how *their* race was important in daily life. Even if they were able to recognize whiteness as a form of privilege on an intellectual level, they were irregularly able to reflect upon how such privilege informed their motivations, practices, and interactions (e.g., see Chapter 6). In fact, when directly asked how their race might inform their interactions with people of color experiencing homelessness, white, color-conscious volunteers were usually quick to admit that it must, but also unable to say exactly how or provide examples. This inability to speak about interracial interactions despite many interracial service experiences highlights the pervasive power and privilege embedded in the taken-for-granted nature of whiteness (Doane 1997; McIntosh 1990). Despite displaying strong knowledge of structural racism and/or anti-racism literature, their own group position remained invisible to them.

White Invisibility?

It has been commonly argued that due to cultural investments and institutional arrangements, white identities, privileges, power, and social patterns are "invisible" – at least to the white "mainstream" (Doane 1997; Du Bois 2015; Lipsitz 1995; McIntosh 1990; Rodriguez and Villaverde 2000). Because whiteness has historically been (and remains) part and parcel of institutional and cultural power in the United States, patterned white practices, ideologies, beliefs, etc. are framed as normative. In contrast, cultural products and practices of nonwhite minority groups have been otherized and/or seen as deviant (Doane 1997). "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (Lipsitz 1998: 1). Generally speaking, white Americans are less likely to acknowledge the privileges of whiteness and more likely to see the world through an

individualistic, color-blind lens than people of color (Croll 2013; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009). This white "invisibility" has had wide ranging implications on American society. Because whiteness is reproduced as default Americanness, institutional practices said to serve American or community interests are truly designed to serve white interests (e.g., federal Indian policy; mass incarceration) (Doane 1997; Hernández 2017). Furthermore, public space is better understood as "white space" in that people of color must learn to navigate physical and cultural geographies of white dominance (Anderson 2015) as "mainstream" media simultaneously reproduces unquestioned understandings of whiteness as socially and culturally superior (Hughey 2014; Vera and Gordon 2003).

However, many have argued that whites are cognizant racial actors. Even if their socialization into American society is not framed in explicitly racial terms, whites are able to interpret social and cultural messages in a way that provides understanding of their advanced social position (Hagerman 2018). In fact, the notion of white invisibility has been consistently complicated, if not outright challenged, by scholars since the 1990s. Frankenberg, who was among the first and most notable whiteness scholars to advance the white invisibility thesis (Frankenberg 1993), later points out that while the power and privileges of whiteness are selectively masked, whiteness periodically "marks" its difference as necessary to protect its dominant status (Frankenberg 2001). Others draw attention to the tendency of whites to become more cognizant of their racial identity when interacting in predominantly nonwhite spaces (Gallagher 1995, 1997; Schneider 2018). In these settings where whites are forced to confront their racial privilege, inequalities are commonly explained away through warped understanding of individual achievement and cultural difference and/or by minimizing and naturalizing racial disparities (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Croll 2013; DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post 2003).

This in mind, the salience of racial inequality and white privilege is not always easy to ignore. With challenges to white privilege growing in strength and frequency in the United States, many whites are learning to manage their racial identity in a way that acknowledges the past and current oppression of people of color (Hughey 2007; Knowles et al. 2014). While many whites continue to "deny" the existence of racial privilege and "distance" themselves from privileged self-concepts, acknowledging racial inequality and working to "dismantle" systems that produce racial inequality has also emerged as a way of managing one's white identity and sense of self (Knowles et al. 2014). And although whites are typically seen as more likely to "deny" or "distance" (Knowles et al. 2014), a growing body of literature is dedicated to understanding those interested in "dismantling" racist systems of oppression (e.g., Appiah and Gutmann 1996; Feagin and O'Brien 2004; Hughey 2007; Kendi 2019; O'Brien 2001; Tochluk 2010; Warren 2010).

White Anti-racism

Anti-racism, broadly speaking, is any ideology or practice meant to challenge racism. However, being "anti-racist," an "ally," or "woke" can look vastly different depending upon one's (or one's group's) understanding of racism (O'Brien 2009). Because the United States remains largely segregated by race, both physically and socially (Crowder 2000; Crowder and South 2008; Hagerman 2018; May 2014), some scholars have suggested that the ability to adopt a color-conscious, anti-racist ideology may be limited for many whites (Feagin and O'Brien 2004; Warren 2010). In turn, it is rather common for scholars and activists to discuss white anti-racism in terms of discovery or as an awakening of racial awareness (e.g., Case 2012; O'Brien and Korgen 2007; Tochluk 2010; Warren 2010). In this view, "moral shock" to racial disadvantage leads whites to question their own position and make connections with people of other racial groups. Such relationships are then credited with leading white anti-racists to understanding of their relative privilege, to their "awokening" (Warren

2010; Yglesias 2019). Following the basic premise provided by Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, many of these theories credit interracial friendships as the "impetus" for anti-racist advocacy, although some scholarship has suggested that (1) colorblind ideology prevents many whites from having meaningful interactions with people of color about racism and (2) many whites are indoctrinated into anti-racism through white friends (Feagin and O'Brien 2004; O'Brien and Korgen 2007).

In more progressive interpretations of anti-racism, race is seen as a social construction, and racism is accepted as real and as embedded into social systems and practices. As Dei (1996: 254) explains, "[Critical anti-racism] moves beyond acknowledgement of the material conditions that structure societal inequality to question white power and privilege and its accompanying rationale for dominance." It has been well documented that whites can struggle to adopt such a world view, often instead buying into colorblind ideologies where race is perceived as inconsequential (Bonilla-Silva 2010) and their whiteness as personal trait (Doane 1997; Lewis 2004; Underhill 2019).

By definition, anti-racists must be willing to acknowledge the importance of race and persistence of racism/racial inequalities to some degree (Appiah and Gutmann 1996). However, the degree to which anti-racists are color-conscious varies. Frankenberg (1993: 157), for example, details how "race cognizance," or a recognition that race "is a significant factor in shaping contemporary U.S. society" – among white women in California, race cognizance was commonly associated with anti-racist discourse and political action. Likewise, Omi's (2001) inventory of anti-racist organizations in the U.S. showed that institutionalized and intersectional understandings of racism and other systems of oppression are common. However, O'Brien (2001) asserts that even among race cognizant, anti-racist whites, there is a struggle to be reflexive. For those who have what she calls "selective race cognizance," white privilege can be understood in the abstract and as something reproduced by social institutions. Even so, those same selectively race cognizant whites struggle to

recognize how such social forces affected them as individuals – how they personally benefited from white privilege.

In the case presented here, volunteers displayed strong understandings of institutionalized racism and overlapping systems of oppression (race and class). Although they may not have put their work and ideologies in the terms of "intersectionality," "critical (race) theory," or even "anti-racism" (although many did use the latter), there was an expressed desire to spur systemic change. Yet, as will be shown, the limitations in understanding race (and class) as a group position in turn placed limitations on their ability to work toward the systemic change they desired.

Volunteer Understandings of Race, Racism, and Inequality in St. Louis

During the course of my fieldwork, it became clear early on that volunteers providing grassroots homeless services entered the field with two general understandings of homelessness. One view leaned heavily upon "common sense" notions of poverty. Homelessness was about individual choice or effort and issues of race and racism were rarely, if ever, featured in dialogue. The second view, as we shall see below, was that homelessness was the product of institutional barriers and arrangements and was deeply intertwined with understandings or race and racism. Rather than suggest that people experiencing homelessness "pull on their bootstraps," they pointed to longstanding issues of racism, interpersonal but especially systemic, and advocated for the St. Louis city government to better protect the rights of citizens experiencing homelessness and provide infrastructure that will better provide safety and social mobility (e.g., more temporary shelter beds, day centers, permanent shelter, rehabilitation services, etc.).

For many volunteers, advocating for structural/systemic change was done through the language of "social justice." Joseph, a retired white man heavily involved in the provision of transitional and (semi)permanent shelter through Citywide, explained it in this way:

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Well [being committed to social justice means being] committed to trying to change the conditions. Not just to be charitable and give money to the poor or whatever. But try to change the systems that cause poverty, that cause discrimination, that cause racial injustice, that cause a lack of affordable housing. I was a developer, my first job was as a consultant. I was a real estate consultant for nine years and then I went to work as a director of the first redevelopment corporation around Washington New Medical Center. And one of my main jobs was to get rid of all the boarding houses and rooming houses along West Pine and Laclede which were a problem. But I look back on that now and think, Well yeah I was getting rid of some problems, but I was also getting rid of a lot of affordable housing and I feel like it's karma for me to be creating affordable housing now. Very affordable, because I certainly was responsible for getting rid of some of it earlier. So that's what I mean by social justice is not just charitable giving but changing the system.

It is not clear where Joseph gained such reflexive hindsight, and he was exceptional in that he viewed his current volunteer work as a sort of penance for the role he played in the gentrification of the Central West End neighborhood years ago. However, his view of inequality was far from exceptional. He and other "woke" volunteers framed their work as (attempting to be) transformational and social justice oriented because the goal was to change the system so that people in poverty could (simply) access housing. Homelessness and poverty, in this view, do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are (re)produced and exacerbated through social policy, markets, and other social institutions. Thus, any approach to abating homelessness needs to consider changes or alternatives to existing institutions and/or systems of oppression. Notably – although he does not offer any details – Joseph includes race as one of these systems of injustice, tying it economic inequality.

Likewise, René, a white therapist/social worker who was in her first year of service with Citywide Outreach, believed the United States, and St. Louis in particular, was in need of a "cultural shift" toward understanding poverty as a structural outcome rather than as a personal trouble (Mills 2000):

René: Yes. I think we need a major cultural shift, cuz I mean like other countries, other developed countries don't have this kind of problem that we do.

Interviewer: So, what is it about us then?

René: I think we have a very like – I think our society is very individualistic and I think that we see other people's problems as not really our problems. And "that's on them", and "I'm

going to worry about me", and "I've worked hard for my shit," sorry. "I've worked hard for what I have and if you didn't", 'cause that's the perception, "if you didn't, that's kind of on you", and "if I'm okay, I'm okay with that, that's okay, that's enough".

Matt: Mh-hmm. You interpret it differently it sounds?

René: Yeah, I feel like, society can all do better if everyone had their basic needs met. In terms of the economy and the health and happiness of our society.

René's position was twofold. First, systems of (un)housing are upheld and justified by flawed cultural logics, ideologies, and practices. In this particular case, she points to problems of abstract liberalism (see Bonilla-Silva 2010) that frame homelessness and poverty as individual problems resulting from unwillingness to work – and in relation, housing security and wealth as individual achievement earned through "work[ing] hard for my shit." Second, she asserts that this cultural ideology frames the world in a way that is detrimental to societal health, happiness, and economy. And what is more, René would go on to explain that she understood systems of privilege and oppression, especially race, as important predictors of social outcomes.

René: A vast majority of the people I see who are homeless are black, are people of color. I'd be like those are the people without, who have a lack of resources or access to resources. Our whole city is set up like that. The whole [predominantly black] north part of this city is without a public hospital and very many grocery stores and a lot of nonprofit agencies like the one I work at that would help people with meeting their basic needs. There just aren't that many of them up there. Good public transportation[15]…

I think [race] ties into the equation by, I think it might be like one of the biggest if not the contributing factor to someone being homeless. You're just more likely to be homeless if you're a person of color. You're just more likely to experience the things that lead to homelessness. Simple as that. I think it's the overarching factor that someone experiences. Yeah.

Interviewer: Correct me if I'm interpreting you incorrectly; homelessness is, in some ways, in your view at least, like one small part or one symptom of a larger systemic problem.

René: Oh yeah. Oh absolutely. By setting up all these barriers for people of color that we have in this city. Pushing them all to one side of the city and leaving that area without any resources. We're just asking for this epidemic here, you know?

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[15] She is adding "good public transportation" to the list of things North City lacks. She is not noting that it has good public transportation, nor starting a new thought.

Such understandings of poverty and homelessness were common among color-conscious, social

justice-oriented volunteers. Understanding homelessness and extreme poverty (rightly) meant

understanding overlapping social institutions and systems of oppression. For these volunteers,

understanding poverty meant also considering problems of race and (to a lesser extent) gender and

sexuality, as well as problems of social welfare, policing, city, state, and federal policy, etc. "Pushing"

blacks experiencing homelessness, specifically, and poor blacks more generally, "all to one side of

the city and leaving them without any resources" did not just happen by coincidence. These

volunteers viewed the world as the product of competing social forces that (re)produce inequality

and protect privilege in accordance with existing systems of oppression. For them, blackness was a

particularly important analytic tool that allowed them to understand uneven access to social,

economic, and political resources (Omi and Winant 1994).

There was some variance in the way volunteers discussed such matters. Often, volunteers

fixated on the need for specific policy measures, such as the need for St. Louis to adopt a homeless

bill or rights or the reestablishment of a day center. At other times, volunteers across groups were

prone to calling for full scale revolution. For example, a number of Catholic Workers were fond of

saying that they were attempting to "build a new world in the shell of the old."[16] Others, like

Thomas (white) and Cecilia (black), a young, mixed-race couple, talked at length about the need for a

communist revolution, tying problems of homelessness and racism to the exploitive capitalist

system.

To their credit, volunteers frequently considered the role of racism in structuring community

relations and how they, as relatively privileged, predominantly white volunteers could respond to

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[16] My understanding is that this is a rather common saying in Catholic Worker circles because this language is
borrowed from a letter written by Catholic Worker and social activist Dorothy Day. In the letter which was later
published in *The Catholic Worker* in 1969, Day advocates for "teaching of revolution" by reading about Mahatma
Gahandi, Che Guevera, and Ho Chi Minh, with the objective being to "begin now within the shell of the old to
rebuild society" (Day and Meyer 1969).

these problems. Justin, a white man who had committed a year of his life to living at and working through the Episcopalian Service House, explained that his roommates, five of whom were white and one black, were regularly having conversations about how to understand race in the 21st century:

> I think it's great. Cuz when most people come into, like, a different area, they would look at it as like, "Oh. We're these figures to like *help*." Or like, "This is a charity case. Yeah. We're about to do so much good." They don't look at it like that, and that's what I love about my roommates: the humility that everyone displays here. There's like very little, if no, hubris at all. I don't sense this air of like, "Oh. I'm elite. I'm helping out these underprivileged area." It's very much so, "I want to be a part of this community." That's assuring, knowing that like, the events of Ferguson, etcetera, all of these things that were happening in St. Louis to re-spark national debate, it's like, "Do we live in a post-racial society? Is gentrification really a thing? Is white flight really a thing? Is police brutality really a thing?" You know? They get it. And they're willing to have those difficult conversations, as well, and peeling back their own layers of blindness, and so am I. I realize so much more about my own blind spots. We're all aware that we have blind spots that we need to work on, and things that we need working on, internally, as well.

Although a number of volunteers were rather self-congratulatory at times and conversations among volunteers of similarly privileged social positions were not always well-equipped to have a well-rounded and productive conversations about racism and poverty in North St. Louis, they were genuinely interested in understanding racial injustice. Many volunteers credited the murder of Michael Brown and the ensuing protests as a moment that spurred them to such conversations, as Justin did in passing. Like with Joseph, it is not totally clear why how he came to understand racial justice as important in the first place, especially considering that many other whites view the world differently. It does seem that for Justin, and a number of other volunteers, the murder of Michael Brown represented a moment of "moral shock," realizing then that police brutality (against Brown, but also against racial justice protesters) did not fit with his values system (Warren 2010). Additionally, people like Justin and Joseph may have been fortunate enough to have a network that exposed him to anti-racist ideologies, even in a world of segregated social networks (Feagin and O'Brien 2004; O'Brien and Korgen 2007). Certainly Chapter 4 of this dissertation would suggest that being surrounded by people with similar world views would help a person iron out the meaning

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behind their actions. But regardless of the impetus, his predisposition toward anti-racist ideals was an ongoing project through his involvement with Service House. These conversations with his roommates reinforced and molded his view of the world as a social product of competing, racist social systems and affirmed his desire to serve marginalized communities.

Upon reckoning with the reality of racial inequality, volunteers would turn to each other and other groups to learn more. Barbara, a middle-aged white woman who had spent more than 20 years in service to Mercy House, explained that she was always challenging herself to continue her anti-racist education:

> *Barbara*: Another thing. We just put a [quarterly Mercy House newsletter] out about gentrification and all that is related to colonialism. So just understanding that a little bit better. And I am not an expert. I have a lot of learning to do about that, specifically. For myself, I've learned just a lot about oppression in the last five years, and have gotten extra training, and I'm working with other groups that do education on oppression, anti-oppression work, and that has been pretty life changing, and has helped me see people's different identities in the way that people have unearned privilege, but the way that they're targeted in that and that kind of thing. So that has been really helpful to put things into context, I think.

> *Interviewer*: Is this the Association of Anti-racists [AAR], by chance?

> *Barbara*: AAR is one of them… [phone interruption]… The other group I work with is called the Community Justice Collective – St. Louis [CJC-STL], and they do diversity and inclusion work in St. Louis from a very Paulo Freire, deep social change, systemic analysis kind of perspective. So that has been really powerful. You know, I think, like for example, understanding that I have targeted identities… [interruption from hall]… So anti-oppression, like, helping me understand that, like, I work here and when I compare myself to women who live here, I am a white person, I'm a middle-class person, and I have, I'm an agent -- in that they are targeted. And also I'm a lesbian, so I am targeted in that identity in a way that straight people aren't, and so understanding that mosaic, that we're all a mix of those things, and they don't, that it's just important to consider all of them, and just because I'm white doesn't mean that I'm not targeted with my sexual orientation or being a woman and that kind of thing. Like, like learning that "both/and" concept has been really really helpful, that you can just hold a lot of simultaneous truths that yeah. So that has been super helpful. That's been super helpful.

Here, Barbara explains that in recent years, she has made a concerted effort to better understand race and racism by seeking out organizations like AAR and CJC-STL. Through her experiences with these groups, as well as with Mercy House, she has developed an understanding of inequality that is,

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more or less, in line with the principles of intersectionality (see Browne and Misra 2003; Collins 2000, 2013; Crenshaw 1991). As she put it, she has realized the importance of "understanding that mosaic" of overlapping systems of oppression and privilege. But more importantly, Barbara suggests, although perhaps unintentionally, that in her everyday work, her statuses as white and middle-class exist in relation to the "targeted identities" of those she serves at Mercy House. Although Barbara has begun to look inwardly, considering her "unearned privilege" alongside her targeted identities, and although privilege was a concept commonly acknowledged in abstract terms by a number of volunteers, it was rare for volunteers to have reflected on how *their* statuses of privilege (especially their white middle-classness) might impact their day-to-day service interactions.

Seeing White Privilege in Social Structure, not as Everyday Power Relations

As previously mentioned, "white" racial/ethnic identities have been commonly referred to as invisible because of whiteness' ability to operate as normative or viewed as the default racial identity in the U.S. One's whiteness is often unquestioned or viewed "as an unimportant *individual* attribute rather than a defining feature of a white *group* identity" (Underhill 2019: 493; see also Doane 1997; Lewis 2004). And although the true "invisibility" of white racial identities has been rightfully questioned – whites can be, of course, aware racial actors (Frankenberg 2001; Hartigan 1999b; Knowles et al. 2014; McDermott 2006; McDermott and Samson 2005) – volunteers showed time and again that even those who are capable of talking about whiteness and white privilege in the abstract are unlikely to think about the effects of whiteness on their everyday interactions. Although many volunteers, as demonstrated in the previous section, were capable of understanding the structural constraints and advantages endemic to white supremacist society, they neglected to consider how *they,* as members of the white racial *group,* were enmeshed in system of power relations

that informed and affected their interactions and relationships with people experiencing

homelessness, both white and nonwhite.

Among color-conscious volunteers – many of whom would also identify as anti-racist

activists – it was common for them to express a sense of surprise when explicitly asked about the

way race might affect interaction during the course of service. For example, when Gabriela, a white,

retired social worker who regularly volunteered with Citywide was asked if she thought race ever

"impacts the interactions between volunteers or service providers and the homeless," she responded

by saying:

> Oh, that's a good one! [Pause for thought]. I don't know. I want to say no, we've all got the great big liberal hearts. But, you know, what, I don't know. I would hope that if it were, that I'd become aware of it and be able to address that. But I'll tell you what, since Michael Brown, here in the St. Louis region, I have personally become so much more aware and educated about the racism that goes on in my life and in this community. God, I just hope that I can be aware if that's an issue. I don't feel like it is, but you know what, if somebody said, "Gabriela, you act differently here than you do here," I would want to know that. Because so often I just am reacting to stuff and doing stuff that I don't see it, but I would hope that somebody – and I'll tell you, some of those activist volunteers, especially with Fam in the Streets, they would be happy to point it out, I know they would. In a good way, in a kind way, to point out that they saw some volunteers showing some kind of difference between people, in colored people and people that are white. And I think they would, I would hope I would be able to. But you know what, what I'm aware of is how much I'm not aware of. You know, for real. For real.

Gabriela echoes Barbara in that she has, in recent years, become more aware of the role racism plays

in her "life and this community," but her excited response of, "Oh, that's a good one!" suggests she

has not reflected on how race might inform service interactions before the question was posed.

Furthermore, she is willing to admit that she may enter into service interactions with implicit biases,

but as she puts it, "what I'm aware of is how much I'm not aware of."

In this way, white, color-conscious volunteers walked a middle ground between

understanding whiteness as a group position laden with structural advantages and whiteness as an

individual characteristic. While they were willing to admit that their whiteness might (or even must)

be important, it had not occurred to them to think of it as important to their everyday interactions.

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In a social world where racial inequality and racism is increasingly salient, particularly in a place like St. Louis, MO, where protests over racial injustice are commonplace, volunteers became aware and worked to educate themselves on race, racism, and racial inequality in the abstract. They were willing and able to point disparities in education, health, police surveillance, etc. In fact, identifying as anti-racists interested in dismantling racists systems of oppression likely helps them manage their self-image at a time where white privilege is more frequently called into question (Knowles et al. 2014). However, the cultural, social, political, and institutional, investment in whiteness prevented volunteers applying that framework to their own lives. As Paul, a Mercy House volunteer succinctly put it, "I'm white and things like that don't really stick out to me, because I don't know what's racist and what's not. So, I'm sure that I've done many things that were problematic, but yeah, I don't know."

This is not to say that color-conscious volunteers were uninterested in trying to manage their whiteness. Rather, there were limitations on their ability to know what to manage. In the case of Paul and Joan, it was only through their relationship with Julia, a peer of color, did whiteness begin to take on meaning in their everyday lives. In an interview, Joan recounted the "impetus" for deeper reflection on her everyday interactions at Mercy House:

> *Interviewer*: So yes, I mentioned earlier that Paul and Julia had suggested to me that you have a lot of conversations about race and social justice and racial justice. And I was wondering if there's anything about those conversations that stands out to you and if any of it relates to Mercy House's mission.

> *Joan*: Yeah. There was a particular period, I mean it's work that, like, continues. You know, like, Paul and I actually have, like, weekly meetings, now, to specifically talk about our own racism, and the racism in the house, and I'm really pleased that we're doing that. So, this isn't to say that it's not still a focus, but there was a – the impetus for those meetings was a particular hot period with these issues about a month ago, where Julia got just kind of fed up with these two privileged young white kids oblivious to their racism in a lot of ways, and like her having to deal with the consequences of that was just exhausting.

> What struck me the most about those conversations was just how much, how much rage Julia had and how much she had sheltered us from that. Cuz it's not, and I don't want to for a moment perpetuate the story of like the angry woman of color – her rage was justified.

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Like, the weariness and the exhaustion she must have been feeling, I would have been pissed, too. It was just, realizing in that moment, how difficult it was for her as a person of color in core community and how difficult it must have been for every other person of color who's been in core community. Like, that's sort of what struck me the most, just how, how much weariness and how much justified anger the white people in this community have been sheltered from. Like, because – in large part because – like, nobody wants to deal with the level of defensiveness and-or guilt that arises when white people, especially young, relatively sheltered white people, are called out on their racism like that. It just, it made me realized just how, like, omnipresent racism must feel to, at the very least, people of color in core community, but also probably to a lot of our guests, and just how invisible it can be to the white people in the house if you aren't making an effort to look for, and even when you are, that divide. It really surprised me, and like, having that happen within our core community made me wonder how old of a story that really is. For how many years have the white people here been protected from the worst of the outrage that they generate, of the pain that they cause. You know?

Through her relationship with Julia, Joan was able to begin examining how her taken-for-granted white group position might be affecting how people interact with and perceive her. She explains that generations of Mercy House volunteers – who have been overwhelmingly white – have rarely considered how the ways in which the power embedded in their whiteness reproduced an "omnipresent" racism. Their failure to consider their own whiteness was both the outcome of and tool for the reproduction of day-to-day power relations that, at least in Joan's estimation, have a profound effect on the emotions of those they encounter, as well as on white volunteers' ability to serve a majority black population. And while this resulted in weekly meetings of self-reflection for Paul and Joan, it is hard to imagine white volunteers engaging in this sort of reflection without the intervention of someone like Julia – in this case a volunteer of color with a background in anti-racist activism and community organizing that was willing to confront Paul and Joan over their implicitly racist behaviors.[17]

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[17] The specific grievance that prompted the intervention was that Julia felt as though all conflict resolution work was being placed on her. Both Joan and Paul agreed that they had, without thinking, placed Julia in this position. Although their logic was not completely clear to me, they saw conflict aversion as a characteristic of whiteness, but as can be seen in Joan's quote, she speaks to a larger pattern of obliviousness to the consequences of living in a racialized world.

Furthermore, Paul and Joan fall victim to a common pitfall. Even in recognizing that their whiteness may sometimes predispose them to particular behaviors, they view it as something that can be unpacked and managed (McIntosh 1990; Omi 2001). Yet, as Joan also notes, racism is "omnipresent." It is a normal part of everyday life in the United States, and it is embedded into both micro-level relations and our social institutions (Aviles de Bradley 2015; Christian 2019; Christian et al. 2019; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Ray 2019). Thus, the continued inability of many white volunteers to understand their day-to-day interactions as the product of unequal group positions places limits the effectiveness of supposedly color-conscious service.

Discussion and Conclusion: Whiteness, Middle Classness, and Volunteer Status as Group Position

"As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (Lipsitz 1998: 1).

First, it should be stated that the objective of this chapter is *not* to suggest that reflecting on personal privilege is unproductive or unimportant. However, reflecting upon one's identities (e.g., white, middle class, volunteer) as individual characteristics that, even if acknowledged as negatively effecting one's interactions, can be managed may place limits on volunteers' ability to work toward social justice. A common critique of white anti-racist efforts is that in their effort to unpack their privilege, predominantly white organizations and their members end up centering whiteness, and in turn, marginalizing issues of racism and the lived experiences of people of color (Hughey 2007, 2012; Kowal 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2019; Omi 2001). It is important, on the other hand, that statuses of privilege be understood as group positions that exist in relation oppressed positions. Whiteness is defined by its position relative to blackness, Latinx-ness, etc. (Blumer 1958; Lipsitz 1998; Omi 2001).

Homelessness is defined by its group position relative to the housed (Willse 2015). Service

provider/volunteer status is defined by relationship to those served.

Similar to Joan and Paul, René suggested that her whiteness was something that could be

managed when interacting with black service recipients, either as a volunteer or through her work as

a social worker/therapist. When asked if race ever informs her interactions, she responded by

explaining:

> It's something I'm really like, it's something I think about all the time in terms of just like
> kind of check my privilege and feeling like not walking into someone's space like I own the
> place. Always thinking about like being, I don't want to ever come across as like an authority
> or like a white savior or anything like that. It's something I'm thinking about a lot. I don't
> know if that, I hope it doesn't come across. It's something I'm always very cognizant of.

For René, there was an implicit acknowledgement that she occupies a position of power. As a white

service provider, her privilege needs to be "checked" before "walking into someone's space like

[she] own[s] the place." But even as she acknowledges the privileged statuses she occupies, she

dismisses the idea that her structural position matters. She claims that she can shed her position of

authority by being cognizant of the way she enters space. She was white, yes. She was housed, yes.

She understood that social institutions ranging from government to private business were integral to

reproducing social inequality. Yet, when entering into interpersonal interactions, her statuses of

privilege were dismissed as manageable, as in inconsequential personal trait, rather than as a position

structured in dominance (Frankenberg 2001; Underhill 2019).

In fact, a common theme across all groups, including those predominantly composed of

color-blind volunteers, is that there was a symbolic attempt situate people experiencing

homelessness as equal status peers. Fam in the Streets referred to people experiencing homelessness

as their "Fam," "Family," or "unhoused brothers and sisters." Many other groups spoke about

people experiencing homelessness as their unhoused or homeless "friends." One Citywide

volunteer, Tatiana, explained to me that she liked to collect stories from the, as she called them,

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"sojourners" in order to find commonalities between herself and those she served. Often it was as simple as relating to them on the basis of age or health problems, but it was important to her that she felt they had something in common. But again, it was Barbara that had begun to poke holes in such logics. In conversations and interviews I had with her, she spoke of a "false sense of sameness." After many years of service to Mercy House, she had begun to understand that while she can unpack her privilege, she cannot shed it.

On one occasion, Barbara explained to me how she had spent her 20s trying to achieve this false sense of sameness by living the "simplest" life possible:

> I feel like, especially in my 20s, the way it was expressed in our community, so again not every [Catholic Worker] community, and I don't know what other folks are like, but speaking from my own experience, it could look like a competition of who was simplest. And I feel like that's very much against the spirit of everything. We're trying to do collaboration here, and some kind of spitting contest about who can, you know, get more clothes from the thrift store and who can –it feels like it's a misplaced... It felt like a way to be OK. To make myself feel better about all the privilege I had, and in a way that wasn't actually liberatory in some ways because I wasn't gaining new skills in some ways. I don't know that it most of the time created more connection…

> And I feel like there's a tremendous amount of white guilt and class, middle-class guilt, that I had and wasn't super aware of, but I was trying to do this work as sort of reparations for it, and like "I have to do something with all this privilege." And I feel like the voluntary poverty, in some ways, in some ways it's like just part of the fabric, and it's communal living and sharing. But in some ways it can fall into just a self-righteous distancing thing that creates barriers. So like, me not having health insurance for the first few years. Like, [mocking herself] I was super radical, and like I'm all that about it. But the women here were like, "Why don't you have—you could have health insurance. What is wrong with you?"

> Which, to me, is right. Am I helping them? Am I helping them directly by not having health insurance? No. Am I changing any system by not having health insurance? No. I'm not participating, and that – this is a huge piece of voluntary poverty is like not participating in unjust structures—but I think I didn't have a handle on every single structure in this country is built on slavery and capitalism and terrible. And so by walking down the street I'm participating, and there has to be a more sophisticated way to address it than to try to, on an individual level, be super pure and withdraw from everything. And I feel like there's a lot of, there's some balancing that has to happen. But I feel like I've fallen on the other side of individual action that's super self-righteous, and creating this idea of like, "Oh yeah. Me and the guests are the same." Like "Oh. We can just commiserate about how we don't have insurance." Like, my father is in the Air Force, and if something happens to me, my parents will pay for it.

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Through her example, Barbara points out that she and the "guests" she serves at Mercy House never were and never could be in the same structural position, try as she might. Despite attempts to undermine her privileged position, her privileged economic position meant that she would always have a safety net. Although she shifts to a largely class-based analysis in this excerpt, she recognizes that her whiteness comes with privileges that most guests cannot attain, and her status as a volunteer put her in a position of power. She would go to demonstrate the point further, citing a time where she, as a young (at the time referenced) white woman who "most things have been handed to," was advising a 40 year-old black mother on how to budget:

> Like, I'm 25 and doing a budget with a 40 year-old mother, too. And suggesting, making any kind of suggestion, like, because the truth is I actually don't have the skills that I think I have. I don't have the resiliency that's born out of struggle, because class-wise, most things have been handed to me. So it's an irony that I'm put in the position of being an authority with somebody who has had to work the system in a way that I am completely unaware of. So it's a really ugly interaction because then that person has to like – I have authority over their housing – so they have to modify their responses and their behavior knowing. I mean, they should tell me to fuck off, right? Like, you don't know what you're talking about. Have you raised -- you know? And I do understand that it's not so simplistic that you have to have experienced every scenario in order to have insight into it, but I think when we have more fallen on the side of things of thinking that because we have privilege, we know better. So budgeting, how you should interact with your kids, what decisions you should make for your kids, so many things, so many things that I have thought that I should have known better.

Through her example, Barbara recognizes that some combination of her class, race, and volunteer status provide her not only with certain relative advantages, but also with a degree of power over the guests. By virtue of her position, she controlled guests' ability to access housing and was able to dictate the terms of their stay.

In this way, Barbara had an understanding of race and class that volunteers, even color-conscious, social justice-oriented volunteers, generally lacked. She understood that racism, and social inequality more generally, is about group position, not just social boundaries that can be crossed when privilege is "checked." To be white is to hold power. To be middle class is to hold power. To be a volunteer is to hold power. Taken alongside the findings of Chapter 4, that meanings of race,

class, and urbanity are often ironed out and reproduced primarily through within group interaction, it is fair to conclude that the whiteness of volunteer groups may pose challenges to providing social justice oriented homeless service. While prior experiences may move some whites toward color-consciousness and social justice ideals, understanding whiteness as group position may continue to be elusive given that meaningful interaction is likely to occur between people who similar understandings of race and class positions. Conversely, forming relationships with people who understand whiteness as group position may not only move others toward activism (Frankenberg 1993; O'Brien and Korgen 2007), but also toward productive understandings of whiteness as group position and activist/and or service actions that takes this into account (Eichstedt 2001). That white volunteers reflect on this is of particular importance because, as will be shown in Chapter 6, volunteers' life experiences, patterned by their group positions oriented their understandings of race, poverty, and urban space and, in turn, shaped their service missions and interactions.

CHAPTER SIX

"I WAS ALWAYS INTERESTED IN THE DERELICTS":
UNDERSTANDING THE VOLUNTEER GAZE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The evening of April 23, 2018, like many evenings, featured heavy doses of volunteer photography. In fact, by the time we arrived at Stan's warehouse dwelling, it had become an openly acknowledged theme. Over the course of the evening, I had been carpooling with Ana in my car. After parking at the end of the caravan, she hopped out of my old green CRV and announced that the aging warehouse in which Stan lived in would be a great place for a photo shoot. She dramatically leaned up against the wall, indicating the pose she would strike for the camera. She then called to Gregory's daughter to suggest that the girl take a photo with the building. She did, much to Ana's satisfaction.

Meanwhile, John marched up to the warehouse door. He knocked but did not wait for Stan to answer. After just a few brief seconds, he began fumbling with the bottom of the door, eventually managing to slide it half-way open, showing no respect for the place Stan and a couple others called home. It was treated as a public space that he could access because he was looking for someone. In the months since first meeting Stan, the groups attitude toward Stan had showed signs of souring, frustrated that he was still without work, and tonight, John meant business. This attitude empowered him to offer slight criticism of the "friends" who did not prioritize his regular Monday visits and to enter Stan's home without permission. He looked in and asked if anyone was there. After a two second delay, Stan, who was already on his way to the door, called back to greet him.

Once at the door, there were so many people gathered around Stan, who was the only one home today, that I couldn't properly listen in on the conversation he was having with John. I did manage to hear John ask if anyone had delivered wood recently. Stan said, "No," but Teresa, who was standing next to me, immediately chimed in to undermine him, announcing that the Thursday group, led by Raymond, had delivered some last week.

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I must not have been the only one who felt unable to participate in the conversation with Stan, because Gregory had turned on his flashlight app and was leaning into the warehouse door looking for the family of racoons that shared the warehouse. Right Choice volunteers had been fascinated by the idea of men rooming with the raccoons since they first witnessed out about them in February.[18] The novelty clearly had not worn off, as Gregory was diligent in his search. When Dominic noticed what was happening, he leaned in behind Gregory to let out a hissing imitation of a raccoon, making Gregory jump back and clutch his chest as the group laughed.

At this point, people began to take more interest in Stan's living arrangement. John began to take photos of the inside. Half joking -- but only half -- Stan leaned over to John to say, "No photos. No Proof." John persisted anyway, taking more photos as he explained that he likes the light offered by the fire burning across the cluttered warehouse floor. Many of the others leaned in to inspect the warehouse, including Britta, an irregular member of the group, who was also taking photos. Pauline, a first-time attendee, added, "*They get so creative.*"

Poverty tourism, also known as slum tourism, is the practice of purposefully "travel[ing] to impoverished areas" (Scheyvens 2001: 18), but often refers specifically to guided tours through the urban "slums" of the Global South (Meschkank 2011). The practice has become a popular form of "development," in a number of cities across the Global South, with the townships of Johannesburg and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro receiving the most traffic (Frenzel et al. 2015). In this chapter, I draw attention to the similarities between homeless outreach volunteering and poverty tourism in an urban American context. I argue that the privileges and power associated with volunteer statuses, especially statuses of white and/or middle-class, shape perceptions of and interactions in nonwhite urban spaces. More specifically, I argue that, much like poverty tourism in the Global South, the

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[18] They were always excited when the racoons made an appearance. On occasion, they also criticized Stan for allowing the raccoons to reside there and for feeding them.

tourist gaze displayed by volunteers in marginal urban space emphasizes and helps reify difference between themselves and those they seek to help. Even as they showcased interest in meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness, volunteers ultimately reinforced the marginal social positions of people experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, this chapter shows that the Otherization process varies based on the ideological bent of the volunteer group. Those who more readily deployed color-conscious, social justice frames fixed their gazes upon a consumable blackness. Meanwhile, those who understood homelessness through frames of abstract liberalism cast a gaze that implicitly constructed white homelessness as difference, but black homelessness as dangerous, a product of laziness, and/or cultural deficiency.

Because many see poverty tourism as a sustainable and "alternative" form of tourism that promotes community development (Scheyvens 2001) and others see poverty tourism as voyeuristic (Dovey and King 2012; Harrison 2008), there is disagreement over the place poverty tourism should occupy in development efforts. I suggest that poverty tourism – or in this case, touristic volunteering – should not be framed in "either/or" terms. Volunteers were dually capable of making a tangible impact on disadvantaged members of the St. Louis community while simultaneously cementing the marginalized position of those experiencing homelessness through a *volunteer* gaze. Put differently, volunteers did not only consume these marginal urban spaces and people, but they also helped reproduce it as a spectacle of otherness.

What is the Benefit of Volunteering?

While volunteering was once considered an obscure leisure activity, rarely granted serious attention as a field of academic study, social scientists more extensively interrogated the practice in recent decades (Wilson 2012). Volunteering is typically thought of in benevolent terms as helping activities for which no payment or reward is expected. The working definition of volunteering I provide in

this dissertation, in fact, is that it is helping activity engaged in without expectation of benefit or reward. Of course, this is not universally true, however (Snyder and Omoto 2008). For example, volunteer tourism's popularity can be (at least partially) attributed to the idea that it is mutually beneficial; volunteers expect to provide a needed service and in return they are provided with "authentic" travel experiences and/or learning opportunities (Germann Molz 2017; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; Lasker 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Tiessen 2012). Likewise, volunteering in the United States is often linked to employability, acquisition of social capital, and/or a chance to develop soft skills (Akintola 2011; Astin and Sax 1998; Clary and Snyder 1999; Eliasoph 2013; Okun and Schultz 2003; Putnam 2000; Skocpol 1997, 2004). Thus, the benefits to volunteer are notable.

However, groups do not equally benefit from volunteering participation. Although prosocial behavior is comparatively more common among people in lower classes (Kraus and Callaghan 2016; Miller et al. 2015; Piff et al. 2010; Van Doesum et al. 2017), it is those of privileged statuses that make up the bulk of formal volunteer group membership. The groups most likely to volunteer are those who are highly educated, middle- or upper-class, and white (Foster-Bey 2008; Lee and Brudney 2009; Pho 2008; Rotolo et al. 2010; Skocpol 2004; Wilson 2012). Given these benefits, and given the overrepresentation of privileged groups in volunteering, it is fair to ask to what the tradeoff is. To what extent does volunteering benefit the receiving communities?

Despite the fact that volunteering experiences foster a sense of civic responsibility within volunteers (Astin and Sax 1998) and a commitment to promoting racial understanding (Astin et al. 1999), it does not necessarily lead to additional work that undermines structural inequalities. The question is thus one about social mobility and entrenchment. While past generations often viewed volunteering as a way of addressing issues of public policy and public affairs, volunteering has more recently taken the form of interpersonal connections and one-time events addressing what are

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viewed as isolated or individual problems (Carpini 2000). In other words, volunteer groups, composed of predominantly privileged, white, middle-class members, use volunteering as a vehicle to grow their advantages (e.g., skill development, employability) without meeting the root needs of those they intend to help. The literature on international volunteering has started to question the impact of volunteers are having on the communities served, with some studies suggesting that that volunteering practices are often unsustainable (Lasker 2016) and/or promote cultural *mis*understanding (Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004). Although it is easy to see the short term, rather surface level benefits that come from charity activities (e.g., providing food or blankets to a service population, this study extends a fairly recent tradition established in the volunteer tourism literature by broadly asking what impact volunteer practices and service interactions have on marginalized urban spaces and the people making use of that space in the United States, if any.

Perception of the "Other" and of Otherized Space

As discussed in the general literature review (Chapter 2), the construction and perception of black poverty and black urban space is often problematic. General understandings of homelessness, in contrast, occupy a strong space in the American consciousness. In contrast to racialized social problems like affirmative action and welfare dependency, the issue of homelessness – at least in the abstract. Although homelessness disproportionately affects blacks in the United States – an estimated 39.1% of people experiencing homelessness are black (Henry et al. 2016) despite only representing 13.4% of the country (U.S. Census Bureau 2018) – homelessness is not necessarily perceived as a "black issue." In Wilson's (1996) study, Baltimore residents perceived people experiencing homelessness as white, while those dependent upon welfare were perceived as black. In turn, causes of homelessness were, perhaps predictably, perceived as structural (low wages, exploitation, no jobs, and/or bad schools) and welfare dependency was perceived to be the result of

individual/personal causes (lifestyle choice, ability and talent, morals and drunkenness, and/or lack of effort). Thus, the fact that homelessness is a popular public and academic concern (Lee et al. 2010) may be related to the perception of homelessness as a "white issue." Furthermore, Stuart (2014, 2016) documents how police and welfare management in Skid Row has changed to become more paternalistic. Rather than attempting to control the "rabble" of Skid Row, officers reimagined their role as stewards of recovery management, often trying to "shepherd" people experiencing homelessness into recovery programs at nearby mega shelters (often by ticketing them for quality of life violations) so that they might rejoin mainstream society as productive members (Stuart 2014: 1910). How do these competing perceptions of homelessness and marginal urban space play out on an interactional level, on a level in which largely white and middle-class volunteers come into contact with a predominantly black homeless population?

(Poverty) Tourism

Tourism is a social and spatial phenomenon in which tourists are attracted to a place by the promise of exploration in an "elsewhere" or of an "other" (Bauman 1998; Minca 2000). With cultural experiences continuing to grow as an object for consumption, spatial contexts have transformed to meet the needs/demands of consumers. Resorts, theme parks, and tourist towns have emerged as "protected and closed spaces which offer the over-abundance of image stimuli to which we have become accustomed" (Minca 2000: 401). Other common places of tourism seek to provide experiences of "authenticity," meaning that they are perceived to be genuine products of local culture(s) and/or deemed traditional in some way, shape, or form (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills 2003; Urry 1990). Such spaces are evaluated by a tourist gaze, which "presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practices, particularly those

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based within the home and paid work" (Urry 1990: 2). Thus, authenticity is measured by a space's or a people's ability to meet expectations (or stereotypes) of social or cultural difference (Urry 1996).

Around the world, and especially in the Global South, "slums" are becoming increasingly common places for tourists to seek this perceived authenticity, and there is a growing body of literature dedicated to understanding the slum, poverty, and volunteer tourism industries (Frenzel et al. 2015; Roy 2011). The poverty tourism industry, and similar industries like the volunteer tourism industry (Crossley 2012), trade on the idea of consumable culturally authentic experiences (Dyson 2012; Frenzel 2016; Frisch 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; Lasker 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Schneider 2018), and the ability to mix social responsibility with observation of poverty, adventure, and entertainment (which might include tours, bars, restaurants, concerts, festivals, or even bungee jumping) (Butler 2012; Frenzel 2016). In fact, many poverty tours advertise themselves as "reality tours" as a way of emphasizing the "authentic" experiences tourists will obtain – experiences that may or may not conceptualize poverty as the defining feature of the slum (Meschkank 2011).

Much debate exists around practices of poverty tourism (Freire-Medeiros 2013). Some argue that poverty and volunteer tourism can be used as a tool for development/modernization, empowerment of the poor, and poverty alleviation (Frenzel 2013, 2016; Harrison 2008; Scheyvens 2001), cultural exchange (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Scheyvens 2001), and/or social justice (Conran 2011; Scheyvens 2001). In this view of poverty tourism, authors draw attention to the tourist industry's ability to bring income to previously avoided communities and residents (Harrison 2008; Scheyvens 2001). Additionally, Scheyvens (2001) states that ethical standards of poverty tourism are a crucial part of its definition, and that any form of voyeurism or pity motivated volunteering would be at odds with poverty tourism. Instead, poverty/slum tours are well served by emphasizing "true" life and everyday cultural practices in the toured area, in effect undermining conceptions of the slum as places of suffering, hardship, and despair (Meschkank 2011).

This picture of poverty tourism might be better understood as a system of best practices, rather than a reality driven definition. A number of scholars have argued that the poverty tourism is, at least in practice, voyeuristic and otherizing (Dovey and King 2012; Dürr and Jaffe 2012) and that it upholds the legacy of colonialism in the neoliberal era (Manyara and Jones 2007). More specifically, poverty tourism may Otherize those living in slums because, rather than utilize the experience as an opportunity to build cross-cultural connections, poverty is instead observed by tourists and volunteers as an object of difference (Crossley 2012; Simpson 2004). Although tourists frequently express an interest in learning from the host community, conceptions of poverty, culture, and race are also deployed as a means of maintaining social and physical distance (Crossley 2012; Schneider 2018; Simpson 2004). In addition, and despite the stated goals of community development and cultural exchange, many slum tours are operated by people who are not members of the subject community, and many fail to initiate interaction between community members and tourists (Frisch 2012).

Although poverty tourism could conceivably offer opportunities for poverty alleviation and for cultural understanding if conducted with some attention to common pitfalls (Scheyvens 2007), proponents of poverty tourism must still grapple with the tourist gaze (Frisch 2012). The slum is theorized to be an ideal tourist location because despite the quest for "authenticity" and "reality," it offers a largely privileged group of people a chance to observe a world *believed* to be the opposite of their own (Freire-Medeiros 2013). On the one hand, the tourist's desire to gaze upon the slum opens up opportunities for transformation (Dovey and King 2012). On the other hand, tourists seek "authentic" experiences based on preconceived notions of the "other," and as tourists flock to these locations, images of the slum as a place of squalor and despair reproduced and disseminated through selective photography and tourist perceptions (Dürr and Jaffe 2012). Time and again, volunteers and tourists do their part to perpetuate the stereotype of slum residents as "poor but happy" (Crossley

2012). Given that tourists are drawn to an aestheticized poverty (Dovey and King 2012; Dürr and Jaffe 2012), it might be difficult for poverty tourism to provide sustainable improvements to the community and large scale poverty alleviation without compromising the slum's appeal to tourists.

Although not exclusively, poverty tourism is typically associated with the Global South (Freire-Medeiros 2013; Frenzel 2015; Steinbrink 2012). In fact, Frenzel et al. (2015) estimate that more than one million people go on slum tours each year, and more than 80% of these tours take place in the favelas of Brazil or the townships of South Africa. The homeless service activities I observed were not formally planned slum tours, nor were they exotic excursions into foreign lands where the people were perceived to be poor in market opportunities, but rich in culture (Crossley 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016). However, it would be hard to ignore the touristic impulse displayed by many volunteers. In St. Louis, I repeatedly observed volunteers, both black and white, both color-blind and color-conscious, profess interest in "urban decay" (Alfonso, Fam in the Streets) and take photos with such frequency that one volunteer jokingly asked another volunteer if she "ever feels like a Japanese tourist" (Teresa to Veronica, Right Choice). In these moments, volunteers sought to explore their home city in a way that few others of their class status would, and in the process, emphasized the difference between themselves and those "on the street."

The Draw of the "Derelicts"

Although the volunteers in this study were not traveling long distances to take guided tours through the slum, as is common in for many contemporary slum tourists, many conceptualized their volunteer work in touristic terms. They desired to observe an "elsewhere" (Bauman 1998). With most participants coming from middle-class households, and many of them coming from residential or suburban St. Louis, homeless outreach doubled as an adventure into marginal, physically crumbling, graffiti-riddled urban space. It was a chance to tour the peculiar lives of those excluded

from "normal" life (Freire-Medeiros 2013; Urry 1990). Teresa, who was among the most consistent

volunteers with Right Choice Ministry and Outreach, most directly spoke to this issue:

> I don't know. I've always, when I was younger, I was always interested in the derelicts, shall we say. I was always interested in that which was not normal. I was always kind of curious, but I was always told, "Don't go there. Don't do this. If you go through a bad area, just drop your head, don't be seen." But I was always kind of curious as to what was going on, and it kind of grew more into that role when I got older. But it wasn't so much as, "don't go there," but it was "go there."

Teresa explains that although she has always had a curiosity for "that which was not normal,"

including the "derelicts," she was discouraged from lingering in the unsavory places that might host

such people. Nevertheless, the draw of such places persisted in her mind until she decided to act on

it through Right Choice service opportunities. She wanted to know more about those who lived

outside the white, middle-class life she perceived as normal.

Likewise, fellow Right Choice volunteer, Veronica, explained that when she learned about

Right Choice at her church's involvement fair, she was "intrigued." She explained that after she

started to attend outreach events, she came to enjoy service activities as a chance to learn:

> I mean, at first, it's kind of like, I was nervous. I didn't know, you know, how to react or what to say to people. But once you get to know our homeless friends, I mean, they're just like me and you, just different circumstances on how they're living, and talk to them like you would talk to anybody. So, I don't know, just the way that they can live and survive, I guess, in a different climate was interesting to me. How some want to stay in that lifestyle. Some don't. I just like hearing their stories and getting to know the people.

Like Teresa, she wanted to observe and learn about a different way of life, to hear "their stories." In

this way, people experiencing homelessness were an attraction of sorts. Because they represented

something that, at least in their perception, was atypical, it was interesting to observe them, to learn

about them. Even if what they learned was not wholly accurate (e.g., that people choose to be

homeless, as Veronica suggests), performing homeless outreach was an activity that they found

enjoyable because it gave them an opportunity to witness life on the margins. By going out on a

regular basis to serve their "friends," people deemed to be "just like me and you," they also had the

opportunity to witness something fascinating: how someone could "survive" in a "different climate." This sense of otherness was embedded in their desire to volunteer; it was something that they wanted to observe for themselves. Whether or not that difference was real or imagined made little difference during the course of the volunteers' observation, however. While it was fairly common for volunteers to claim a sense of sameness to people experiencing homelessness, they just as frequently, if not more frequently, emphasized homeless otherness.

Emphasizing Otherness

On the night of December 14, Fellowship Outreach took their normal Thursday night route through St. Louis. After making several stops across the city, including two in downtown and one on the east side of the river, we pulled up to our final stop of the night. The stop was on the west bank of the Mississippi River. From the bank we could see barges floating down the river, and despite the dark, bridges connecting Missouri to Illinois loomed in the distance. We were there to visit with Clark and Lynn, two "friends" of the group. By himself, Peter stepped along the flood wall to their tent hidden amongst the trees and brush to fetch them for conversation and supplies. When he returned from the camp without them following, he reported that, for the second week in a row, their camp was still set up, but no one was home.

Perhaps a bit disappointed, the group started to retreat to their cars – except for Peter. Instead, Peter approached what turned out to be a parked car covered in a black tarp. He shouted in, asking if anyone was there and if any food or supplies were needed. After a few shouts, Lance, a young black man wearing a "SEMO alumni" (Southeast Missouri State) hoodie emerged. Lance was a familiar face – someone we were used to seeing at a common gathering spot on the near south side of the city – so Peter was surprised and greeted him warmly. Those offering supplies piled him down with chips, donuts, and chicken sandwiches. As Lance awkwardly crawled back under the tarp

to tuck his supplies into his car, Peter spoke up to say, "This is a first," chuckling as he took a series of photos. Compared to the previous stops, we did not linger long to talk with Lance. We stayed only long enough to learn that he had a friend somewhere nearby and that he had not seen Clark or Lynn. Even as we heard this news and retreated to our cars, Peter continued to take photos of Lance's tarp covered car. To Peter, and likely to others present, Lance's poverty was a spectacle to behold. It existed not only in sharp contrast to everyday, suburban or middle-class life, but also in relation to previous encounters with people experiencing homelessness.

The very concept of tourism is built upon the perceived contrast between leisure and work, between one's "real" life and one's experiences "elsewhere" (Minca 2000; Urry 1990). Likewise, homeless outreach was appealing to volunteers, at least in part, because it provided them with a setting in which they could observe alternative practices of living as novelty. In this case, volunteers in Fellowship were nearly all coming from the suburbs of St. Louis. Because such a series of events would not be commonplace in the more affluent, more residential neighborhoods from which they had commuted, the chance to observe a man crawling in and out of a tarp covered car was treated as spectacle. As Lance crawled in and out from under the tarp, the group stood circled around, chuckling while Peter took photos, explicitly noting the novelty of the experience by saying, "This is a first." Although this likely was Peter's first time observing a man crawl out of a tarp covered car, creating spectacle out of homeless life was a regular occurrence. Through their touristic impulses, which included taking photos, making social media posts, and strolling through dwellings without consent, volunteers who were there to "help" also helped reify the difference between those living in homelessness or poverty and those living in financially secure households.

Homelessness and the Volunteer Gaze

Once volunteer groups identified and traveled to appropriate space(s), their statuses and mission as volunteers provided them with the ability to begin exploration of both places and people. Although I witnessed mildly tense moments on rare occasion, interactions between volunteers and people experiencing homelessness during the course of service were almost always friendly. Indeed, Fam in the Streets routinely referred to those experiencing homelessness as their "unhoused family," Right Choice, Fellowship, and a handful of other volunteers from other groups frequently referred to those experiencing homelessness as "homeless friends" or simply as "friends." Furthermore, many volunteers reported that they "enjoy" doing outreach. But why volunteers enjoyed such forms of service provision cannot be wholly attributed to the friendly nature of their interactions. It was also about the ability to observe the marginal. Although I have no doubt that feeling appreciated or developing relationships enhanced their satisfaction with homeless volunteering, the interactions I observed, and the interactions described during volunteer interviews were fueled by a desire to learn about the "other" and the "other" St. Louis – the Saint Louis that they would not have experiences in during the "normal" course of their lives. They sought a firsthand knowledge of homeless difference that could only be attained through "authentic" experiences. Claire, for example, recounted a time at which she was privileged enough to observe a "brilliantly creative" "young homeless guy:"

> Oh oh! Here's another magic moment. This was maybe a year or two ago, and we were going different places. A lot of the homeless people will have jobs. I mean, it's literally they don't have enough to make ends meet. They are working. They don't have enough money for a place. It's crazy. So, this guy, you know, he had a bike. He had a job interview. He was so sweet. And he ended up singing for us. He had this incredible, like, voice, soulful voice. And it was – and then we sang with him, and stuff like that. You can't, you can't pay for that. And like the guy with the typewriter that was writing poems for everybody. I mean, how do you get experiences like that? The only way you can is if you do stuff like this. You know? I mean, this is stuff I will remember forever. You know?

For Claire, these moments were "magic" and memorable because the poet and the musician allowed her to feel as if she had had unique and intimate experiences, the kind of experiences one could only have by doing "stuff like this." She understood her experiences as events that existed in sharp contrast to those she had on a daily basis in the rural town in which she lived and in contrast to other generic forms of leisure. Rather than having the cookie cutter experience one might pay for, she voyaged into places unknown, filled with people unknown. For her trouble, she was often rewarded with unique experiences ranging from a private concert performed by a man with a soulful voice to a man writing poems on his typewriter.

In fact, the poet was notable enough that Claire wanted to share this experience with others, perhaps as evidence of the authentic and intimate connection she had made while exploring life on the margins. In a post on a publicly accessible social media site, she wrote: "I was given a typewritten poem by a young homeless guy (who also happened to be brilliantly creative); I will keep it forever. I promised I would write him a poem in return. I hope you can enjoy it too!" She did not provide a copy of the poem written by the "young homeless guy", but she posted the poem she wrote for him, which she titled "Alex," after the man who had written her the original poem. Her poem read:

Alex[19]

By Claire[20]

Street-Alex wrote me a poem.
I asked him to.
Joyfully he ripped out bright yellow backing
From a notebook;
Stuck it in an ancient typewriter,
Listened and spoke as he wrote:
His third poem in a row.

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[19] To preserve the original poem, "Alex" is the only name in this dissertation that has not been substituted with a pseudonym. Only his first name has been included, and I do not feel Alex's confidentiality is compromised by this choice.

[20] In the interest of protecting the participant's confidentiality, I have not named the social media site, nor have I provided an excerpt of the post that is searchable through internet search engines.

I thought, perhaps, I would end up with the leavings,
The tired remains from his first two works.
I'm so excited to do this,
He was saying…
I have this gift, I can see into a soul
Write what the person is feeling, going through,
Needs.
Cynicism is the catchword of the day.
Yet his first poem,
About love-light-giving –
What we were feebly attempting to do –
Was really magnificent.
So then he read mine.
I expected, if his gift was real,
To hear of pain, struggle –
Grief.
Instead, he wrote of choices:
To choose to live, to love, to be free
Despite constraints.
Not what I expected; but true; very true;
And soft tears came to my eyes:
A soul-response, a heart answer
Apart from mind, thought, memory.
His namesake, I think, is Alyosha – Alexei –
From *Brothers Karamozov*:
A mystic, a poet;
A giver as well.
I told him I would write a poem for him in return.
How to do it while avoiding
Condescension, false intimacy,
Over-romanticism?
To Alex:
I have now
A torn piece of paper
With typewritten words
And a memory – a spot of time –
Of a soul which chooses to give,
Which finds joy in helping others
In a form most unique.
I will keep this gift, Alex,
And the memory of the beautiful typewriter
And the street
And the cold
And unafraid, unassuming boldness:
The confidence of freedom,
In a city-street in the dark, in the night
Full of light.

Her post not only highlights the perceived intimacy of a fleeting connection to "Street-Alex," but by posting the poem to a social media site, and noting that she "hope[s] you enjoy it too," she intends for another audience to derive meaning from it. Her poem leaves the reader with two take-aways. First and foremost, she wants readers to know what an intimate and lasting impact "Street-Alex" made on her. In so doing, she stakes her claim on the explored person. The poem serves as evidence of her expedition to find something/someone interesting. Secondly, she presents an argument for her view of homelessness: despite the cold, hard life of this man on the street, he remains brilliant, creative, generous, and "Full of light." While understanding him as a person existing on the margins, she takes it upon herself to try to convince the world that "Street-Alex" has value.

As far as I know, Claire's decision to post type-written reflections in a publicly accessible space (i.e., not Facebook or Instagram) was rare. However, photos were frequently taken in all but one of the outreach groups with which I worked[21] and served a similar purpose. On the evening of April 9, 2018, while I was conversing around a barrel fire with two other volunteers, John rotated around the fire, snapping photos on his phone. When he finished taking photos, he interrupted the group conversation to ask, "Matt, are you 'here,'" using his fingers to place "here" in air quotes. When I responded with a look that suggested I did not understand, he asked again, "Are you *here*." Again, I did not understand, and he waved for me to join him in huddling over his phone. He was crafting a Facebook post, and he was asking if I wanted to be tagged. The rest of the group was listening in and laughed to suggest that they also had not understood. I told him that was fine, and he clarified that he always asks people if they were OK with being counted as "here."[22] He proceeded to ask all the other volunteers if they were "here." The post included a number of

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[21] When new members signed up to volunteer with Citywide, they were explicitly asked to avoid taking photos. Photo taking was never observed when working with Service House and Mercy House (not outreach groups), but this might be attributed to the differing nature of their work. Fam in the streets did take photos, and was frequently featured in the local news, but the frequency of photo taking was low compared to Right Choice and Fellowship.

[22] This was not true. He had tagged me in posts without my consent at least once before.

nondescript photos of people gathered around a smoky barrel fire, as well as a close-up selfie of he and Scott, a black man experiencing homelessness whose smile prominently featured a missing tooth. After the post was made, he went back to taking more photos, asking David, another Black man experiencing homelessness, to pose with a group of volunteers, and then circled Dominic, an older white volunteer, and Scott as they joked with each other and shared a hug. Dominic had been standing on a rock immediately next to Scott, kidding that he was taller than Scott. Probably noticing that his movements were less than stealthy, John announced, "Gotta get a shot of these two goofing around."

Similar to Claire, John sought to document his experience in marginal space in a way that gave him a claim on authenticity, on an observed *reality*. On nearly every outing, John and a number of other members of Right Choice and Fellowship could be spotted taking photos of people experiencing homelessness and spaces (thought to be) occupied by the homeless. Smoky bonfires, graffiti covered walls, impressive or makeshift tents, crumbling redbrick buildings, and abandoned warehouses were treated as tourist destinations, as volunteers observed and tried to capture the essence of St. Louis' fringe urban landscape. With his inclusion of a smoking barrel fire, John highlighted the perceived destitution – or perhaps the ingenuity and resilience – of life on the margins. Simultaneously, John wanted his Facebook followers to see that he and his group, Right Choice, had cultivated genuine connections with the homeless "Other," hence the smiling selfie with David and the photos of Dominic joking with Scott.[23]

In the examples provided here, both Claire and John cast their tourist gaze (Urry 1990) upon homeless subjects. The tourist gaze is built upon two interlocking conditions. First, the tourist must

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[23] It is possible the inclusion of smiling selfies and photos of a volunteer bantering with a person experiencing homelessness represents an attempt to reproduce the "poor but happy" trope (Crossley 2012). However, because it was rare to see "poor but happy" photos that did not also include volunteers, I have chosen to instead code these as cases of volunteer relationship framing.

be able to perceive that the experience is in some way authentic or genuine. The experience must be perceived as different from that of "normal" life while also aligning with their preconceived notions of what the experience should be like, often based on the consumption of media (e.g., Facebook photos, movies) that has taught them of the difference they will encounter (Urry 1990). Dovey and King (2012: 287) suggest that the appeal of poverty tourism is the chance to observe an "informal" and "impenetrable" urban "labyrinth." Volunteering thus offers a chance to glimpse a "backstage" of St. Louis that is otherwise off limits to those coming from the formal city (Dovey and King 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; MacCannell 1973, 1992).

Second, the tourist gaze is reliant upon visual stimulation. Above all else, tourist interactions are framed by the difference of visual surroundings (Urry 1990, 1992). Volunteer homeless outreach provided volunteers a chance to see something stunning. The informal, impenetrable, urban labyrinth mentioned by Dovey and King (2012) took distinct physical form as volunteers ventured through it. The physical surroundings were an important backdrop to the homelessness observed by volunteers. In the cited examples, it was John who most obviously demonstrated this as he made sure to capture not only the group of volunteers and people experiencing homelessness in his photos, but also the smoking barrel fire around which they gathered.

Upon meeting these two conditions, tourists often go about reproducing understandings of the slum. Photographs – or any documentation of an encounter, for that matter – is significant in this process. As Urry (1990: 139) contends, photography represents a power/knowledge relationship, in which the photograph suggests knowledge of and power over the captured object. And although photographs are generally interpreted as transcriptions of reality, "photographs are the outcome of a signifying practice in which those taking the photo select, structure and shape what is going to be taken" (see also Sekula 1982, 1982). Thus, as volunteers like John and Claire take idealized photographs and/or document their experiences with people experiencing homelessness,

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they (re)construct meanings of homelessness, poverty, and life deemed "not normal." Then, the

meaning they helped construct about "authentic" homelessness – one that is largely accepted as

"real" but is nevertheless implicitly framed by preconceived understandings about homeless

difference – is further entrenched as volunteers share their photos, poems, blogs, etc. with their

fellow volunteers, friends, congregation members, and online followers (Dürr and Jaffe 2012; Sekula

1981, 1982; Urry 1990, 1992).

Up to this point I have referred to the desire to observe and consume homeless otherness as

a *tourist* gaze because, to be frank, the motivations behind slum tourism and homeless outreach

volunteering are remarkably similar. However, the actions taken by the volunteers in this study are

likely not unique to homeless service volunteers. Instead, it is beneficial to question the motivations

and perceptions of all volunteers who seek out face-to-face interaction with people in disadvantaged

positions. This would include myriad forms of volunteering, including but not limited to Teach for

America volunteers, Peace Corps members, volunteer tourists in the Global South, and white anti-

racist activists.

Clary and Snyder (1999) have developed a typology of six social-psychological volunteer

motivations. The motivation to volunteer may be based in one's values (e.g., volunteer feels it is

important to help others), a desire to better understand the world or develop otherwise unused

skills, a belief that volunteering will lead to some sort of personal growth, a desire to attain career

related experience or skills, a belief that volunteering will allow him/her to strengthen or create

social relationships, and/or a way of reducing negative feelings in oneself (e.g., guilt). During the

course of fieldwork, all such motivations were expressed to some degree by at least a few volunteers.

However, the motivation to understand or learn about homelessness, stood out across interviews

and field observations. Indeed, it is well established the volunteer tourism literature that volunteers

are often motivated by the idea of experiencing something new, exotic, and/or "authentic"

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(Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Schneider 2018; Tiessen 2012). This gaze need not be limited to geographic boundaries or activities that more closely resemble traditional tourism.

With nearly all volunteers coming from some position of privilege (class, racial, residential, or a combination of the three), homeless service represents an opportunity to explore an "elsewhere" (Bauman 1998) as volunteers quest for understanding. In the following section, this research will suggest that this volunteer gaze is racialized based on the racial ideologies they held. Volunteers' understandings of race and social inequality more generally shaped the way they interacted with the space, their conclusions (conclusions they confirmed, rather than developed) about homelessness, and the information they disseminated to others through photos, conversation, and social media.

A Racialized Volunteer Gaze

Like many other social processes, the volunteer gaze was found to be racialized in the context of homeless service provision. These ideological differences were observed to produce two forms of the volunteer gaze. Many volunteers, principally coming from Citywide Outreach, Fam in the Streets, Mercy House, and Service House, operated based on color-conscious, social justice-oriented ideologies. It was common for members of these groups to openly grapple with systemic racism and think of poverty and racial inequality in structural terms. Many belonged to other explicitly anti-racist organizations and expressed interest in working for systemic change, most frequently at the level of city government. On the other hand, they were also likely to express an interest in consuming black culture – not just homelessness/poverty, although the two were not always separable in the minds of volunteers (Harris 2001; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). This desire was, perhaps, most pronounced among white volunteers at Mercy House, many of whom lived or

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had lived in the North Side shelter as a part of their dedication to (or a perk of) the mission. Take Paul as an example.

On one slow November 2017 morning, I had been volunteering alongside Paul. With very few people coming to collect sandwiches or to pick up donated clothes, Paul and I were passing the time in the Mercy House office. While they[24] worked on the volunteer schedule for the upcoming month, I flipped thorough a book written for a white anti-racist audience they had left lying on the office desk, *Witnessing Whiteness* by Shelly Tochluk (2010). As I flipped through, I noticed that Paul had flagged a paragraph by writing "me :(" in the margin. The paragraph read:

> For me, part of my journey involved a wholesale rejection of my home community, my culture, and my sense of self. I fell into a troubling pattern that many distressed whites demonstrate. Part of that included unwittingly objectifying people of color as I turned to them in escape of my "white" life. I retreated into a world of color, what many describe as "colorful" garb, "colorful" music, and "colorful" people. At that time, I had much antipathy for anything that reminded me of my former, less aware, white self. I found conversations with most white people on matters of race fruitless. I now see that those conversations failed, in part, because they were not in the spirit of two people sharing dialogue. They were arguments, meant to bolster my view of the world and break theirs down (Tochluk 2010: vii).

Suggesting to me that Paul was grappling with their white privilege and wider understandings of race, I asked them to elaborate on the frown they had penciled onto the page when I interviewed them. They explained that it was a feeling akin to the author's that pushed them toward volunteering at Mercy House:

> Yeah, like, I've always been interested in other cultures or other people that aren't just like me. But I remember a very very vivid -- I'm surprised it came this early -- moment, when I had just failed all my finals in my second year of [college], and I was reading *The People's History of the United States*, cause I was feeling incredibly anxious and didn't want to go to sleep, and just like freaking out. So I borrowed it from [a friend]… It's awesome. I only got like a third of the way through it. It's just talking about the history of the United States from oppressed peoples' perspective, and I was realizing how fucked up everything was, and how this country was founded on genocide and slavery, and thinking about how I care about these things in the front of my brain, but like at the end of the day, I like my little white privilege bubble, you know? I explore those spaces and talk about those things, but I like privilege and I like my position of power in this society. I just remember having this image

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[24] Paul used they/them pronouns.

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of this little cocoon that I nestle back into, which is comforting myself with all my privileges, so yeah. I mean, I think that my life since then has been about trying to dig deeper, like figure out what's going on there. Because I knew that was wrong when I felt that. I was never satisfied with – I mean, I was for a long time – but I didn't feel satisfied in that moment in being like paying lip service to the fight for justice, and then just going back to my normal life.

Recognizing that they benefited from white privilege and feeling it was morally wrong (Warren 2010), they began seeking ways to contribute to the "fight" for social and racial justice. In Paul's case, this meant moving into a predominantly black neighborhood in order to live and work at a shelter for women, children, and trans people experiencing homelessness. Others explained that they were drawn to volunteer work in black neighborhoods, because they wanted to challenge racist assumptions made about poor, black neighborhoods and people. In this vein, Ambrose, a Mercy House volunteer, explained that he wanted to challenge "the beliefs that I was taught," and Tatiana, a Citywide Outreach volunteer, explained that the objective was to achieve "that sense of breaking down the us and them." But while social justice-minded volunteers were moved to service and activism after recognizing that racial inequality did not align with their morals (Warren 2010), it was also tied to interest in "other cultures or other people that aren't like me." They also sought to escape the white spaces – the spaces Paul dismissively referred to as their "white privilege bubble." Paul differentiated themself from other color-conscious volunteers through their ability to be reflexive.

Nevertheless, Paul and other volunteers who had relatively strong understandings of historical and structural oppression of minority groups, failed to fully recognize the power of their privileged positions. Black urban space was not only essentialized as being poor and disadvantaged (Hughey 2007; Hunter and Robinson 2016; Wilson 1987), but also as a place where they could escape their "white privilege bubble," a place where they could relate to the oppressed on an "authentic" and interpersonal level (Hughey 2007). While driven by a desire to work for social

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and/or racial justice, they utilized a canned set of racial stereotypes to decide where their gaze should be fixed.

Conversely, many other volunteers, mostly from Fellowship and Right Choice, operated through individualistic, color-blind ideologies. These volunteers were quick to minimize the importance of race in the reproduction of homelessness and social inequality. They were especially dismissive of the idea that race informed their service activities. However, it was predominantly white homeless spaces that they typically cast their gaze upon. Perhaps because homelessness is *perceived* as a white issue (Wilson 1996), color-blind volunteers were also content to spend time consuming these spaces as "authentic" representations of homeless life. But the over-representation of blacks experiencing homelessness could not be totally ignored. While one color-blind volunteer, Claire, did concede that "… sadly, it seems like white volunteers tend to get along the best with white homeless people," it was more common for color-blind volunteers to deflect questions about the disproportionate amount of time spent socializing in predominantly white camps.

On the evening of June 10, 2018, I rode with John of Right Choice Ministry and Outreach. After parting with "our homeless friends" on the North Side, it was decided that we would make a stop to check in on Stan, just in case he was back at his place of stay earlier than usual. As we pulled up to the abandoned warehouse in which he lived, there was a fairly large gathering of African American men and women, seemingly people experiencing homelessness. They were camped out in the shade of a few trees that grew across the narrow blacktop from the warehouse, with bags and trash thrown about, and a couple of them sitting folding chairs. Upon seeing them I asked, "What's going on to the right?" John simply responded with, "Oh. They've been there. A bunch of trouble is what this is." He did not explain, but his meaning was clear.

When doing work with Right Choice, it was common occurrence for us to pass by groups of mostly black men congregating on the streets between Downtown and the North Side. Because of

my work with other groups, especially Fam in the Streets that commonly stopped there, I knew many of them to be people experiencing homelessness. Regardless, based on the places in which they gathered (near the city shelter and abandoned buildings) and their appearance (often wearing clearly unwashed clothes or clothes of the wrong size), it should have been clear to all volunteers involved that these groups would have been receptive to a stop by an outreach group. Yet, night after night, the caravan would pass by without stopping. More often than not, we passed these groups on our way to provide food, supplies, and conversation to a group of mostly white men living in a comparatively well stocked camp on the East Side (Illinois). On this particular night, John articulated through coded talk why these groups were to be avoided. In other words, John avoided breaking the rules of color blind discourse, by relying on a shared understanding of the context and of a racially coded word (Burke 2012); in this case, the word was "trouble." They were dangerous, or at the very least, they presented the possibility of danger.

While it was somewhat rare for volunteers to voice this understanding, it did happen on occasion. On another occasion, John explained to me that he was uncomfortable stopping for gas in certain parts of the city because drug deals might be going on. Justin, who had lived on the predominantly black North Side as a part of a year of service, explained with certainty that a sound we had heard "wasn't a knock at the door," but a gun shot. Ana explained that she continued to volunteer despite objections from family who feared for her safety. A number of volunteers in Fellowship Outreach insisted that if any danger were to arise, their homeless friends would protect them from it. In a presentation to non-volunteers on Citywide's work, Simon once called attention to the North Side's perceived danger and blackness by reflecting on a night when he asked himself, "How did I end up driving this van around in the dark in North City?" While the mostly older,

mostly white group he was speaking to laughed at the idea, Simon added "But I felt confident doing it," highlighting a potential gap between perception and reality.[25]

But regardless of whether or not they were willing to talk about what race and poverty meant, their actions were governed by it. For groups with a bent toward color-blindness, the nature of interactions and locations they were willing to serve were informed by race. Compared to Right Choice, Fellowship was not as selective about whom they would serve, but I was frequently struck by the differences I witnessed in the approach of the volunteers based on the location of service. Each night we would make a number of regular stops at camps and common homeless gathering places. Generally speaking, groups encountered in or near Downtown were predominantly black. When at these stops, a fairly standard routine occurred each night: the caravan of volunteer vehicles would pull up to the spot, volunteers would make their way over to whichever car was carrying the supplies, food, and other provisions would be enquired about and/or distributed to those who wanted it, and for several minutes afterward, volunteers would cluster and talk amongst themselves while those experiencing homelessness would retreat to where they had been previously sitting or lying. Often there would be one or two volunteer-service recipient conversations happening and from time to time, a volunteer would venture into the space where people experiencing homelessness loitered or slept for observation or to offer supplies to someone who did not approach the caravan – but the social atmosphere varied considerably from that observed in predominantly white gathering place and camps.

In predominantly white gathering places, including a number of smaller camps, the social atmosphere was lively and social. Volunteers and service recipients traded stories about things that they had experienced since last seeing each other. People talked politics, both local and national.

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[25] Articulating homeless or black spaces as dangerous was far more common among color-blind groups. However, the theme existed to a lesser degree among socially justice minded volunteer groups. In this paragraph, for example, both Simon and Justin were members of groups that operated based on social justice frameworks.

Volunteers and people experiencing homelessness talked about their jobs, mutual acquaintances, and

things going on around town. One volunteer, Bernard, spoke directly to this issue in an interview:

> One of [my daughter]'s favorite stops, and probably my favorite stops, too, is going over to
> Enos' [all white] camp. Hot chocolate and a campfire, that's not a half bad time, you know.
> But my least favorite stop is going to -- well, it's not there anymore, we stopped, but when
> we were going to that park, that last stop. That's my least favorite stop, because that is where
> the interactions have been the worst. You know, even [at a church near Downtown], those
> were always pretty good, you know. Most of those guys [who were predominantly black],
> you talk to them, and they're thankful for brining you "what you got." That park, that
> element over there, which is predominantly younger, not all, but predominantly younger,
> there's always a harsher reaction with those folks over there.

Ultimately, Bernard was critical of nearly all people experiencing homelessness, characterizing

homelessness as a choice to be unproductive, but even so, he preferred the time spent with the

predominantly white group at Enos' camp on the East Side of the river. While Bernard claims that

this preference is tied to age and/or willingness to show gratitude, his reference to "what you got"

was an imitation of American black English (ABE)[26] and he previously stated that "The black folks

[experiencing homelessness] don't like us [volunteers] as much." Furthermore, even his relative

preference for the predominantly black group who gathered at the church was tied to their

willingness to express their gratitude for the group's help – i.e. acknowledge the contribution made

by someone with superior social status.

In this example, Bernard showcases a racialized (or racist) volunteer gaze well. For Bernard,

there was some value in serving those experiencing homelessness, but the process of identifying

which spaces were consumable was based on racist stereotypes and preconceptions. At the all-white

camp on the east side of the river, Bernard could relax and have a good time. But when he would

venture into urban space occupied by predominantly black groups of men experiencing

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[26] Throughout the interview, Bernard was critical of ABE, using "what-chu got" as an example of how he is commonly greeted by young black men, men he described as "The Ebonics speaking, thug type[s]," who "wear your pants below your ass." Bernard's wiliness to criticize black "subculture" was somewhat unique among research participants. However, Bernard provides a good example of the underlying expectations of other volunteers expressed through coded talk and mundane action.

homelessness, the nature of the expected interaction changed. Rather than seeing these moments as opportunities to have hot chocolate and conversation with "homeless friends," blacks experiencing homelessness were expected to take a handout and express gratitude. Variation from this pattern would signal either ingratitude, as was the case for Bernard, or danger, as was the case for John.

Discussion and Conclusion: Touring Homelessness

> "The tourist's horror in confronting the slum and its denizens is always tinged by the dread of a loss of morality and a loss of self – the preservation of the moral subject is at stake. Turning away (with or without the photograph) is one response to this dilemma; *commitment to action is another*" (emphasis mine, not in original) (Dovey and King 2012: 287).

The volunteers I worked with in this study represent a larger pattern of well-intentioned people of privileged positions seeking dual, although potentially incompatible, goals: (1) to learn about or explore the "other" and (2) to contribute to the well-being of their neighbors. While activities that more closely resemble traditional tourism (e.g., volunteer tourism, slum tourism) have been questioned and their merits debated (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004), more attention should be given to volunteer and activist efforts to address social inequalities.

In this study, volunteers expressed a desire to not only serve, but to learn about homelessness through firsthand experiences (Clary and Snyder 1999). As with slum tourism, this learning process involved exploring beyond the social and physical boundaries of the "formal" city in search of an authentic homelessness to observe (Dovey and King 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; MacCannell 1973, 1992). As they did this, they often operated based on and helped reproduce preconceived ideas about the meanings of homelessness. Put differently, they cast a volunteer gaze – a gaze similar to that of tourists – upon people and settings that could affirm their existing (or slightly modified) views of homelessness (Urry 1990, 1992). Importantly, the volunteer gaze was intertwined with volunteers' racial ideologies. Those who entered service with color-conscious views of social inequality plunged themselves into settings where they could consume an idealized,

"authentic," black poverty. Color-blind volunteers, on the other hand, conceptualized white homelessness as difference, but black homelessness as danger, a product of laziness, and/or a symptom of cultural deficiency. Of course, these differing gazes translated to differing volunteer practices. For example, relying upon a gaze that constructs black homelessness as danger likely results in the uneven distribution of resources, with these groups opting to spend greater amounts of time and give a greater share of their resources to groups that are predominantly white, or at the very least, well-known to the volunteer group members.

The intention of this chapter is *not* to argue that the volunteer gaze is inherently "bad" or "wrong." Rather, it is simply meant to identify the mechanism that draws volunteers, a largely white, college-educated, middle-class group of people (Foster-Bey 2008), toward "the derelicts" and how this gaze might reproduce social relationships. It should be stated that these volunteers made tangible impacts on St. Louis' homeless population. By providing shelter, transportation to shelter, blankets, propane, food, etc., they literally saved lives. Furthermore, scholars like Warren (2010), explain that witnessing (racial) inequality is an important first step towards activist mobilization. However, it also bears repeating that the tourist gaze must be grappled with by slum tourist organizations (Dovey and King 2012), and the same would thus be true for volunteer organizations serving marginalized groups. While a volunteer gaze may be helpful in spurring action, volunteer missions should be careful to prevent the reproduction of otherizing narratives upon which the volunteer gaze relies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION:
THE QUESTION OF SERVICE IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD

"I feel like [Mercy House] was always attempting to go against the grain, and that's why I stayed for that long. You know, that's why I stayed for four years, and that's why I still mess with them, cuz I think it's different. It's always, it's always evolving, and getting better. That's why – I mean that's why, I should have drove that in a little bit more. But that's the thing, me being critical of it isn't necessarily totally dismissing it or whatever. I just always want it to be better. You know what I mean, I want white people to be better. I want white people to undo their whiteness. I want white people to get rid of that culture, cause if we got rid of that, we wouldn't even have as big of fucking problems as we do, like systematically in our communities and in ourselves. Like I think that it's important to be, it's important to have that tough love. It's important to not throw away people. It's important not to throw away things, in a sense of like, I don't hate Mercy House. I don't say fuck this or that. But I really loved it. It's so I want it to get better, so I'm not gonna just live in, what do you call it, rose colored glasses or whatever. I'm not going to sit around and say that it's great all the time, cuz it wasn't."

- Katherine, Mercy House

Undoubtedly, marginalized communities and populations are able to mobilize around any number of social and civic problems to create change *for themselves*. It is also undoubtedly true, however, that such action can be time-consuming, expensive, require social and political capital, and/or require the volunteers/activists overcome structural obstacles (Cloward and Piven 1984; Cress and Snow 1996; Lee et al. 2010). Thus, there it is both ironic and unsurprising that so much of the work needed to provide for "the most vulnerable among us" is carried out by people of privileged positions, often through religious and activist organizations (Foster-Bey 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Pho 2008; Wasserman and Clair 2010; Wilson 2012).

This research is broadly situated in the fields of racial and ethnic relations, social inequalities, urban sociology, civic engagement, and tourism. With an emphasis on race, class, and privileged housing/neighborhood status, this dissertation has sought to better understand the relationship between community service and privilege, as well as how service interactions might reproduce, undermine, or shape systems of inequality. What motivates people of privileged positions to seek out interpersonal experiences with people existing on the margins? How do race, class, and/or

ideology inform the interactions between these groups? How do these interactions undermine or (re)produce the structural constraints facing the service population? Put succinctly, this research grapples with the reproduction of inequality despite intentions to the contrary. Answering these questions has often meant exploring the touristic nature of volunteer excursions, as well as consequences of uneven power relations and volunteer preconceptions about the service population.

Volunteer outreach, local response, and nonprofit work is all the more important as state and federal support for people in extreme poverty proves inadequate year after year (Edin and Shaefer 2015). Unfortunately, volunteerism as it is currently conceptualized and practiced by people of privileged positions faces its own challenges. At this point, I feel compelled to remind readers that I do not intend to portray volunteering as inherently good or bad. Again, my year of fieldwork has brought me into contact with some of the most inspiring, dedicated, and kindhearted people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. That said, they too are the subject of structural disciplining, and it is important to critically interrogate the practices many of them engage in on a regular, sometimes daily, basis.

In Chapter 4, I explored how meaning was derived, modified, and entrenched through interaction within volunteer groups. Once volunteers had found a group that presented palatable ideas about poverty, race, urban space, and service values, group members would frequently turn to each other to shore up their questions about homelessness and group purpose. Rather than root or amend their understandings of homelessness in interactions with those they came into contact with through service, they relied on repeated conversations with those whose group position resembled theirs. In particular, it was common to observe volunteers reproducing common narratives about "sin" (e.g., laziness, exploiting volunteer generosity, dishonesty), "systems" (e.g., failures of the city government, institutional racism), and "sickness" (e.g., mental illness, addiction) (Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2015; Lyon-Callo 2000).

In Chapter 5, I chose to highlight the experiences of color-conscious volunteers. As a race scholar and advocate for racial justice, I see the task of cultivating a color-conscious society as absolutely necessary. However, I highlight these volunteers because they showcase what work must be done moving forward; they demonstrate the current limits of allyship. So, although (white) Americans are more aware of racial inequality than ever (Croll 2013), there needs to be greater emphasis placed on understanding race as group position. In this chapter, even those white volunteers who were open and willing to consider structural dimensions of inequality and racism were generally unable to situate their own experience within the broader social patterns of the world they help reproduce. Put differently, most were unable to conceptualize whiteness as a group position of privilege affecting their everyday interactions. If explicitly asked how whiteness affected their daily lives and interpersonal service interactions, many were willing to concede that it must, but they had not thought about it. Because their whiteness did not create structural obstacles for them to overcome, many articulated an understanding of *their* race as an inconsequential personal trait that could be managed (Doane 1997; Lewis 2004; Underhill 2019). Instead, it is important that volunteers – particularly groups of predominantly white volunteers providing services to largely nonwhite populations – understand that race, volunteer status, and class status represent a set of power relations that cannot be disentangled from one's (inter)actions. Racial categories and boundaries are, after all, the result of longstanding conflict, with the white racial category successfully reproducing its dominance through institutionalization its power and disproportionate access to social, political, and economic resources (Blumer 1958; Doane 1997; Lipsitz 1998; Omi and Winant 1994; Wellman 1993).

Furthermore, I proposed the existence of a "volunteer gaze" in Chapter 6. Given their privileged positions, particularly as people who were housed in residential and suburban neighborhoods, homelessness was defined by its difference. In fact, the desire to explore this

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difference was a driving force behind (sustained) volunteering. Although the volunteer gaze may have been useful in mobilizing volunteers in the name of homeless service provision, it might also suggest a problematic resemblance to the practice of slum/poverty tourism. As volunteers sought out an "authentic" homeless "Other" and explored the informal city, they emphasized the marginal position of those they served (Dovey and King 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016; MacCannell 1973, 1992; Urry 1990, 1992). Importantly, cultural meanings attached to notions of homelessness varied based on the general ideological bent of the group. For those groups who approached service with a color-blind ideology, their gaze reproduced white homelessness as simple difference. These volunteers were generally sympathetic to whites experiencing homelessness, although there was often questions about work ethic being raised. Black homelessness, on the other hand, was oft associated with danger. Meanwhile, the volunteer gaze present in color-conscious organizations emphasized blackness as a cultural product ripe for consumption. As they sought these experiences, they engaged in a racial project that (re)constructed blackness as a culturally rich, yet static position of poverty and oppression.

A Need for More Reflexive Service

But what does this dissertation mean for the future provision of homeless volunteer services? Most obviously, these findings suggest a need for greater reflexivity among service providers. By this I mean that volunteers should seek to better situate their thoughts, beliefs, and (inter)actions within the social, political, and economic contexts in which they operate (Gouldner 1970). Critically reflecting on how their actions and beliefs are viewed by others, as well questioning their own perceptions, may lead to an improved understanding of how to provide any particular service.

As has been mentioned, the current process of meaning making for volunteer groups relies heavily upon socialization processes internal to the volunteer group. Furthermore, the tendency to

neglect one's own group position when entertaining the question of service is problematic. One way of improving reflexivity is to push volunteer discourse beyond the current social boundaries. Although, under the right circumstances, within group dialog can lead people to anti-racist identities (Feagin and O'Brien 2004; O'Brien and Korgen 2007), continued conversation with people of similar group position has, at best, diminishing returns. At worst, intragroup dialog can reproduce harmful tropes about marginalized groups while cementing the worldview of those engaged in this discourse (Hughey 2007). Other research has shown, however, that white anti-racist activists engaged in dialog with other (not necessarily white) activists have learned to productively consider their relationship to racism and anti-racism (Eichstedt 2001; Warren 2010). Volunteer groups seeking to undermine persistent structural inequalities might similarly benefit from engaging in conversation with other volunteer groups and with people experiencing homelessness about how they are perceived during the course of service.

Likewise, one's structural positioning affects their understandings of the world around them. Critically questioning their relationship to structural privilege and asking how they can best situate themselves within the landscape of social services may also be productive. As this dissertation has shown, volunteers were largely drawn to service based on preconceived notions of homelessness, and as they engaged in acts of service, they were likely to frame their experiences in ways that reified homeless otherness rather than undermine it. Thus, it is also of great importance that volunteers question how they know what they "know."

Responding to Structural Limitations

Over the course of my time in the field, a common talking point across groups was an inability to "change situations" and/or spur systemic change. Peter, for example, explained the constraints in this way:

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There's a lot of people, no. Other than, other than pointing them to different agencies that help with certain things, or sharing my own story, which is a real, was a gift to me, to hear from other addicts that have gotten clean, you know, that's a strength to us. So yeah. That's, you know, like I say, you get the folks that could be housed if they get to Florida or Los Angeles or you know, New Orleans or wherever, so we do that. You get 'em on a bus. Point 'em to [a local service agency]. A lot of people I point to [a local service agency], you know. Then a lot of them have already been there or know about it. This week is a woman and a two-year-old that is gonna go over to [another local service agency], you know. Yeah. So, you know, I have a book in the truck full of resources that I could point people at. But that's about it, you know.

Groups like Peter's (Fellowship Outreach) did their best to meet immediate needs, because (1) these needs were pressings and (2) they were equipped to meet these needs (at least at a basic level). It was often frustrating to group members that week after week they would see familiar faces and that they were working against an insurmountable problem.

For those with a more individualistic/color-blind understanding of homelessness, fears of "enabling them to be homeless" were commonly voiced. As John commonly put it, "I wanna help those that want help. We didn't start this back in 2012 to see people stay where they're at." So, while these groups were undoubtedly dedicated and – I believe – caring, they inflated their understanding of what they could reasonably achieve. Although providing for people's immediate needs was important, they were not working to address the structural barriers that would help people exit homelessness. Principally, people living in poverty want steady, fair paying work (Edin and Shaefer 2015). They want reliable transportation so that they can get to work. Overwhelmingly, this is what was reported to me in the limited interviews I was able to conduct with people experiencing homelessness and the many casual conversations I had on outreach nights. But, of course, this is not something the volunteer groups in this study were equipped to offer.

Groups who approached homelessness with the view that homelessness was the product of systemic inequalities were more aware of their limitations. While many of these group members advocated for the city to implement protections for people experiencing homelessness and to expand services, two problems were commonly encountered. First, a number of volunteers

expressed frustration with their inability to provide anything more than a "band aid."[27] Some felt that what they were doing was important, but also recognized that it did little to address the larger problems of institutionalized racism or an inadequate welfare system. Others expressed feeling exhausted by the constant need for basic service provision and connected this to a lack of time and energy for collective action. Second, despite attaining several meetings with Mayor Lyda Krewson, members of Citywide, Fam in the Streets, and Mercy House (who collaborated fairly frequently) remained pessimistic about the possibility of meaningful action from the city. They accused the mayor of prioritizing the police budget over public health, closing down important city service centers without creating alternatives, and displacing people already living precarious lives by removing tents at a number of locations across the city.

Despite the frustrations expressed by members of these groups, their attempt to organize and pressure the city to make policy changes may be the most appropriate response available. In particular, it may prove useful to create more intentional coalitions between activists, service providers, both volunteer and professional, and people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness. Collective action efforts may be the most effective way of determining what needs to change and applying social and political pressure on institutions like city governments. Meeting direct needs through temporary shelter, donations, and transportation to shelter, while filling an important service gap, does little to reorganize structures of inequality in the United States. As this research has shown, it can actually reproduce the social and spatial marginality of people living in extreme poverty.

A number of social movement scholars have written extensively about homeless social movements and resistance (Cress 1997; Cress and Snow 1996, 2000; Wagner 1993; Wagner and Cohen 1991; Wright 1997). Cress and Snow (1996, 2000), for example, show that well organized

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[27] The sentiment was common, but the exact word was used by Margaret of Fam in the Streets.

collective action that that unites diverse community actors were successful in mounting sustained political pressure. A number of authors have documented the gains made through collective action, protest, and social movements. Notably, pro-poor collective action has been effective in attaining voting rights, protections from the police, and increased access to services/housing (Cress and Snow 2000; Lee et al. 2010; Rosenthal 1994; Wright 1997). With this in mind, more general social movements may be needed to improve working conditions/wages, provide affordable housing, and improve the cash safety net currently absent in our welfare system – all of which would have direct and indirect impacts on the prevalence of homelessness in the United States.

It is important to stress, however, that to be truly just, such social movement organizations will require that privileged members of the group make an effort to recognize (1) the role that their privileged position plays in shaping their world view and (2) that their ideas and plans for addressing homelessness may be misguided by these perceptions. As this dissertation has shown, group position is integral in shaping one's perception of and response to the social world. Pushing forward without revising the current model of service is likely to result in continued reproduction and limited ability to meaningfully interrogate white, middle-class volunteers' roles in that reproduction.

Directions for Future Research

First and foremost, future research that centers the experiences of people experiencing homelessness needs to be conducted. As discussed in Chapter 3, the choice to collect data through participant observation of volunteer groups lead to limitations in my ability to collect data from people experiencing homelessness. Organizing a study of homeless service provision that prioritizes a relationship with people experiencing homelessness would complement the current study to provide a fuller picture of volunteer-service recipient power dynamics.

Second, study of service networks in St. Louis (and likely elsewhere) is warranted. In my casual observation, St. Louis seemed to host at least two (mostly) segregated networks, with one network consisting of largely secular organizations and one network consisting of faith-based organizations. Volunteers, especially volunteers who had been engaged in outreach for several years, noted that from time to time efforts have been put forth to increase communication and coordination among the volunteer groups providing homeless services. The effort always fails to materialize, however. The landscape of volunteer/social services for the homeless is large in St. Louis, but conducting a study that takes an inventory of homeless service organizations in the area and subsequently surveying them about their goals and network connections may be useful in understanding how (fragmented) service networks operate and for making suggestions on how to better collaborate to meet the direct and indirect needs of people experiencing homelessness in St. Louis.

Third, given that space, politics of space, and perception of space are crucial to understanding homelessness and urban marginalization, I also plan to incorporate the tools of visual sociology into future study of volunteering and urban exclusion. In the study of homelessness and volunteer service provision, photography can be deployed as a tool to highlight layers of inequality and volunteer-homeless interaction.

Last, in the coming years, I also intend to continue the line of collaborative research started by my dissertation. Specifically, working with color-conscious, social justice-oriented volunteer organizations has suggested a need for community-based participatory research. In my experience, these groups have not only recognized the problems with homelessness in their communities and sought address it, but they are also invested in unpacking and reckoning with their privilege, addressing inequality at the structural level, and being better service providers. Treating organizations who are "on the ground" on a nightly basis as experts in their own right may lead to

productive research agendas in which activist/public sociology is emphasized and "local knowledge" is considered more closely (Cancian 1996; Israel et al. 1998). Furthermore, by making them partners in the research process, volunteer groups may become more willing to adapt their behavior/approach to service to account for the results.

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VOLUNTEER GROUP INFORMATION

Group Pseudonym	Religious Character	General View of Race	Service Provided	Larger Goal
Service House	Episcopalian	Color-conscious	Provided labor to local nonprofits	Work with nonprofits to target social problems
Mercy House	Catholic	Color-conscious	Emergency and short-term shelter; provide supplies as possible	Work toward radical systemic change
Fellowship Outreach	Nondescriptly Christian	Color-blind	Travel through city with food, sodas, and other supplies	Provide fellowship to people experiencing homelessness
Fam in the Streets	Secular	Color-conscious	Travel through city with hot meals and occasionally other supplies; partnered with Citywide to transport people to shelter on cold nights	Work toward radical systemic change
Right Choice Ministry and Outreach	Nondenominational Christian	Color-blind	Travel through city with a range of supplies, especially clothes and bottled water	Provide guidance out of homelessness
Citywide Outreach	Secular	Color-conscious	Traveled through city looking for people in need of shelter on cold nights	Work toward systemic change

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Volunteers who Interviewed						
Pseudonym	**Group Affiliation**	**Race**	**Age**	**Religion**	**Place of Residence**	**Class**
Justin	Service House	White	23	Episcopalian	North City	Upper-Middle
Anthony	Service House	Black	25	Episcopalian	North City	.
Mary	Service House	White	.	.	North City	.
Adrian	Mercy House	Latinx	21	Catholic	Central Corridor	Middle
Paul	Mercy House	White	23	None	North City	Middle
Ambrose	Mercy House	White	20	Catholic	Central Corridor	Upper-Middle
Barbara	Mercy House	White	41	Spiritual	North City	Upper-Middle
Rose	Mercy House	Black	36	Non-denominational Christian	Metro East	Middle
Catherine	Mercy House	White	23	"There's something out there"	.	Lower-Middle
Joan	Mercy House	White	24	Catholic	North City	Middle
Christina	Mercy House (formerly homeless)	Black	.	.	North City	.
Sixtus	Mercy House	White	58	Catholic	North City	Lower
Claire	Fellowship Outreach	White	42	Christian	Rural Missouri	Middle
Jude	Fellowship Outreach	White	68	"Raised Catholic;" Atheist	Northwest Suburb	Middle
Peter	Fellowship Outreach	White	51	"Jesus"	West Suburb	Working/ Middle
Bernard	Fellowship Outreach	White	42	"Bible only" Christian	West Suburb	Middle
Elizabeth	Fellowship Outreach	Black	26	Christian	Central Corridor	Lower-Middle
Alena	Fellowship Outreach	Black	37	Non-denominational Christian	West Suburb	Middle

Agnes	Fellowship Outreach	White	.	.	.	.
Martin	Fellowship Outreach	White	54	Christian	South City	Upper-Middle
Cecilia	Fam in the Streets	Black	34	Christian	North Suburb	Lower
Thomas	Fam in the Streets	White	28	Catholic	North Suburb	Lower
Margaret	Fam in the Streets	White	58	Episcopalian	South City	Middle
Quentin	Fam in the Streets	White	55	None	South City	Lower-Middle
Germaine	Fam in the Streets	Black	57	"Child of God"	North Suburb	Middle
Regina	Fam in the Streets	White	49	Episcopalian	South City	Lower
Veronica	Right Choice Ministry and Outreach	White	32	Nondenominational Christian	West Suburb	Upper-Middle
Lawrence	Right Choice Ministry and Outreach	White	38	Christian	West Suburb	Middle
John	Right Choice Ministry and Outreach	White	40	Nondenominational Christian	Southwest Suburb	Working/Middle
Teresa	Right Choice Ministry and Outreach	White	35	Christian/ Spiritual	West Suburb	Middle
Lucy	City Wide Outreach	White	.	.	.	.
Simon	City Wide Outreach	White	64	Atheist	Northwest Suburb	Middle
Martha	City Wide Outreach	White	63	Quaker	South City	Middle
Dorothea	City Wide Outreach	White-Asian	18	Christian "In part"	Central Corridor	Lower-Middle
René	City Wide Outreach	White	28	None	South City	Middle Class

Vincent	City Wide Outreach	White	41	Non-religious	West Suburb	Middle
Joseph	City Wide Outreach	White	76	None	.	Upper-Middle
Dominic	City Wide Outreach	Asian	23	None	Central Corridor	Upper-Middle
Gabriela	City Wide Outreach	White	65	None	South City	Middle
Tatiana	City Wide Outreach	White	57	United Methodist	Southwest Suburb	Middle
Giles	City Wide Outreach	White	59	Methodist	Metro East	Lower-Working
Fran	City Wide Outreach	White	60	"Believer"/Catholic	North City	Working/Middle
Ana	Requested complete anonymity	White	23	Christian	.	Lower-Middle

People Experiencing Homelessness Who Interviewed			
Pseudonym	**Place Affiliation**	**Age**	**Race**
Andrew	North Side	38	Black
David	North Side	62	Black
Enos	East Side	58	White
Willie	East Side	48	White
Alexander	South	57	White

Referenced in Dissertation, But Did Not Interview			
Pseudonym	**Group/Place Affiliation**	**Age**	**Race**
Aaron	Citywide	Early Middle Age	White
Julia	Mercy House	Early Middle Age	Asian
Gregory	Right Choice	Early Middle Age	White
Raymond	Right Choice	Middle Age	White
Dominic	Right Choice	Early Elderly	White
Britta	Right Choice	Early Middle Age	Black
Pauline	Right Choice	Early Middle Age	Black
Michael	Fellowship	Middle Age	White
Alfonso	Fam in the Streets	Mid-late 20s	Black
Stan	North Side	Late Middle Age	White
Scott	North Side	Middle Age	Black
Lou	Downtown	Middle Age	White
Miss Alberta	Downtown	Late Middle Age	Black
Jed	South Side	Middle Age	Black
Lance	South Side	Mid-late 20s	Black
Clark	South Side	Early Middle Age	White
Lynn	South Side	Early Middle Age	White

APPENDIX C

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Service Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the organization you volunteer with?

2. How did you end up serving through this particular organization?

3. How long have you been volunteering with this group?

4. As a group, what are you trying to accomplish?

5. As an individual, are you working toward the same goals, or are they different?
   - [If different] What goals are you working toward?
   - Have your goals changed since you started? If yes, how so?
   - Do you feel you are making headway toward these goals?

6. It sounds like you are most interested in providing [service X, Y, Z]. Why is that you provide this particular service?
   - Why is it important?
   - Why does it interest you?

7. Have you experienced any unexpected challenges in your efforts to serve people experiencing homelessness?

8. What services do the people you serve need?
   - Are you able to provide them with those services? If not, why?

Experiential Questions

1. Can you say a few words about what your experience as a volunteer has been like?

2. What motivates you to volunteer your time? Is there a particular reason you do this work?

3. Was there anything particularly appealing about serving the unhoused?

4. So going back to before you started, what did you imagine volunteering in this capacity would be like?
   - Have those expectations been met? How yes or why not?

5. What is the nature of your relationship with the people you serve?

6. Have you had any experiences in which the color of your skin has had an impact on an interaction? Can you tell me about it?

7. Does race ever complicate your relationships with other volunteers/workers or the people you serve?

8. Do you think white people experiencing homelessness are treated differently than people of color experiencing homelessness? How so or why not?

9. Have you had any particularly positive experiences as a volunteer with this organization? What was it?

10. Have you had any particularly negative experiences as a volunteer with this organization? Can you tell me about it?

11. Does your religion/faith have anything to do with your motivation to do this work?
    - I'm not an especially religious person. Could you spell out how this service work relates to your religious beliefs?
    - [If relevant] How do you know that this is the work your religion/God calls you to do?

Issue of Homelessness Questions

1. How would you describe the people you serve?

2. Based on your experience, what you say are the common causes of homelessness?

3. According to the most recent, available Point-In-Time count, about 77% of those experiencing homelessness in St. Louis City and County are black. How would you explain the over-representation of African Americans in this population?

4. Is your role as important in dealing with the problem of homelessness? Why or why not?

5. What else, if anything, do you think needs to be done to address the problem of homelessness?

Demographic Questions

1. How long do you expect you will continue to volunteer/work with this service organization?

2. How old are you?

3. With which race do you identify?

4. What is your gender identity?

5. What is your religious affiliation, if any?

6. What is your class background: low, working, middle, or upper?

7. Would you still identity with that class?

8. What is/was your job title?

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

10. Can you describe your political orientation for me?

11. Can you refer me to others who might be willing to participate in my study?

APPENDIX D

SERVICE RECIPEINT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Service Provision Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the types of volunteer groups that you've interacted with?

2. Which groups do you interact with the most?

3. In what ways do you benefit from these service groups, if at all?
   - What services are the most helpful?

4. Is there anything that you need that these service organizations don't provide? What is it?
   - Why don't they provide it?

5. Which volunteer groups do you enjoy the most, if any? Why is that?

6. Why do you think these volunteers are interested in serving people experiencing homelessness?

7. I've noticed that most of the volunteers that come around here aren't from this part of the city. Why do you think that is?

8. Is there anything that bothers you about the volunteer groups? If yes, what is it?

9. Are there any negative consequences of these projects? If yes, like what?
   - Why do you think that is?

10. Do you ever get the feeling that the volunteer groups expect anything from you?
    - If yes, what do you think they expect?

11. I've noticed a lot of the volunteers here are [white or black], and most of the community [is or isn't]. Why do you think this is?
    - Does this ever cause any problems?

12. Do you think that volunteers interact differently white people experiencing homelessness than they do with people of color? If yes, how so?

13. Do you think white volunteers are perceived differently than volunteers of color? If yes, how so?

14. Do you think the race of the volunteer impacts the way you are treated? How so or why not?

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been experiencing homelessness?

2. How old are you?

3. With which race do you identify?

4. What is your gender identity?

5. What is your religious affiliation, if any?

6. What is your class background: low, working, middle, or upper?

7. Would you still identity with that class?

8. What is/was your job title?

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

10. Can you describe your political orientation?

11. Can you refer me to others who might be willing to participate in my study?