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Using Visual Storytelling to Design Solutions-Based Approaches to Homelessness

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USING VISUAL STORYTELLING TO DESIGN SOLUTIONS-BASED

APPROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite millions of dollars spent over several decades on assistance programs, the

nation's homeless population has increased for the last four years in a row. The number of

people reporting as homeless for the first time doubled in San Diego between June 2019 and

June 2020. Trying to impose a one-size-fits-all model of care on a population comprised of

unique individuals has resulted in many homeless opting for the street rather than subjugating

themselves to rules they feel do not treat them with respect and dignity. Yet, the perspectives of

homeless individuals are excluded from decision-making dialogue around policies and programs.

This critical qualitative study was designed to examine the degree to which using visual

storytelling can transform existing power structures and inspire service providers and policy

makers to take transformative action. This study used visual critical ethnography to

collaboratively co-produce a short documentary with one homeless man in San Diego.

Conversations with city, state and some federal leaders about the obstacles to secure housing

revealed the critical roles that pre-existing perceptions and lack of knowledge about the

challenges that the homeless face account for the primary disconnects in the system. Visual

storytelling created behavioral awareness, leading to development of more humanistic solutions.

An empathetic connection between leaders and the homeless motivated ideas offering potential

transformative change. Results also showed the ways in which visual storytelling, producing and

sharing one's personal story, has both positive and negative consequences for the homeless

storyteller.

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to Henry Cabrera, and all the other talented, thoughtful, caring, misunderstood folks living on the streets.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The language around homelessness has been evolving, largely due to the negative connotations ascribed to the condition of having lost a safe, secure place to live. Over the past decade well-meaning individuals in society have begun using the term "unsheltered" as a means of extending a more compassionate tone when discussing, or speaking with, individuals experiencing homelessness.

This is because there is a certain amount of shame these individuals might feel about their current living status, and therefore the speaker is attempting to be sensitive by using more respectful language. Using a less literal term than "homeless" and instead engaging in language that feels less judgmental has the potential to soften the harsh truth of that individual's circumstances. This attempt to be less judgmental in one's language, of course, paradoxically acknowledges that the individual being referred to is in a position to be judged at all. This begs the question, does using more subtle language liberate the speaker from the fact that they have deemed the unsheltered person to be in a position to be judged?

Journal articles originating in the United Kingdom and Australia commonly use the term "sleeping rough" rather than homeless. With very few exceptions, journal articles originating in North America, including Canada, use the term homeless, often varied with phrases like "people experiencing homelessness" in the way one might interchangeably use the terms "as well as" and "also," i.e., they have the same meaning but the use of one rather than the other simply breaks up the monotony of constantly using the same phrase. Unsheltered is a tricky term. Service providers and researchers make the distinction that while a person who has lost their home might be temporarily placed in an emergency shelter or temporarily housed for a limited period of time in a program or a funded "in-between" situation, they are designated as sheltered homeless, as

opposed to the unsheltered homeless who are sleeping rough. Roughly 65 percent of people reporting as homeless are staying in transitional housing programs or emergency shelters (Ahuja et al., 2020), so the term unsheltered, or even unhoused, becomes complicated.

This leaves us with the phrase "individuals experiencing homelessness." I like the sound of this phrase and use it often in speech as well as in this dissertation. Among my homeless friends, however, this is also a tricky phrase. They joke about this and a more recent phrase, "unhoused individuals," being a mechanism for the aforementioned well-meaning officials, community members and researchers to express compassion while still doing nothing concrete to change that homeless person's situation. In essence, it makes the speaker feel better to demonstrate through their language that they are not judging someone for whatever circumstances they might currently be in, or how they arrived there in the first place – but does that help the homeless person in any way? I will leave the reader to consider how they might answer this for her/his self. In conversation, my friends who happen to be living rough and I use phrases like, "he's just out of jail, so he stays with us out here for now," and "the cops chased us off the safe bridge, so I stay behind that truck by the stairwell." We use affirmative language about where people stay and where they are safe, not so much about what or where they are not. That said, since they use the term "homeless" when speaking in generalized language about issues, solutions, and challenges, that is the term I have opted to use here in this dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

On a single night in January 2019, roughly 567,715 people were homeless in America, representing a three percent rise from the previous year, and an increase for the third year in a row (NAEH, 2019; HUD, 2019). California outpaced New York in the period between 2018-2019 with the highest increase (16.4%), meaning 21,306 more people were homeless in California than the previous year for a total of 151,278 (HUD, 2019). San Diego County ranks fourth nationally in homeless populations (8,576 people documented during the annual regional Point-in-Time count) for large urban areas with a Continuum of Care (CoC), that is, a collective of emergency shelters, transitional and rapid housing programs, health care operations and outreach teams funded by federal grants. San Diego is just behind New York City, Los Angeles, and Seattle (SDRTFH, 2019).

Each individual experiencing homelessness embodies a unique set of circumstances, and they are therefore their own best advocate for what will produce meaningful transformations to their quality of life. Existing homeless service programs, however, exclude these voices when designing their policies and practices. Applying a one-size-fits-all model to a population of individuals with unique circumstances has resulted in many clients exiting the system completely rather than subjugate themselves to rules and regulations they feel do not treat them with respect and dignity (Donley & Wright, 2012; Phillips, 2012).

The San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless (SDRTFH) notes in their annual report (SDRTFH, 2019) that over the course of 2019 more than 20,000 people experienced homelessness in San Diego County, suggesting that the actual numbers are higher than what is

recorded during Point-in-Time (PIT) counts (NAEH, 2019; RTFH, 2019; Schneider et al., 2016). The SDRTFH, which manages the regional CoC, lamented in its 2019 report that while more than 40% of the people who exited temporary shelters were able to move into a stable living situation, 26% of those individuals returned to homelessness within two years. This is the highest rate of recidivism among urban west coast CoCs. Clearly the existing models of care need more than just thoughtful assessment; they need wholly new creative solutions, inclusive of the knowledge and perspectives of individuals who are themselves homeless.

This need for change reveals the degree to which the current mechanisms for how program leaders and policymakers interpret the stories of homelessness are inadequate. The plethora of quantitative "graph-able ways of knowing" about homelessness (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008), i.e. written reports, books, statistical analyses, graphs, charts, and newspaper articles that constitutes the bulk of research on homelessness, provide indices on how many people are living completely unsheltered (i.e. on the street or in other locations unfit for human habitation), and in temporary shelters, but this data does not provide a sense of what transformative solutions might look like to individuals experiencing homelessness. Engaging with the personal stories of life on the streets in collaboration with homeless storytellers not only shifts our collective understanding of the issues but reassigns the voice of expertise on those issues.

Using visual storytelling to amplify the voices of traditionally marginalized individuals has been employed by researchers in some form for nearly a century, providing a mechanism for viewers to develop an empathetic connection to another person or community's lived experiences (Becker, 1998; Drew & Guillemin, 2014; Gallo, 2002; Greene et al, 2018; MacDougall, 1995; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Connecting empathetically with the insider perspective deepens our understanding of social contexts and challenges our own social and

behavioral truths (Pink, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008), creating space for reframing the problems and reimagining solutions to social problems like homelessness. This reframing and reimagining of current circumstances informs potentially transformative actions. Visual storytelling likewise creates space for individuals experiencing homelessness to construct counter-stories (Asimeng-Boahene, 2010; Johnson, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that challenge the dominant narratives perpetuating stereotypes and implicit biases which suggest the problem of homelessness is with the individual rather than a systemic failure.

Because of the ubiquity of high-quality digital visual tools, society is poised to mobilize visual storytelling as a praxis for elevating the narratives of individuals experiencing homelessness into a form of emancipatory dialogue, i.e. controlling the narratives about their lives, and participating in a reimagined solutions-based approach to a better quality of life. This study focused on capturing the responses of policymakers and program personnel to viewing a documentary about the life of one San Diego homeless individual. It also asked whether visual storytelling as a critical practice is transferrable to informing the structural reform of other social, educational, and political systems that exclude the voices of marginalized groups.

Background

Many studies attribute deinstitutionalization as the beginning of the surge in homelessness (Masenthin, 2017; Schneider et al., 2016; Tsai et al., 2017). In the 1960s, thousands of patients were removed from state mental institutions and placed in poorly funded and under-staffed community-based facilities. The development of certain anti-psychotic drugs at that time was assumed to facilitate management of patients' mental health at the community level. Concurrent changes in federal budget policies, however, diverted funds away from those community care facilities in order to finance the newly created Medicaid, Medicare, and Social

Security Disability Income programs (Masenthin, 2017; Schneider et al., 2016; Tsai et al., 2017). The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 assigned additional funding to deal with the escalation in homelessness, and a plethora of programs were then created and managed through regional planning boards, or Continuums of Care (CoCs). The CoCs' dependence on federal funding, however, forces program leaders to focus on securing financial stability for their respective programs at the expense of advocating for evolving policies and practices towards more personalized, holistic client-centered care (Mosley, 2012).

Between 1980 and 1990 federal assistance to low-income households was reduced by more than half, leaving the responsibility for prevention of housing instability to local entities at a time when rent prices were rising and the average working wage failed to keep up with the cost of living (NAEH, 2020; RTFH, 2019). For the next 25 years the booming tech industry changed the dynamics of wage earning in some parts of the country. Meanwhile, less reliance on fossil fuels phased out a way of life known by generations of Americans in other regions without replacing it with a viable alternative. As a result, the face of poverty changed (Kristof, 2019). Local nonprofit and church-based assistance programs began trying to fill the gaps where federal and local CoC programs were not designed to adapt. Those CoCs have continued to fall short of clients' needs ever since. The federal administration's 2018 budget sliced $1.8 billion from public housing assistance while simultaneously imposing the largest of its rent increases on the lowest income households in public housing units. The 2020 budget proposes removing another $4.6 billion in public housing assistance and eliminating 140,000 housing vouchers (Engelmayer, 2019). Meanwhile, the Trump administration proposed new regulations that instruct the housing department to withhold assistance from undocumented families and transgender individuals (Fadulu, 2019). This resulted in even greater numbers of individuals and families living in cars,

parks, and on sidewalks. Given the faltering economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is potential for an emerging new wave of homelessness as unemployment benefits run out and more people fail to earn enough to pay rent. It is therefore imperative to engage new mechanisms for understanding the stories of those experiencing homelessness in order to design prevention and solution strategies while also respecting the dignity of society's most vulnerable members (Culhane et al., 2011; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008).

Strategies and Challenges in Addressing Homelessness

HUD requires annual Point in Time counts in order to keep track of population swings. However there is no standard method for carrying out the count, which is conducted annually on a single night in January by a variable number of volunteers wielding long questionnaires. One of the obvious problems with relying on this method is the potential for missing a large portion of the population who may be hidden, sleeping in cars, couch-surfing, or who simply decline to answer questions (Schneider et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, figures show that existing programs work for some, but do not work for an increasing number of people. The aforementioned challenge of securing funding for agencies tethered to federal grants stifles creativity in addressing the immediate needs of a population for whom survival is a daily emergency. Resistance to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) within programs can also be attributed to dogmatic cultural norms that could lead to potential culture clashes when these agencies are asked to collaborate (Roche, 2004). This disconnect between service providers and their client base is best expressed by clients who tried to find a way into housing and health care through these existing systems and ultimately felt they were better off on the street. The primary complaints voiced by these individuals include excessive regulation of personal activity, being treated with disrespect by shelter staff, theft of personal belongings, not

being able to keep their pets, and being forced to live separately from one's life partner even if they were married. Some would rather live in the woods than give up their pet (Donley & Wright, 2012) or subjugate themselves to the power dynamics at play with shelter personnel (Buck et al., 2004).

Out on the street they are immediately ascribed the stigmas associated with homelessness, i.e., that they are lazy, substance abusers, and somehow deserving of their plight. A lack of understanding about homelessness leads housed community members to pressure municipal leaders to remove the homeless from sight by any means necessary, which results in the criminalization of homelessness (Masenthin, 2017; Phillips, 2015). Ordinances like "illegal encroachment," for instance, which was originally created to keep businesses from expanding seating or planter boxes out onto public sidewalks, are being used to target homeless individuals who sit too long in one place or sleep on the sidewalk. People who accumulate multiple infractions are then subject to jail time and paying fines they cannot afford. A criminal record then further stigmatizes people looking for housing or applying for a job. Individuals experiencing homelessness must also overcome the psychological challenges (Miller, 2009; Phillips, 2015; Williams, 2016) of being perceived as "less than" or "other" while attending to their daily physical needs like sleep, food, hygiene, and safety from theft and assault. Not having easy access to bathrooms, showers, laundromats or storage for their belongings destroys their dignity. It also complicates efforts to pursue their goals of attending school, holding a job, using the library, or going inside an office, courthouse or health clinic (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008).

Out of the Box Solutions Are Few

Researchers, journalists and service providers agree that unaffordable housing is the primary cause of homelessness (Roche, 2004; SDRTFH, 2019; Sanburn, 2016; HUD, 2020).

They also agree that several experimental programs over the past two decades confirm that the "housing first" model works to get people into housing and keep them there (Culhane et al., 2007; Phillips, 2015; Sanburn, 2016). The majority of strategic approaches, however, remain an entrenched patchwork of services wherein a program's survival is controlled by the regional CoC boards. This often results in the highest costing services being used by a comparatively smaller, albeit needier, group of individuals while the greater number of cases are allotted services with the lower per unit price tag (Culhane et al., 2007). Clearly a change is needed.

The few experimental programs that have brought individuals experiencing homelessness into the decision-making process demonstrate how effective this approach can be. Creating a Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) comprised of individuals who were homeless at the time in a Houston health care network, for instance, revealed immediate and surprising organizational skills exhibited by the participants despite their having no prior training, limited structure in their lives, and in some cases mental instability (Buck et al., 2004). CAB members advised staff on educational outreach, redesigning bus routes, provided input on mental health interventions for a federally funded health care grant, and suggested undertaking a study on West Nile Virus among the city's homeless.

Another example of amplifying the authentic narratives of homeless individuals, also in the health care field, invited clients to share personal narratives of illness and self-care while living on the street in Stockholm, Sweden. These narratives directed professionals in what, where, and how precise intervention is most effective (Hakanson & Ohlen, 2016). Inviting homeless individuals to participate in fashioning solutions to their care values their authentic experience and empowers them to develop agency in self-determination (Buck et al., 2004).

Hearing and seeing the lived experiences of homelessness contributes to our collective understanding of real obstacles and can help fashion viable, personalized solutions.

A partnering strategy initiative in Canada generated eight different federally funded housing first models that incorporated wrap-around services from community-based service providers in support of new approaches tailored towards subpopulations, including youth, women and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples (Gaetz et al., 2013). The Vivian House, for example, in British Columbia, is run by women for women only. The population includes women exiting the corrections system and the commercial sex industry, women with mental health and substance abuse issues. The Nikihk Housing First, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society program in Alberta values cultural awareness and inclusivity in its program design (Gaetz et al., 2013).

The San Diego nonprofit organization Think Dignity holds monthly forums to gather input from people who are homeless, as well as concerned community members. Based on what they hear in these 'basic dignity forums' Think Dignity management fashions programs to address these issues. The Transitional Storage Center, for instance, offers bins and lockers where homeless individuals can leave their belongings for as long as they like, freeing them up to go to appointments, attend classes, look for work, spend time at the library doing research or reaching out to family and friends, do their laundry, and ride on public transit (Capps, 2014). Other programs generated from the 'basic dignity forums' include a travelling boutique, a fresh food café, and a mobile shower unit.

The Power of Amplifying Voices Through Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling taps into the cultural norms of knowledge-sharing through story. Storytelling and creating counter-stories to take back the narratives defining one's life are used as pedagogy and for helping develop personal agency. The Storytelling Project (Bell, 2020), for

instance, employed a team of arts educators, performance artists, urban high school students, and college students in a teaching program. Together they sought to elevate the issues of whose stories are heard and valued, and whose are treated as fringe and irrelevant in society. Participants classified stock hegemonic stories as the source of generalized social perceptions in support of the status quo advantaging white privilege through superior access to resources and opportunities. They then generated their own counter-stories about the history of race and racism, building theory derived from observed patterns of exclusion. Counter-storying is a methodology primarily used by people of color to disrupt dehumanizing narratives that society perpetuates about communities of color (Asimeng-Boahene (2010; Johnson, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is rarely used to amplify narratives of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Authentic narratives in the form of visual, digital or multimodal storytelling do more than produce counter-stories. The process itself empowers the storyteller, elevating the stories that matter to the storyteller into the broader social agenda while supporting the development of agency in self-advocacy and identity expression (Boydell et al., 2000). Since the advent of digital visual tools, visual storytelling in the form of collaborative action projects using *PhotoVoice* and other forms of digital storytelling (Greene et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warren, 2005) has been used to develop a sense of democratic engagement in youth groups (Gubrium et al., 2014; O'Hara & Higgins, 2019), as a vehicle for creative non-textual expression of identity (Tait, 2019), as pedagogy (Hamilton et al., 2019; Johnson, 2017; Robin, 2008), and in empowering low socioeconomic status laborers (Gallo, 2002; Harper, 1998; Strangleman, 2012; Warren, 2005), Indigenous Peoples (Spiegel et al. 2020), women, refugees and other groups in the development of personal agency for self-advocacy (Carlson et al., 2006; Copes et al., 2018; Moletsane et al., 2007; Umurungi et al., 2008).

These methods build on the historical example of sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers studying the transformative power of visuals, typically in the form of still images, that evoke an empathetic response in the viewing public (Banks, 1998; Becker, 1998; Collier, 2003; MacDougall, 1995; Pink, 2001). These responses resulted in legislative and/or practical actions responsible for significant social change. Sociologist Lewis Hine's classic images of child labor in American factories inspired the enactment of child labor laws in the 1910s. Dorothea Lange's famous photograph of the destitute *Migrant Mother* in a lean-to tent with her three children at the edge of a flooded pea field during the Great Depression became representative of human suffering during that era. The photo essay by Gordon Parks, the first African-American staff photographer at *Life Magazine,* showed the complex world of a gang leader in Harlem during the 1950s, while W. Eugene Smith's powerful essays "Country Doctor" and "Nurse-midwife Maude Caullen" in the 1950s educated America about the difficulties in reaching rural communities with quality health care, and Donna Ferrato's book *Living With the Enemy* (1991) gave us a chilling look at the impact of domestic violence. Each of these bodies of work generated responses from the general public that improved the quality of life for those communities (Becker, 1998; MacDougall, 1995).

The viewer's engagement with visual storytelling is a sensory experience calling upon the viewer's memory and the accompanying emotions (Biehl-Missal, 2013; Belova, 2006). This attention to the sensual perceptual response reflects a recognition of the profound influence that embodied cognition plays in the contextual response to visual storytelling, and therefore in our construction of reality. This response is uniquely different from the cognitive, rational response that aligns with more traditional semiotic interpretations of visual images and narratives. When we connect emotionally and viscerally with the insider perspective to a lived experience other

than our own, it deepens our understanding of that reality, challenging what we hold as cultural, social and behavioral truths (Broadbent, 1998; Rose, 2012; Wray-Bliss, 2003). In the case of homeless narratives, setting aside our preconceived notions while experiencing another person's story invites us to reframe our interpretation of the problems and to imagine nuanced solutions to homelessness, informing potentially transformative actions while respecting the dignity of the individual sharing their personal story.

Because of the availability of high-quality digital tools, society is poised to mobilize visual storytelling as a praxis for further amplifying the narratives expressing our multicultural, multi-gender, multi-generational selves. This is the language of the digital generation. Idea sharing and other forms of knowledge co-creation across social media platforms are challenging the traditional hierarchical control of information, to instead share knowledge and ideas on more democratically mediated communication spaces. The creative latitude afforded through digital tools likewise nurtures a globally connected community whose relationship is ever-evolving, transformed by engaging with others and transformative in the moment (Ladkin, 2010) through developing and appreciating emancipatory dialogues (Raelin, 2012). The digital generation's embrace of the creativity of visual media tools and their respect for the behavioral and ideological norms of groups outside their own sociocultural confines comes at a time when the economic hardship created by the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly change the face of poverty in America once again. Engaging the digital generation to share those stories across the globally connected media networks can invite dialogue with other communities who are either working on solutions themselves or who might have implemented strategies that could serve as working models elsewhere.

Digital natives communicate fearlessly using digital visual and multimodal tools, and theirs is not only the voice the future, it is the voice of the present. A July 2020 report by the Brookings Institute reveals that 50.7 percent of Americans are under the age of 39. The combined Millennial, Gen Z, and younger population is also more diverse than previous generations (Frey, 2020). The multi-ethnic centering of this generation has embraced language that is more inclusive of people from all communities and backgrounds. Inclusivity supports expressing one's personal identity in a way that embraces ancestral roots, and which pressures existing social, educational, and organizational systems that exclude those multi-ethnic, multi-generational identities. This inclusivity of diversity pressures existing dominant sociocultural leaders to dismantle entrenched systems of power and control, including structural racism that has traditionally excluded those narratives (Doucet, 2019). Connection to the past while speaking through the technology of the future sets the stage for visual storytelling as a means of amplifying the voices of communities living in the shadows of society, providing a critical practice for transforming existing leadership paradigms, generating more culturally sensitive and racially aware social systems that respect the storytellers' agency in representing themselves.

Problem Statement

Homelessness has not only persisted in America, but the number of individuals categorized as homeless has been increasing. San Diego has the fourth largest homeless population of major urban areas in America. Given the decrease in federal funding for homeless programs, the lack of affordable housing in San Diego, the inability of wages to keep up with cost of living in San Diego, and the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic, those numbers will undoubtably grow unless existing models of care begin to invite new, creative solutions-based approaches. Unfortunately, the authentic voices of individuals experiencing homelessness

are excluded from policymaking dialogue about where best to direct funding and how to evaluate the efficacy of existing programs that purportedly serve to alleviate homelessness. This is problematic because each homeless person embodies a unique set of prior and current circumstances that contribute to their individual situation, yet their agency is not respected in articulating the obstacles and potential solutions to improving their quality of life. The current mechanisms for telling the story of homelessness, therefore, are not appropriate for generating real transformative actions. Methods for understanding homelessness have traditionally been textual reports and data analyses devoid of the personal narratives that invite an empathetic connection with the physical and psychological obstacles homeless individuals experience and these existing methods are therefore inadequate. What is needed is a new way of exposing the realities of homelessness.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the degree to which sharing the lived experiences of homeless individuals through visual storytelling has the potential to inform policymakers and program leadership in reframing their understanding of problems and reimagining solutions to homelessness. Using a conceptual framework fashioned from three pilot studies, personal experience and an extensive literature review, this study used visual storytelling as emancipatory dialogue to challenge existing power structures, center the insider narrative, and encourage participatory communicative action. By co-creating a video documentary with Henry Cabrera, a chronically homeless man in San Diego, then sharing the video with staff for city, state and federal homeless service programs as well as personnel at nonprofit organizations, results from this study help to fill the knowledge gap on what impact visual storytelling generates in these viewers and whether that response inspires meaningful acts of social change.

In order for significant change to happen for communities living in the shadows of society, assistance strategies need to move beyond the existing exclusionary system of care (Mosley, 2012; Schneider et al, 2016) where being tethered to federal grants means leadership at programs in the CoC network focuses on establishing partnerships with financial donors, often at the expense of dedicating time and resources to crafting creative solutions for addressing the needs and goals of their clients (Mosley, 2012; Schneider et al, 2016; Von Mahs, 2013). Findings from this study determined that visual storytelling is a critical practice that can effectively transform perceptions and practices at the policymaking level as well as among service providers. Results also show that this methodology can be transferred to other situations where the voices of traditionally marginalized individuals are excluded from the decision-making processes that oversee policies and practices concerning issues directly impacting their lives.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, does experiencing the stories of homelessness through visual storytelling affect the ability for policymakers and homeless service providers to both reframe their understanding of the problems and reimagine solutions to homelessness in San Diego?

2. In what ways, if any, does experiencing stories of homelessness through visual storytelling motivate policymakers and service providers to transform their organization's current approach to addressing homelessness in San Diego?

3. In what ways, if any, does the process of producing and sharing one's personal narrative through visual storytelling impact the homeless storyteller?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A visual approach to research presents a framework for new knowledge creation and cultural understanding that has the potential to change the way we approach social science. Specifically, a visual approach to research requires collaboration between researcher and participant(s) as well as attention to reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis processes (MacDougall, 1995; Meyer et al., 2013; Pink, 2001). This centering on collaboration and reflexivity democratizes the research process, elevating the voices of traditionally marginalized social groups, and increasing data reliability. Amplifying the stories of individuals typically harmed by the dominant hegemonic narratives that prevail in society also generates authentic narratives that challenge those dominant narratives, allowing audiences to connect empathetically with life experiences outside of their own cultural contexts (Benmayor, 2008; Leon, 2008; Lomax, 2003). One social group that, arguably, occupies the extreme margins of society is the homeless community. Their daily focus on survival leaves little room for self-advocacy, and their lack of access to technology restricts their ability to confront dominant narratives that perpetuate damaging perceptions about their true selves, their strengths, abilities, goals and their inhibits insider perspectives from contributing to solutions. Therefore, amplifying the authentic narratives of the homeless so they are represented in community and policy dialogue requires using different mechanisms for gathering and sharing those stories than have traditionally been employed in research (Mitchell, et al., 2017) or in practice.

Fortunately, a recent shift in social science inquiry directing us away from researcher-centered studies toward studies that embrace a participant-centered worldview (Scarnato, 2019) has created space in the humanities for multimodal and visual methods. This opportune moment

in qualitative inquiry dovetails with a sociocultural embrace of visual and multimodal idea sharing in education, health, public policy making, and entrepreneurship. The advent of digital tools and global connectivity through social media underscores the imperative for incorporating these methods if social science is to contribute to cultural understanding and improve the quality of life for people with limited access to resources and opportunities.

While there is an abundance of literature on the historic use of photography and video in qualitative field work, few researchers have addressed the use of visuals in understanding and informing leaders' decision-making processes (Klenke, 2015) in addressing solutions to homelessness. Those few articles attend more to the details of the applied methodology than to study outcomes, profoundly missing an opportunity to develop deeper social knowledge (Greene et al, 2018). This dearth of visual research in the context of homelessness, i.e. physical and mental health, the economy, housing, and domestic violence, doesn't mean there is no research whatsoever documenting homeless narratives. However, those studies involve traditional ethnographic and anthropological note taking and observation rather than the collaborative and reflexive approach (Bell et al., 2014; Mead, 1974/2003) embodied in visual methodologies. Additionally, those studies present a profile of shifting trends in homeless populations and problem areas rather than elevating authentic lived experiences as authoritative knowledge.

Elevating the perspectives of homeless individuals into leadership spaces values their knowledge in reframing perceptions of problems and in reimaging solutions-based approaches to our nation's homeless crisis (Buck et al., 2004; Donley & Wright, 2012). Research and journalism articles that analyze alternative social programs in which homeless individuals are either invited into policy dialogues or as part of the system itself (Buck et al., 2004; Gaetz et al., 2013), once again engage traditional research methods; none of these studies use visual methods.

In short, literature at the intersection of visual research methods, homelessness, and social change are few. Yet the ubiquity of digital photography and video equipment creates an unprecedented versatility for researchers and scholars poised to do this work (Gylfe et al, 2016; Heron & Steckley, 2018; Kuhn, 2013; Parry, 2020). This literature review is my attempt to explain how the processes of visual research, especially collaboration and reflexivity, are uniquely suited to democratize social science as well as inform emergent leadership theory and practice (Shortt & Warren, 2019) by amplifying the authentic narratives of individuals traditionally excluded from the dialogues that determine our social systems.

Background

The phrase 'visual methods' typically functions in the literature as a broad term inclusive of visual anthropology, visual sociology, ethnographic fieldwork, and in some cases, documentary photography. Historically, works involving visual tools in qualitative fieldwork have generated researcher-created photographs, film or video recordings of social interactions that become 'artifacts;' visual documents representing a moment, an era, or cultural phenomenon (Traue et al, 2019). As I have already mentioned, anthropology, sociology, and ethnography especially, have embraced a shift from researcher-centered inquiry to one that focuses on the participants' worldview (Meyer et al., 2013). Digital technology and the omnipresence of visuals in all aspects of social life have played a key role in this transformation (Scarnato, 2019). This shift has encouraged an increasing acceptance of digital dissertations (Kuhn, 2013; Monaghan, 2006; Parry, 2020), fostering creativity among scholars in the production of public-facing projects.

However, while social science has become more accepting of visual methods in the development of theoretical, and empirical understanding (Bell et al., 2014; Pink, 2001), this

acceptance is not universal, nor is it a categorical embrace of visual research as unique unto itself. Some researchers feel that visual and multimodal (any combination of visual, aural, interactive, and tactile) materials are not viable empirical data and they (these researchers) do not support inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches (Collins et al., 2017; Rose, 2007; Styhre, 2014). For example, Becker (1998) pointed out that as recent as the 1990s visual research materials were regarded by sociologists as "teaching aids," and that their use "constituted pandering to the low tastes of the public."

Nevertheless, a larger body of literature supports the idea that photographs unlock cultural meaning, that the meaning is contextual and assigned by the viewer, that meaningful visual research is best produced through collaboration, and that it enhances the potential to express identity and values (Leon, 2008; Lomax, 2003; MacDougall, 1995; Pink, 2001; Sorenson, 2014). In short, visual and multimodal research methods can change the way we do science (Meyer et al., 2013), the way we make sense of phenomena, and encourage the development of potentially transformative knowledge – the kind of knowledge required for meaningful social reform. Additionally, advocates of visual knowledge creation argue that the social sciences are not inert or unchanging (Wagner, 2002) nor do they function better in isolation from one another. Therefore, the value of an inter- and multidisciplinary use of visual methods is most notable for its ability to divert the various disciplines from "intellectual and moral tunnel vision" (MacDougall, 1995) to heal ailing social science genres already "flawed by reductionism and ethnocentric thinking" (p. 218).

Literature focused on homelessness has historically favored a quantitative approach. The bulk of homeless studies identify the trends in populations, i.e. a shift in the number of homeless families or veterans, youth or single women (Schneider et al., 2016). These quantitative reports

generate colorful graphs and charts illustrating demographic changes in geographic regions (NAEH, 2020; SDRTFH, 2019). Federal agencies finance these studies to determine whether or not to continue financially supporting regional Continuums of Care (Masenthin, 2017; Schneider et al, 2016; Von Mahs, 2013), which are localized networks of homeless shelters, health clinics, and outreach teams. These graph-able ways of knowing (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008), i.e., written reports, books, analyses, and charts represent the majority of research on homelessness.

Studies that do interview homeless individuals to gain their perspectives on obstacles to improving their quality of life reveal key knowledge about why some individuals choose to live on the street rather than stay in shelters (Buck et al., 2004; Donley & Wright, 2012) and the damaging psychological impact that stereotypical perceptions of the homeless (Phillips, 2015) have on those individuals.

In reviewing the literature, it became clear that part of the hesitancy to more readily incorporate visuals in qualitative research can be blamed on a dearth of literature explaining a path forward. Most of the literature reviewed for this study either detailed how visuals were used in a particular study, i.e., a focus on methodology rather than outcomes, or reflected appreciatively on past relationships between visual sociologists and policymakers in enacting labor reforms during the first half of the last century (Bolton et al., 2001; MacDougall, 1995; Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Reiger, 1996; Strangleman, 2014; Wagner, 2002; Walker & Wiedel, 1985). Literature discussing a constructivist theoretical approach to leadership and the merits of cultural diversity and inclusion in global organizations (Smith & Victorson, 2012) lays the groundwork for valuing cultural differences, however it falls short of identifying how to nurture those differences. Literature exploring the potential of visual methods in this pursuit, in a social change context, is limited at best.

In this review I address the specific outcomes unique to visual research methods, how they can inform social change to improve the lives of the homeless, and why there is no better time than now to recognize the value of utilizing a "visual mode of discourse" (Meyer et al., 2013) as a new pedagogy for the humanities (Benmayor, 2008; Collins et al., 2017; Pink, 2001). This review consists of five sections, guided by the questions:

1. What role can visual research methods play in generating transformative actions that impact the quality of life for homeless and other marginalized groups?

2. How does elevating collaboration and reflexivity in the qualitative research process through visual research methods transform the way we do social science research?

I address these questions by first sharing the historical roots and contemporary use of visuals in qualitative research. This first section includes a discussion of the dark side of visuals, i.e. issues of perception, representation, and control over identity through images. The second section critiques academic literature focused on participant-centered knowledge creation through visual narrative methods like *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling. This section also includes a discussion of how change advocates in leadership studies can benefit from involving visual strategies to more fully comprehend and theorize about the social world (Wagner, 2002). In the third section I explain the existing literature on homelessness, particularly where traditional graphable ways of sharing data fall short by excluding homeless people's authentic narratives and how that exclusion creates significant gaps in knowledge. The fourth section suggests implications for further research while the fifth section summarizes the literature reviewed.

The search for appropriate literature involved multiple databases and journals in the Copley Library system, especially EBSCO. Other catalogues used include WorldCat, the Sage Publications library and Taylor & Francis journals. Some articles and books reviewed for this

study were identified by reading prominent articles on the topic of either visual storytelling, visual research methods, homelessness, or narratives of marginalized groups.

Visual Methods in Qualitative Science

In many ways, documentary photography and sociology have evolved side by side for more than a century, dedicated to producing graphic evidence of social injustice. They shared a concern for respecting the subjects whose life stories are the heart of the inquiry (Bolton et al., 2001; MacDougall, 1995; Strangleman, 2014; Walker & Wiedel, 1985). Just as the early photographs by sociologist Lewis Hine depicting deplorable working conditions in early 1900 industrial America famously influenced political leaders to enact child labor reforms (Bolton et al., 2001; MacDougall, 1995), more recently Broadbent (1998) demonstrated the effectiveness of using photography in her study of the physical and emotional impact of living on the "economic margins of society" (p. 291). The strong responses to these bodies of work resulted from the audience's ability to empathetically connect to the stories through images.

The seminal book *Visual Research: Photography as a Research Method* (1967) by visual anthropologist John Collier Jr. introduced many of the concepts concerning methods, ethics, positionality, and analysis that are still considered benchmarks today in discerning validity and trustworthiness of visual data (Ball & Smith, 2001; Becker, 1998; MacDougall, 1995; Meyer et al., 2013; Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Wagner, 2002). I had the pleasure of taking a visual anthropology course taught by Dr. Collier in 1980 at the San Francisco Art Institute; a choice that influenced my pursuit of social documentary work with a camera rather than with a pen.

Digital storytelling and *PhotoVoice* (Greene et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warren, 2005) have been the foundation of participatory action research projects intent on developing a sense of democratic engagement among racially, socially, and economically marginalized

groups. Literature describing these projects detailed the transformative impact that creative self-expression offered participants, giving them a sense of ownership over the narratives describing their lived experiences. It is with these projects in particular that we see the shift in social science's acceptance of a more participant-centered worldview.

Variety of Methodological Approaches

MacDougall (1995) suggested there are three approaches for using visuals: ethnobiography, observation, and interviewing. The shift towards participant-centered social meaning (Meyer et al., 2013; Pink, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008) has resulted in a fourth approach: the use of photography and video for collaborative projects between researchers and the community (Greene et al., 2018; Harper, 2002; Snyder-Young, 2011; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Visual anthropologists often use photo elicitation (Becker, 1998; Collier, 1967; Harper, 2002; Klenke, 2015; Wagner, 2002; Yanow, 2014), wherein study participants react to images shown to them by researchers as a form of ethnobiography. For example, by bringing photographs made during fieldwork back to the community for review, the exchange often triggers comments about relationships, power structures, and significant events (Becker, 1998). Photo elicitation, a form of member-checking, often results in a request for the researcher to do the photographs over again when a subject felt the images did not characterize them accurately. Elevating community participation into the decision-making process, therefore, enhanced the validity of the data. Reiger (1996) built on the photo elicitation concept by 're-photographing' – documenting the same area repeatedly over many years – to measure changes in the land and how people interact with it.

The methodological uses of visuals for interviewing and observation that MacDougall (1995) referred to reflect a fairly traditional, safe, qualitative approach wherein the visual data

are treated as artifacts to be studied, not unique knowledge that stands on its own. This mindset mires visual methods in stagnant ideologies that refuse to see the potential in employing collaboration and reflection through visual methods.

The current attention to insider perspectives has given rise to projects that hand cameras to the participants (Greene et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warren, 2005). Greene et al. (2018) explained how *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling – two methods that invite participants to document significant areas of their life for critical reflection – work to engage socioeconomically and racially marginalized youth in the democratic process. In reviewing research that connects digital storytelling, *Photovoice* and civic engagement, the authors identified specific outcomes that result from using a visual mode of discourse: i.e., reframing identity, reimagining neighborhood spaces, uncovering personal capacities for creating meaningful change, employing personal artistry in activism, and unpacking sociopolitical contexts that contribute to inequality. This agency in taking control of one's story is at the heart of what visual research methods have to offer as a new pedagogy for the humanities (Benmayor, 2008; Grossman & O'Brien, 2001; Morris, 2018; Pink, 2001). More recently, Gabriel Tait (2019) created *Sight Beyond My Sight,* an ethnographic photography approach in which participants photograph their communities then group and code the images to identify themes. Participants then write explanations of the content in the images they deem most significant.

While *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling projects successfully engage youth groups in building self-esteem and situational awareness, what is missing from these qualitative studies, and subsequently from the literature, is an understanding of how participatory visual projects can inform dialogue (Mitchell et al., 2017) to generate transformative action for social change.

Variety of Approaches to Analysis Using Visual Data

Audiences connect with visual materials through emotions, memories, personal experiences, and social contexts (Benmayor, 2008; Meyer et al., 2013). Mass media, especially advertising and movies, invoke our fears, hopes, and preconceptions through visual narratives not only to inform us, but also to influence our behavior. At another level, idea sharing and other forms of knowledge co-creation across social media platforms are transforming the traditional hierarchical control of information into a more democratically mediated space. The immediate global activism in response to the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer is evidence of how visual rhetoric can directly influence social behavior.

To address the absence of a shared verbal language for both the interpretation of visual rhetoric and the new knowledge generated through a visual approach to research Drew and Guillemin (2014) suggested a framework of 'interpretive engagement' comprised of three types of meaning-making. The first type involves participant engagement in meaning construction, the second is researcher-driven engagement, the third involves recontextualizing data in terms of the social environment where the narrative is documented and how it is viewed.

According to the authors, the narrative associated with participant meaning making refers to an internal narrative; one which the narrator hopes to communicate to the outside world. This can be vastly different from the narrative the researcher presumes to generate with the same image, undoubtedly influenced by the framework of their inquiry (Chase, 2005). The researcher-driven approach was the primary mode of data collection and analysis of visual research until the 1990s (Bell & McArthur, 2014; Ball & Smith, 2001; MacDougall, 1995; Pink, 2001; Veer, 2014). A considerable amount of literature devoted attention to the third approach: the social context within which the image is embedded at the moment of viewing (Banks, 2008). For instance, elements of external narratives are provided by the audience's own cultural background

as they view the visual material (Becker, 1998; Drew & Guillemin, 2014; Collins, et al., 2017; Pink, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Put another way, this third approach makes clear that sight is always mediated through the viewer's prior knowledge and phenomenological experience (Wagner, 2001; Yanow, 2014).

Much of the literature advocating for analysis through a contextual lens comes across as a form of rebellion against traditional scientific methods that ignore context and disavow visual data of its unique ability to evoke empathy without the assistance of text (Pink, 2001; Rose, 2012; Traue et al., 2019). Meyer et al. (2013) pulled no punches in stating "We have been mired in realist, positivist paradigms, holding us back from validating visual methodologies. Now is the time to move forward" (p. 35). Likewise, the strictly verbal academic publication format prohibits a full engagement with all that visual material has to offer if analysis must be expressed solely through words (Becker, 1998; Collins et al., 2017). Valuable insight is "lost in translation" (Yanow, 2006) when photographs are subordinated to the researchers' verbal interpretations.

Lastly, the software NVIVO has gained popularity among researchers looking for an efficient way to code visual data. Using NVIVO allows the researcher to assign codes to images for later analysis. This software is yet another means of treating visual research as artifacts subjugated to textual analysis rather than valuable unto itself. Using NVIVO allows quantitative researchers to feel like they are doing qualitative research without actually doing it.

The Dark Side of Visuals

A considerable amount of literature focuses on the dark side of visual rhetoric pursuant to questions of representation and persuasion (Becker, 1998; Bell, et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2013). Images can control identity perceptions (Campbell, 2012; Meamber, 2014), create visual consensus, and reinforce 'regimes of truth' (Meyer et al., 2013) that perpetuate damaging

stereotypes. Just as visual aesthetics sell products and create charismatic leaders (Bell et al., 2014) they can reinforce social othering. It is therefore incumbent upon the research community to apply the same standards of academic rigor when using visual strategies as when utilizing other methods (Pauwels, 2012; Reiger, 1996). This attention to ethical concerns makes collaboration with participant communities all the more necessary, if for no other reason than to oversee the validity and trustworthiness of purported meaningful outcomes.

Literature addressing the dark side of visuals also showed concern for how we as a society ingest the content of images. The majority of images we see are not filtered but rather are accepted as fact and are therefore internalized and re-projected into the world. Our lives become a function of those images (Bell et al., 2014; Goodnow, 2005; Kenney, 2005; Martin, 2014). African Americans, for instance, have a long history of vulnerability and violence in media representation (Carter, 2019; Smith & Price, 2005). However, photography also offers an opportunity to dismantle these narratives and present instead a 'just image' (Carter, 2019). This underscores the importance of vigilance concerning whose story is being told by whom and how. Critics of content control focus on strategic attempts to create visually symbolic representations of value to influence the consumer (Meamber, 2014; Messaris, 2003). However, meaning is not a fixed concept. Regardless of any intentions, the meaning assigned to visual material is constructed according to the viewer's sociocultural framing of what they are seeing in relation to their understanding of truth (Belova, 2006; Biehl-Missal, 2013; Rose, 2007; Yanow, 2014).

Critics of visual methods seize on this notion that perception is contextual as another argument against visuals (Banks, 2008; Martin, 2014). Becker (1998) lauded this caution, though he did not agree with critics' summary dismissal of all visual research. I agree with Becker (1998) that the critics did not take the next step: recognizing that every social science discipline

has "exactly these problems," and none of the methods applied by traditional sociology "solves them very well either" (p. 91).

How Visual Narratives Inform Social Change

Since whoever controls the seeing determines where the viewer's attention and perception will be fixed (Kenney, 2005; Wagner, 1979b), social scientists are encouraged to keep in mind that the story they are documenting belongs to the community, not the researcher, and the scholar would therefore be well-advised to involve that community in the entire research process (Collier, 1967; Greene et al., 2018; MacDougall, 1995; Wagner, 1979a). Fortunately, as a result of the evolution towards studies that seek out participant worldviews, visual ethnographers no longer see their fieldwork as 'capturing the truth' or assigning meaning to images from their outsider's perspective (Plummer, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Rather, there are multiple truths dependent on who is telling the story, the audience's interaction with the narrative, and the social context of the narrative (Meyer et al., 2013).

Leaders of successful, globally minded organizations recognize the importance of embracing disparate worldviews; of understanding the cultural and ideological differences of its team members (Pasmore, et al., 2020; Smith & Victorson, 2012). The same differences that present potential barriers can inform value-added outcomes when the different norms, creativity, and behaviors each group brings to the team are nurtured. Citing a 2008 study funded by Mercer LLC, an international consulting firm, Smith & Victorson (2012) pointed out that essential components of managing a diverse workforce include addressing inclusion, tackling 'microinequities' between different identity groups (i.e., LGBTQ, seniors, individuals with special needs) and holding all people accountable for their behavior toward others. Additionally, Eagly and Chin (2010) noted that top-down 'command and control' leaders are being supplanted

by leaders that inspire and motivate employees towards a co-equal investment in changing

organizational structure. And yet, however well-intentioned, leaders who seek to more fully

engage employees in the agenda-setting process encounter skepticism, grounded in the

employees' past experiences with prejudicial power structures (Pasmore, et al., 2020).

These leaders would do well to study the examples of *PhotoVoice* for developing agency

in the workplace through visual narratives (Broadbent, 1998). Digital storytelling and

PhotoVoice projects, for instance, have involved young people either in foster care, living in

resource-challenged neighborhoods, or the criminal justice system. These community youth

engagement (CYE) projects gave participants cameras, introduced them to critical reflection

theory, and asked them to reconceptualize the places where they live, work and go to school. The

objective was to create spaces where the youth could use creativity to nurture their capacities for

reframing the narratives about their lives (Wang & Burris, 1979), and foster leadership skills in

advocating for meaningful change (Greene et al., 2018; Heron & Steckley, 2018; Warren, 2005).

While the potential for visual research to inform social and corporate organizational

change is in its infancy, multimodal and visual approaches are gaining greater acceptance in

academia. An exceptional example of using digital storytelling to interrogate educational

leadership is the dissertation *Cross-marked Sudanese Women talk about Education* by Anne

Harris (2010). The captivating set of seven videos chronicles Sudanese immigrant youth in

Australia as they navigate a new language and social systems. This public-facing collaboration

critiqued educational practices in Australia that objectify immigrants, while also offering

methodological solutions. Though few individuals outside her committee will likely read the

accompanying 195-page text, the filmic 'exegisis' published online can easily be shared among

policymakers and educators with the power to implement meaningful changes. Using visual

research allowed participants to reframe the damaging public narratives about their lives and unpack some of the sociopolitical complexities that contribute to the inequity of the system.

Advocates of visual and multimodal processes in higher education argue that passing comprehensive exams and writing a book that will be seen by virtually no one, under the mentorship of professors "whose legacy depends on replicating themselves" (Parry, 2020, online), is outdated (Collins et al., 2017; Kuhn, 2013; O'Hara & Riggings, 2019; Parry, 2020; Scott, 1985; Warren, 2005). Rather than focus on finished products, i.e., an article or book, a multimodal discipline represents a "pedagogical intervention" (Collins et al., 2017) that honors the messiness of ethnographic encounters, and nuanced production spaces (makerspace, apps, interactive design). For instance, reform advocates cite *Unflattening* (Sousanis, 2014), a comic book about visual thinking, as a successful alternative dissertation (Kara, 2016; Parry, 2020).

Despite evidence that this signature pedagogy enables critical and creative theorizing for the humanities (Benmayor, 2008; Van der Meulen, 2011), scholars are meeting resistance from tenured faculty. Academic hesitancy comes from uncertainty over criteria for evaluating digital or multimodal dissertations. At the University of Wisconsin, for instance, though Virginia Kuhn's doctoral committee had accepted her proposal for a digital dissertation, once the "filmic text" was completed university officials debated whether to accept it. University lawyers were concerned about copyright laws relating to film clips embedded in the online project. They eventually accepted her argument that citation of video clips is no different from word citations published in academic papers – considered fair use in publishing parlance (Monaghan, 2006).

Narratives of Homelessness

The literature centered on homelessness falls into four main categories: 1. identifying how bad the problem is, 2. defining the challenges and strategies for dealing with homelessness,

3. all homeless individuals are not the same, 4. the mechanisms for telling the stories of homelessness are inadequate.

Qualitative studies investigating the scope and profile of homelessness concentrate largely on physical and mental health concerns (Hakanson & Ohlen, 2016; Mosley, 2012). Mental health instability is prevalent within the homeless community. Meanwhile, the tendency for chronically homeless individuals to frequent emergency rooms puts a strain on first responders while also significantly impacting state and municipal finances (Culhane et al., 2007). Many studies seek to identify the presence of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis A among the homeless community (Sisson, 2018) in attempts to isolate outbreaks and target care accordingly (Youn, 2018). Again, the majority of qualitative research, as with quantitative research on homelessness, is either economically focused or trend focused rather than centering the lived experiences and perspectives of the homeless themselves.

This focus on demographic trends is typically presented in textual and graphic form, i.e., written reports, books, statistical analyses, and charts (Henry et al., 2020; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; NAEH, 2020; Schneider et al., 2016). These reports are funded by government agencies that base their financial support for regional programs on the findings. These programs are not inconsequential. Masenthin (2017) and Tsai et al. (2017) point out the deinstitutionalization of thousands of mental patients from state mental facilities in the 1960s created an immediate need for localized programs to house and care for them. The dependence on federal funding at these programs, however, forces leaders to concentrate on securing financial stability rather than advocating for the creative development of more personalized, holistic client-centered care (Mosley, 2012). Nonprofit organizations have established operations that fill the gap in basic

needs, and doing so with a personal respect they feel is lacking at institutionalized, government-funded facilities (Capps, 2014; Halverstaadt, 2019; Lopez-Villafaña, 2018).

Problem-centered research has focused on mental health and substance abuse issues (Tsai et al., 2017; Van Dam, 2019), and unaffordable housing (Englemayer, 2019; Fadulu, 2019; NAEH, 2020, Phillips, 2015). Other studies cite the fluctuation in population numbers and decry federal inaction (Hobbes, 2019; Pandey, 2020; Sanburn, 2016; Schneider et al., 2016) in making real substantive change. While these articles present a statistical profile of homelessness by framing the situation as a problem, or in some cases labeling the individuals themselves as problems, these reports do little to turn our gaze towards solutions.

Literature that focuses on the challenges and strategies in addressing homelessness is where we see academics and journalists engaged in substantive discussions around not only the challenges that policy makers and service providers face to get people into supportive services, but also the obstacles that homeless individuals themselves deal with on a regular basis. This body of literature introduces issues like public perception of homeless people (Boydell et al., 2000; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Miller, 2008), the financial impact of creating more low-income housing (Sanburn, 2016; Von Mahs, 2013; Williams, 2003), and the positive and negative reactions homeless individuals have to existing services and programs (Culhane et al., 2007; Huey & Quirouette, 2010; Roche, 2004; Washington, 2002).

Several factors contribute to why the majority of homeless service programs fail to permanently house more people. Staff at these programs believe themselves to be experts (Buck et al., 2004; Culhane et al., 2011; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Mosley, 2012) and therefore fail to see homeless individuals as authorities worthy of collaborating on their own care. Hoffman and Coffey (2008) examined more than 500 transcribed interviews with homeless individuals and

found the majority of those individuals described such profoundly negative interactions with staff that despite their extreme circumstances they would rather sleep on the street than remain in the facilities. They experienced being objectified and infantilized by staff which left them angry and feeling dehumanized. The authors argue that rather than seeing this exchange as a psychological or cognitive issue in the homeless person, it should be regarded as an additional complication in their lives resulting from power relations and social inequities, in effect perpetuating homelessness (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008).

Literature that suggests a path forward for these entrenched, exclusionary systems advocates for including the personal narratives of homeless individuals in policy dialogue to address the aforementioned types of problems. A smaller number of articles discuss the outcomes when the perspectives of homeless individuals were intentionally sought out. Donley and Wright (2012) focused on the unsheltered subset of homeless individuals, specifically those who are living out in the open rather than in shelters, couch surfing or occupying temporary tent shelters. The authors concluded that unsheltered homeless individuals have unique needs that differ from the needs of sheltered homeless and therefore in order to provide meaningful assistance to the unsheltered community, social services need to adapt and properly consider individual histories and needs rather than creating umbrella, one-size-fits-all programs.

In a few cases homeless individuals were physically brought into the system as consultants. The homeless consultants identified previously undetected problems with administering health care to people on the street (Buck et al., 2004; Culhane et al., 2007), demonstrated the effectiveness of housing first models (Sanburn, 2016; SDRTFH, 2019; Roche, 2004), illustrated the psychological damage caused by perceptions of the homeless as "other" or "less than" mainstream members of society (Boydell et al., 2000; Miller, 2009; Phillips, 2015;

Williams, 2016), and explained why some homeless individuals opt to stay outdoors rather than in shelters (Buck et al., 2004; Donley & Wright, 2012). Additionally, Culhane, Metraux and Byrne (2011) suggest using a prevention-centered approach rather than waiting for people to lose their housing, the latter of which ends up institutionalizing them before ever providing any kind of meaningful support. Placing a priority on assisting people who are about to lose their homes would require an overhaul of existing program paradigms that often function to sustain themselves by extending people's periods of homeless – and thereby perpetuating a need for those programs. Such a reimagining of how the system approaches solutions requires unseeing homelessness through a problem lens and initiating a gaze that centers prevention.

Literature profiling inventive approaches illustrate the effectiveness of doing just that. Inviting homeless individuals to join a citizen advisory board for a health service provider in Houston presented an opportunity for those individuals to exhibit organizational skills, suggest new bus lines and initiate an outreach clinic to test for West Nile Virus among the homeless (Buck et al., 2004). Meanwhile Gaetz, Scott and Gulliver (2013) reported on the effectiveness of tailoring federal funded housing first models in Canada to specific subset populations. These programs positioned women to run the facility for women leaving the correctional system, and centering Indigenous People values at the facility housing Indigenous homeless people.

These studies represent a step in the direction of amplifying homeless voices, allowing individuals to offer counter stories to the dominant narratives that diminish them (Hakanson & Ohlen, 2016) while more accurately presenting homeless people's unique needs, goals, strengths and fears (Boydell et al., 2000). These studies do not go far enough, however, as they are also produced in textual and graphic form. What is missing from the extensive body of literature

reviewed for this study is detailed consideration of research employing visual methods as a mechanism for initiating policy change with those stories (Mitchell, et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The majority of literature concerned with visual methods in social science research presents an uncritical historical overview of the methods used, by whom, and to what ends. A close relationship between visual anthropologists and sociologists in the first half of the twentieth century often resulted in convincing political leaders to make dramatic social and labor reforms. This is primarily the result of a photograph's ability to produce an emotional, empathetic response. Yet, despite its persuasive power, disciplinary purists continue to argue that visual data be subjugated to the text as mere illustration. Many authors laud a recent shift within the social sciences from researcher-centered studies to work that focuses on participant-centered perspectives and worldviews. This shift has generated support for digital storytelling and other visual methods that include participants as co-collaborators in either the decisions about what precisely is being documented or the analysis thereof.

While some of the literature concerned itself with the potential for visuals to be manipulative or misleading, thereby cautioning against using visual methods altogether, it should be said that a healthy discussion concerning the 'dark side' of any research method is essential in determining the trustworthiness of data, not a reason to discredit the methods.

Literature centered on issues of homelessness are presented primarily as quantitative textual reports with accompanying graphics and charts. Yet each individual experiencing homelessness has their own unique life story. These authentic narratives are excluded from community and policy dialogues that determine how homeless assistance programs are designed. The mechanism for how we tell the stories of homelessness are inadequate, and this has resulted

in negative, damaging stereotypes about homeless individuals permeating society as well as retaining a focus on problems rather than encouraging solutions-based approaches.

Most of the literature discussing visual research focused on the process, not on what was actually learned. This shortcoming missed a powerful opportunity to interrogate a unique mode of communication, one that allows for greater personal agency among groups that have traditionally been marginalized. Cleary there is impatience among researchers and scholars who see the potential for new knowledge construction through this pedagogy. While academic institutions stagnate in a debate over how to value visual and multimodal scholarly work, the rest of our global society communicates fluidly across socially mediated platforms at a virtual gallop. Meanwhile, the ubiquity of digital tools continues to democratize media production and inform adventurous social science researchers. In an era when the relevance of research to questions of leadership and social justice is increasingly expected, a new generation of scholars sees value in employing multimodal methods to enrich social enquiry. Therefore, overlooking the intellectual opportunities presented by visually sensitive research, Wagner (2002) wrote, implies a "trajectory that sociologists of any stripe ought to want to avoid" (p. 171).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the conceptual and methodological approaches to answering the research questions for this study. First, the chapter reviews the purpose and research questions introduced in chapter one. The chapter then presents the research design, including the rationale for using a qualitative/critical research approach. It then explains participant selection, the method of data collection, coding procedures, analysis of data, ethical considerations, researcher positionality, and study limitations/delimitations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree to which sharing the lived experiences of homeless individuals through visual storytelling has the potential to transform existing power structures in the continuum of care that currently exclude those narratives and provide a new mechanism for understanding homelessness in ways that allow for reimagining solutions to homelessness. The study also sought to understand the impact on the storyteller that results from producing and sharing one's personal narrative through visual storytelling.

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. In what ways, if any, does experiencing the stories of homelessness through visual storytelling affect the ability for policymakers and homeless service providers to both reframe their understanding of the problems and reimagine solutions to homelessness in San Diego?

2. In what ways, if any, does experiencing stories of homelessness through visual storytelling motivate policymakers and service providers to transform their organization's current approach to addressing homelessness in San Diego?

3. In what ways, if any, does the process of producing and sharing one's personal narrative through visual storytelling impact the homeless storyteller?

Rationale for Qualitative and Critical Research Design

Producing a visual documentary representing the lived experience of homelessness and sharing it in a space where homeless narratives are typically excluded situated this study in three ways: 1) It provided valuable information on how policymakers and service providers perceive the sociocultural complexities of homelessness and their roles in making the system work, 2) it provided an opportunity to fill the knowledge gap of how a chronically homeless individual makes meaning of his experiences, 3) it contributes to literature on the potential for participatory visual projects to inform social change.

In order to answer the research questions relating to the impact of visual storytelling on the policymakers and service providers who view those stories, as well as the impact on the homeless individual sharing his story, this qualitative study employed a critical research approach. Qualitative research is concerned with how individuals experience and make meaning of sociocultural complexities and is grounded in an understanding that there are as many truths as there are individuals in this world. A critical approach recognizes participants as active collaborators in the research, attempts to democratize the research process, and generates knowledge that empowers people to initiate transformative action (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This study was designed as a collaboration between the researcher/photographer and Henry Cabrera, a chronically homeless individual, to produce a video about some of his experiences and then analyze the data compiled from showing the documentary to purposefully selected individuals. This design allowed the storyteller to be a co-creator rather than the subject of a study controlled by the researcher. Critical research also challenges existing conditions "and

through that critique brings about change" (Patton, 2015, p.692), specifically in power relationships that operate within hegemonic social systems that typically marginalize certain groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since the primary research question for this study asked to what degree visual storytelling has the potential to transform existing power structures in the continuum of care that currently exclude the perspectives of homeless individuals, a critical approach to data analysis was the appropriate method for answering this question. In determining how the process of telling one's story impacts the storyteller, i.e., whether the process becomes a form of emancipatory dialogue or in fact harms the storyteller, this type of inquiry aligns with the tenets of critical research traditions, such as Freire's emancipatory and transformative education approaches, which expose and challenge power structures that marginalize certain social groups.

Given the visual storytelling component of this study, the three phases of this research were influenced by both visual critical ethnography and arts-based methods. The application of each of these approaches will be explained below in the description of the research design.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework explains the concepts being studied and their relationship to each other in graphic or narrative form (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 2013). I fashioned my conceptual framework for this study using concepts derived from an extensive literature review, three pilot studies and experiential knowledge. This study used a conceptual framework of visual storytelling as emancipatory dialogue, as a mechanism for dismantling existing power structures, and for reimagining policies and practices affecting the homeless community.

Literature at the intersection of homelessness, leadership, and visual research methods offered key components for use in data analysis. The experiential knowledge of this researcher's

nearly 40-year career as a visual journalist introduces additional concepts not discussed in the literature. The three pilot studies provided a foundation for the study design using visual storytelling in addressing social change, homeless problems and solutions, and identifying the power of public perception in how leadership makes decisions.

Two of the pilot studies involved using visual storytelling with individuals experiencing homelessness. These studies revealed how telling one's story empowers the storytellers by providing them a mechanism for taking control of the narrative defining their life, and offering a

Henry rolls napkins into roses and paints them with watercolors while occupying a table at Carl's Jr. in San Diego. Patrons offer to buy the roses or buy him a meal in exchange for a rose. He learned to paint with a feather woman who was a Holocaust survivor. Painting and drawing is Henry's way of maintaining his sense of humanity on the street.

vehicle for presenting nuanced, more appropriate solutions-based approaches. These voices are currently missing from the conversations about how to structure homeless service programs and

determine legislation affecting their lives. The third study sought to determine to what degree

visual storytelling projects can transform policy and practice in addressing other complex social

issues. In this case I profiled the documentary *The Long Night*, a film about the commercial

sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Seattle. When the filmmaker shared *The Long Night*

with law enforcement, prosecutors and politicians, it proved to be highly influential in changing

local, state and federal laws pertaining to CSEC. Showing the documentary to these

policymakers resulted in harsher laws for those who purchase children for sex, while also

shutting down the unchecked prostitution of children on the internet primarily happening through

Craigslist's Backpage (Matsui, 2016).

The critical factors that emerged from a review of the literature, personal experience and

these pilot studies include: 1) an understanding that homelessness is getting worse, 2) existing

approaches to dealing with homelessness are built around entrenched power dynamics whose

ideologies exclude the voices of actual homeless individuals, i.e. leadership does not like to cede

power, 3) the mechanisms for how we tell the stories of homelessness are inadequate, 4)

watching visual narratives produces an empathetic connection between the viewer and the

storyteller's life experience that has the potential to inspire transformative actions, and 5) the

process of sharing one's story through visual methods is empowering for the storyteller.

What is missing from the literature is an understanding about the role of visual

storytelling in deconstructing existing narratives of power and control in order to incorporate

traditionally marginalized voices, particularly in studies of homelessness. This research

contributes to the literature by investigating to what degree amplifying the voices of the

homeless can democratize and transform structures that have typically exclude their voices.

These concepts fashioned the lens by which this study examined visual storytelling as

emancipatory dialogue, as a mechanism for dismantling dominant power structures, and for reimagining policies and practices affecting the lives of homeless individuals.

Research Design

Two methodological approaches working together influenced the design of this research study. Initially, a visual critical ethnographic approach was employed to collaboratively produce a documentary about homelessness, then have Henry Cabrera reflect on that process. An arts-based approach was used for analyzing how that documentary impacted the viewers and whether their reactions motivated leaders to make changes in how they approached solving homelessness. The following section discusses the nature of these methods and explains how they fit into the overall design of the study.

Methodological Approaches

The visual critical ethnographic approach (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Spradley, 1979) centers on contributing to "radical change or emancipation from oppressive social structures" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 53) through collaboration and reflection. This study sought to investigate the potential impact of visual storytelling in dismantling existing systems that fall short in their role of developing effective prevention or solutions-based programs for homeless individuals. Visual critical ethnography seeks to both upend existing paradigms that oppress or exclude, while also presenting an opportunity for reimagining solutions, and is therefore an appropriate method for this study.

Visual critical ethnography also employs visual methods to focus on the beliefs, values and attitudes that provide structure for behavior within a particular social group. The social groups at the heart of this study were the homeless community and the body of service providers and policymakers who determine the structure of homeless programs and policies. The dominant

culture narrative purports that even when homeless individuals are given the tools to care for themselves they are not able to do what is necessary to improve their quality of life, nor are they able to articulate viable solutions regarding their own circumstances (Mosley, 2012; Schneider et al, 2016). This psychologically damaging perception of homeless people is held by those who design and approve or disapprove the funding for programs created to address homelessness. This attitude justifies organizational behavior that excludes the voices of people with lived experience from discussions that could transform existing paradigms. Visual critical ethnography centers on emancipation from oppression, and in the case of the homeless, that oppression manifests in this type of psychological oppression, i.e., making homeless people feel they are less than or "other" in society (Donley & Wright, 2012; Phillips, 2012; Said, 1978). Physical oppression manifests in denying homeless individuals access to public buildings, bathrooms, or shelter, among other things. In addition to creating awareness, using visual storytelling produces counter-narratives to the ones that oppress or psychologically damage individuals experiencing homelessness, empowering the storytellers by giving them back control of the narrative describing their life experiences, and valuing their personal strengths and worldviews.

Arts-based research aims to facilitate a critical assessment of entrenched social norms, beliefs, and values (Chappell & Barone, 2011, p. 274), possibly causing policymakers to reconsider the effects of their decisions. As mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to understand to what degree visual storytelling can serve as a mechanism for dismantling existing power structures and for reimagining policies and practices affecting the lives of homeless people. Thus, an arts-based method worked in concert with visual critical ethnography in this study to interrogate the current structural paradigms addressing homelessness.

Studies show that people express themselves more deeply when articulating meaning through visual art, photography, music, poetry or other forms of creative voice (Bailey & Van Harken, 2014; Benmayor, 2008). Pauwels (2012) argues that the impact of a "visual sociological essay" in societal as well as scholarly communities emphasizes the strength of expression made possible by blending words, audio, visuals and design. Being able to control one's own narrative through visual storytelling not only generates new knowledge but also becomes a form of emancipatory dialogue for people who speak more descriptively through artistic modes of expression than they do with words. Since this study posits that the mechanism by which we tell the stories of homelessness are inadequate for understanding both the realities of homelessness as well as for designing solutions-based approaches, engaging with stories shared through visual means of expression offer a potentially transformative alternative approach.

Three Phases

This section explains the three phases of this study and the rationale for using the methods associated with each phase.

First phase – Co-creating a Documentary Video

The first phase of this study involved producing a documentary video in collaboration with a 56-year-old gay Latino male named Henry (Enrique) Cabrera whose situation for the last 13 years is classified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as chronically homeless. He goes by the nickname Henry. To the younger homeless people, the "kids" age 16 to 32, he is known as Papa Hen. This entire project, including the video as well as the sharing of the video with specific groups, was the result of a long friendship between myself and Henry. I interviewed Henry for my www.talesofthestreet.com website four years ago and he was thrilled that someone took the time to hear his story and get to know him. We stay in touch

via cell phone and met on the street a couple times a month. We decided to make a longer video that would illuminate the complex nature of survival for San Diego's unsheltered community. Henry introduced me to people as his biographer. He was proud that his story mattered.

Henry's personal situation illustrates the barriers to housing for some people in spite of their efforts to work within the system. Henry is not part of a family, he is not disabled, nor is he a drug user – all situations for which funded programs offer housing and support services. He is not a veteran, so he does not qualify for Veterans Administration programs. He did time in jail for a felony and is off parole, but that criminal record makes it nearly impossible for him to get a job. He is also an insulin-dependent diabetic, so his inability to refrigerate his insulin is problematic, his schizophrenia often causes mood swings when he is running low on medication. The free food served at church feedings is often high in starch and sugar, which compounds the problem, forcing him to decide between going hungry or going crazy. In short, his situation confounds the existing system of care, making his story a perfect narrative to share with those who design and manage those existing programs.

Together we co-created a short documentary (14 minutes) about his life experiences and his perspectives on both the obstacles and the solutions to homelessness in San Diego. Footage was shot between June 2019 and February 2020. It includes Henry collecting cans for recycling, meeting friends in the park, waking up on the sidewalk, attending meals and getting clothing at various churches. Several filming sessions were dedicated to interviews about health, safety, relationships, the therapeutic nature of learning to draw and paint, depression, couch surfing, and his perspective on basic dignity, housing, and the criminalization of homelessness.

Henry sips on hot coffee in his tent at Balboa Park during a rainstorm.

The video clips were reviewed by me to identify key issues, after which I took those issues to Henry for approval. He then identified other issues he wanted to address, so we went to a nearby park where I shot additional interview footage, combining this new material with the previously edited/approved clips. I then put the strongest video clips for each issue onto a timeline using Premiere Pro software and brought those to Henry. We worked off my laptop over coffee at a downtown outdoor café. Together we constructed a rough production of 22 minutes. I then spent time on my own refining the production, as well as creating a three-minute trailer, and brought both to Henry for his review. He approved both and immediately wanted to put them on Facebook to share with friends. "I'm a narcissist!" he admitted. I explained that we needed to wait until I had received both approval from IRB and my dissertation committee before publishing the videos for the research components of the study.

The experience of co-creating the video is central to answering the research question concerning the degree to which sharing one's story through visual storytelling impacts the

storyteller. The discussion sessions in which Henry and I analyzed and coded the transcribed conversations from sharing the video with participants in city, state, federal and nonprofit agencies were also used to answer this question.

Using the lens of visual critical ethnography, the process of filming, producing and sharing a documentary about Henry's current circumstances employed collaboration and reflexivity to focus on beliefs, values and attitudes that guide behavior while also creating space for informed dialogue. These methods were empowering for Henry, giving him agency in how his story is told and what issues are central to developing solutions-based approaches to homelessness from his perspective (Fiske-Rusciano & Cyrus, 2005). Considering the tenet of visual critical ethnography to pursue upending existing paradigms that oppress or exclude, while also presenting an opportunity for reimagining solutions, the documentary provided an instrument by which Henry voiced a counter-story to the existing damaging narratives perpetuated by housed individuals, including policymakers and program personnel, and who regard homeless people as "other" in society (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Said, 1978).

Second phase – Participant Reaction to the Documentary

The documentary was shared with people from different organizations that work with the homeless, i.e., who write policies affecting homeless lifestyles, or who design and implement programs intended to assist people out of homelessness. The sessions began with my brief introduction of the study, going around the room for brief personal responses to introductory questions, then showing the 14-minute video, after which I first invited general comments before asking specific questions from the interview guide. These discussion sessions were documented through note taking and use of an audio recorder, in accordance with IRB protocols.

Participant Selection. In this study I purposefully selected individuals whose responsibilities involve providing physical, occupational or psychological care for the homeless, as well as legislators and political representatives involved in overseeing ordinances and legislation pertaining to homeless issues. These individuals were important stakeholders in how San Diego deals with its most vulnerable community. I interviewed 17 individuals who represent five different agencies or offices under the designation "policymaker." Those agencies included the offices of the San Diego City Council President, the San Diego Mayor, the District 9 councilmember, the California State Senate President, and a federal housing agency located in San Diego. Under the designation "service provider," I interviewed 18 people who represent four different homeless services programs that focus on housing, safe storage, showers, mental health referrals, clothing and hygiene kits. Those organizations included Interfaith Alliance of North County, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), the San Diego Police Department's Homeless Outreach (HOT) Team, and Think Dignity, a non-profit service provider.

To address whether or not the methodology of visual storytelling is transferable to other situations, I also recruited participants who work with vulnerable populations that are not necessarily homeless. This third group of participants included restorative justice practitioners, a school administrator who work with refugee children, researchers from local universities who investigate issues around housing vulnerability, and a psychologist who work with military veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This group was included to speak to whether or not this methodology can be useful in their practices. Analysis of data from interviews with this third group will be presented in chapter five.

Data Collection. All but one of the interview sessions occurred remotely on zoom. The one in-person session was held in a large auditorium at police headquarters with the San Diego

Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). I brought coffee for everyone to that session, and we chatted for 15 minutes while the participating officers arrived. Then I used their auditorium screen to present the video. All sessions began with me introducing myself and the study, then asking individuals to identify their occupation, why they chose to work in homeless issues, and how they get their information about homelessness. We then watched the 14-minute video *Call Me Henry*. The discussion that followed began with an invitation for general reactions, then proceeded through questions on the interview guide (see appendix I). Sessions were audio recorded for transcription using Otter AI software, then coded and analyzed.

A second interview was conducted with at least one person from each agency or organization, approximately two months after the first, to measure any actual tangible actions they might have enacted, or at least their intent to do so.

Adjustments. After the first interview session, questions on the interview guide were adjusted slightly. I added a question about where participants typically get their information about homelessness. I also eliminated two questions because the one hour I had allotted for the entire session was too short to get through all the original questions when the session involved a group of participants rather than only one person. Reactions by HOT team officers to the video inspired me to add a few details into the video. Specifically, since the officers questioned whether Henry was indeed a diabetic, suggesting he was just a drug user lying about his health in order to get access to needles, I added video of him actually shooting up insulin and showing his blood sugar results on a monitor. The officers also said they wished they knew more of his background, like where he grew up, what his relationship was with his family, where his part time job was. Study participants who saw the video before the HOT team did not expressed similar needs, but I nevertheless added a few information slides at the beginning of the video

about Henry's past. With Henry's consent I began the video with information about his alcoholic

father, evangelical mother, and his history of being an HIV/AIDS activist in the early 1980s.

Because the officers had such a visceral response, seeming to take Henry's critique of the system

personally, I began all subsequent interview sessions by warning the participants that Henry gets

emotional in the video, and when he yells, he is yelling at the system, not at them personally.

This was a good adjustment. Two participants thanked me for that warning, and mentioned they

have to remind their co-workers constantly that homeless clients are similarly frustrated with the

system, not necessarily at the people working there.

Third Phase – Coding and Data Analysis

The transcripts were coded using in vivo coding (McCurdy et al., 2005; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2013) by hand to reflect the language used by participants for identifying

meaning and explaining phenomena. I read through the transcripts of interviews twice. On the

first read-through, I highlighted significant passages, then read through them again to make

descriptive notations about those highlighted passages. Those notations used affective coding to

address the inner cognitive systems of emotions, values, and judgements (Saldaña, 2013). Once I

had gone through this process for each interview within a given category of participants, i.e., all

service providers, or all policymakers, I made a list of those codes. This became a first round of

coding.

In the second round of coding, the individual codes derived from the transcripts were

categorized by emergent themes. Overall, there were 42 unique codes in the policymaker group,

ending in five main themes, with 11 secondary themes. Data from the service provider group

yielded 60 unique codes that were categorized into three main themes with nine secondary

themes. These themes were used as a guide for data analysis. Once the themes were identified, I

went back to the original transcripts to reread the passages that supported these themes to double check my initial interpretation of the passages.

The dominant themes that emerged from analysis of discussions with policymakers were: 1. the existing system of policies and programs put in place to address homelessness is broken and needs fixing, 2. each homeless person has unique needs and deserves a tailored approach, 3. visual storytelling can inform policy, 4. the importance of including the homeless themselves in designing policies and programs is essential for meaningful progress in fixing the system, and 5. visual storytelling reminds policymakers of the personal need behind each policy decision they make. The dominant themes that emerged from discussions with service providers were: 1. written reports are boring while visual storytelling in general is emotionally resonant, 2. visual storytelling creates space for difficult but transformative conversations, and 3. the viewer's reaction to Henry's emotions in the video are a powerful call to action. The definitions and meanings behind each theme will be presented in greater detail in chapter 4.

Once I identified these themes, I then drew a concept map (Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to illustrate the relationships between themes. The concept map then informed the findings and suggested implications for further study.

Analysis of the data gathered from the interviews was done in partnership once again with Henry. He was given printed copies of all transcripts to read and code using his own interpretation. I showed him how I had done mine on the first interview, and he understood the process, saying he had a set of colored pencils that would be perfect for this task. We documented our joint analytic discussions by videotaping them. I also hand wrote ethnographic field notes of these sessions. Since stories operate within society as much as they are about society (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), recording these sessions provided valuable research data.

Meaningful discussions with purposefully selected participants allowed this study to address the knowledge gap concerning the degree to which visual storytelling has the potential to provide a new mechanism for understanding homelessness, for transforming existing power structures in the homeless services continuum of care, and for creating spaces to reimage solutions to homelessness. Discussions and observations in collaboration with Henry provided valuable data concerning the impact of sharing one's authentic narrative with the world.

Ethical Considerations

There are many social and cultural communities who can be categorized as "overstudied Others" (Tuck & Yang, 2014; VanNoy, 2020), individuals experiencing homelessness not the least among them. For this reason, I chose to work collaboratively with Henry, an individual who is chronically homeless, so he was not further marginalized as an object of inquiry but rather treated as worthy of determining the process and interpretation of the research project at all stages. Many communities have been beset upon by outsider researchers parachuting into their unique worlds, making observations, then returning to academic life with reports of "truths" from the observed "other" world as they witnessed it. Typically missing from those reports are any insider knowledge or worldviews. Appropriately, Aveling (2012) suggests researchers can either choose to learn methods of conducting inclusive, non-exploitative, culturally appropriate inquiry, or choose to "make way for Indigenous researchers" (p. 203).

Campt (2019) and colleague Saidiya Hartman created the Practicing Refusal Collective to confront keywords and visual narratives from dominant authoritative voices that function to negate marginalized voices, in this case Blackness. Using the cinematic practices of two contemporary artists, the collective works to define "the contours of an emergent black visuality" and in so doing transform those dominant reductionist narratives (Campt, 2019). Taking back the

narratives that define racial and ethnic groups and generating transformative images and words to replace them from within those communities requires researchers, journalists, filmmakers, advertisers and other identity brokers to be supportive in this effort. Similarly, anthropologist Kimberley McKinson (2020) appreciates the statements of allyship for the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the killing of George Floyd from her white academic colleagues, but she emphasizes that enacting meaningful change requires hard work at both the personal and institutional level if the current symbolism is to be transformed into substance. More broadly, she notes, not only should researchers be carefully considering who they study, but also who should be doing research on whom, where research dollars come from in support of exactly what investigations, and finally, how researchers determine the analytical tools to be used in synthesizing gathered research materials (McKinson, 2020). She advocates for decolonizing our pedagogies, our theories, syllabi and publications to allow for a collective refusal of current practices to better reflect all voices and perspectives.

Henry and Tiffany, his "street daughter," share a laugh outside a church offering Sunday late lunch.

Several researchers argue not only for the validation of insider researchers and insider voices as authoritative narratives, but also for regarding "First Voice" (Aveling, 2012) as the methodology itself (Aveling, 2012; Benmayor, 2008; Collins et al., 2017; Iseke & Ndimande, 2014; Meyer et al., 2013; Pink, 2001). The current attention to participant-centered perspectives has given rise to qualitative research projects that employ visual storytelling as an expression of that first voice, by handing cameras to the participants (Greene et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warren, 2005). Greene et al. (2018) explains how *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling – two methods that invite participants to document significant areas of their life for critical reflection – work to engage socioeconomically and racially marginalized youth in the democratic process. Additional research connects digital storytelling and *PhotoVoice* to the development of civic engagement, reframing identity, reimagining neighborhood spaces, uncovering personal capacities for creating meaningful change, employing personal artistry in activism, and unpacking sociopolitical contexts that contribute to inequality (Greene et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997). This agency in taking back one's story is at the heart of what visual research methods have to offer as a new pedagogy for the humanities (Benmayor, 2008; Grossman & O'Brien, 2001; Morris, 2018; Pink, 2001).

Researcher Positionality

Outside of my doctoral journey, I am a career visual journalist with nearly 40 years of experience immersing myself in communities to document the moments that reflect the essence of that community. While I have spent time overseas covering stories that range from human sex trafficking in Mexico to anti-American sentiment in primarily Muslim countries, the majority of my focus has been on the human condition of people on the margins of society in America. I have spent countless hours sitting on a sidewalk or in a park with unsheltered people, sharing

stories over a warming fire in a 30-gallon oil drum in a salvage yard, or huddled under a freeway overpass in the rain. As a journalist I grew frustrated over the images that consistently portray people experiencing homelessness as a homogenous unit under the headline of "blight" or "problem" that needed to be "fixed."

I have also spent many days riding along with law enforcement, mental health outreach workers and with members of service programs that provided shelter and hygiene. This gave me an inside look at how the CoC operates, as well as where and why the system largely fails to elevate clients beyond a repetitive cycle that moves them from one temporary situation to another. I saw the need for a mechanism to amplify the authentic narratives of individuals experiencing homelessness into the conversations that determine policies and practices addressing homelessness. I created a website, TalesoftheStreet.com, where people could share their stories, their perspectives, their thoughts on both the obstacles and solutions-based approaches to addressing the unique problems experienced by each unique individual. For instance, there is plenty of mental illness and substance abuse within the homeless community. There is also plenty of mental illness and substance abuse among housed members of society; it is just more obvious when on full display in the streets. This has fueled a debate about which comes first: does substance abuse lead to homelessness, or does being homeless lead one to become addicted to drugs or alcohol in order to numb the reality of their current circumstances?

My personal interactions with the homeless community and the caregiving community has given me unique insight into the raw emotions, the manipulative maneuvering, the judgement calls, the strength, compassion and fortitude on all sides of this crisis. So, while I am not an insider with either group, my knowledge of the dynamics at play has the potential to help me see themes and relationships that other outsider researchers might not see. My experience in

documenting the stories of homelessness has also taught me the importance of active listening (Chödron, 1995), paying attention to the stories behind the stories rather than imposing my own preconceptions onto their stories.

Finally, I was conscious of the fact that in this study I not only represented the researcher but also the co-filmmaker. Documentary-viewing participants were also aware of my dual role and because they might have felt hesitant to criticize the production and/or its contents in my presence, I made sure to address this at the outset of the meeting, underscoring the importance of their sincerity for the sake of quality research evidence. Additionally, in the few cases where criticisms of the content or production occurred, I was cognizant of the need to abstain from making any comments that might deter participants from freely expressing themselves.

Limitations/Delimitations

Having been immersed with homeless individuals, law enforcement and caregivers throughout my career, I am well aware of how quickly people can draw lines in the sand and say the homeless crisis is someone else's fault. This proved to be the case during this research study. While most viewers reacted empathetically to the video, saying they were motivated to find better, more nuanced solutions or to fix existing programs or policies, there was resistance from one service provider group and one policymaker group to using visual storytelling if the video casts their specific organization in an unfavorable light. This response was anticipated – even anticipated on a much larger scale than actually occurred. Leadership is resistant to ceding power and control, even when the existing models are not producing positive results (Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Roche, 2004). Introducing new ideas can upset cultural norms within organizational systems, and some leaders fear a radical transition might jeopardize relationships with funding sources (Mosley, 2012).

So even though a hesitancy to embrace the use of visual storytelling might seem like a limitation to the effectiveness of this method, this reaction actually proved to be valuable data that informed one of the major findings for this study, all about perception. This reaction also fuels a discussion about the use of visuals for marketing and persuasion that I can explore in greater depth in another study.

This study was centered around one individual, Henry, in one U.S. city, San Diego, California, therefore the sample only pertains to one person's lived experience in one of the nation's major metropolitan areas, albeit one with the fourth highest homeless population. Additionally, while the study documents some of Henry's experiences over the course of seven months, I was not embedded with him throughout those seven months, i.e., I did not sleep on the street and was not with him when he went to jail or inside the hospital, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Also, I was not allowed into the social security office with a camera or the office of PATH, a housing assistance program, so the documentary does not reflect a complete picture of his life story.

It should also be noted that many people have compassion fatigue when it comes to seeing homeless people on the street. The average citizen has trouble generating enough empathy to develop some form of hands-on involvement. Additionally, people are more inclined to want to help when they see women and children in need. Given this proclivity, it could be anticipated that a story centered on a single, elderly, gay Latino male who is chronically homeless might fail to stir any kind of reaction in the viewers. However, this limitation was also anticipated, which is why the participant audience for this study was a purposeful sample of individuals who are directly involved with homeless services, and the rate of success to failure within that system. This was exactly why Henry's story was more useful than a story focused on a family in need or

a veteran – stories that trigger socially-conditioned empathy. Henry's situation was not an easy fix, it did not fit the stereotypes, and it therefore challenged these policymakers and service providers to see the holes in their system. These participants understood that when you are able to successfully and permanently house the most difficult cases, the less-complex cases benefit from any nuanced approaches as well.

Conducting interviews during a pandemic presented challenges. This complicated the goal of engaging in the type of difficult interactions among groups within the same agency that elicit new ideas and plans for collaborative action. Conducting interviews via zoom were less intimate than face to face interviews, however video conferencing presented the serendipitous opportunity to have several members of a given organization together for a session and allowed for interviews with people who might not have been available for an in-person formal meeting, like the homeless task force representative for the state senator based in Sacramento. Zoom conferencing allowed for easy recording of the sessions, ensuring a verbatim transcript of their comments as well as a means of seeing participants' facial expressions while they watch the documentary. It is possible that being at home might have given participants greater confidence to speak their mind, which might not have been the case if they were in a room with peers or supervisors.

I interviewed representatives from two of the nine council districts in the city, as well as the homeless task force representatives from the mayor's office. The data would have been much richer if I would have been able to connect with people from all nine council offices.

Finally, even though the video production and data analysis was done collaboratively with Henry, the imprint of the researcher/photographer still plays a significantly more dominant role in the overall research. Henry was not present for the interviews, for instance. His presence

would have changed the dynamic and the data. It might be a useful follow-up study to repeat the entire process with Henry present. Knowing Henry as well as I do, I can imagine that were he involved during the interviews, he would turn the sessions into a forum for his outstanding complaints about the system. Participants would spend the session defending the system and/or themselves, rather than discussing the method of visual storytelling as a critical practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree to which engaging with the lived

experiences of homeless individuals through visual storytelling has the potential to inform

policymakers and service provider leadership in reframing their understanding of the problems

faced by the homeless and to reimagine solutions to address these problems. The research

questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways, if any, does experiencing the stories of homelessness through visual

storytelling affect the ability for policymakers and homeless service providers to both

reframe their understanding of the problems and reimagine solutions associated with

homelessness in San Diego?

2. In what ways, if any, does experiencing stories of homelessness through visual storytelling

motivate policymakers and service providers to transform their organization's current

approach to addressing homelessness in San Diego?

3. In what ways, if any, does the process of producing and sharing one's personal narrative

through visual storytelling impact the homeless storyteller?

Overview of Findings

In this chapter I present the four major findings from this study, along with the specific

data that supports those findings. It should be said that many of the findings were not anticipated.

The majority of participants were extremely honest about their perceptions of issues around

homelessness, as well as their personal and professional roles in dealing with those issues.

I begin by sharing how policymakers' and service providers' emotional responses to a

visual storytelling narrative from a homeless man caused them to reveal their different

perspectives of the complexities of homelessness. First, I give details of their competing conceptions regarding the effectiveness of the system and their positionality in that system. I explain how these pre-existing perceptions are in fact the reason for a major disconnect in the homeless services system that is supposed to link people in need with available resources.

In the second section I discuss the ways in which the visual method used in this study generated new knowledge regarding the obstacles homeless individuals face, and in so doing, created a behavioral awareness among policymakers and service providers that caused them to focus on notions of their own and their organization's accountability in connecting homeless people with resources. Participants suggested that new approaches to solving homelessness must take a more humanistic approach, which involves centering both internal personal and professional accountability, as well as external work in the form of tangible new projects that work to support the needs of homeless individuals.

In the next section I discuss how the strong empathetic connection evoked by visual storytelling motivated policymakers and service providers to not only imagine new tangible projects inspired by Henry, the storyteller, but to actually manifest those ideas into actual programs. This section addresses how the call to action inspired by visual storytelling motivated policymakers and service providers to make changes in their respective organizations and in public policy.

In the final section, I discuss findings that indicate sharing one's personal story can produce a measurable impact on the homeless person telling his story. Henry Cabrera, the homeless individual who was both research collaborator as well as the subject of the video that is central to this research, was clearly impacted by this process. This was evident in his comments

during the sessions where he analyzed transcripts from study participants, as well as from our

personal conversations during and after the video production process.

<div style="text-align: center;">**Policymakers and Service Providers: Perspectives on Homelessness**</div>

In response to the visual storytelling in this study, policymakers and service providers

revealed their perspectives on both the homeless individuals they serve, and the effectiveness of

the policies and programs they represent that attempt to elevate people out of homelessness.

While there was general agreement across all participants that Henry's story exposed

multiple complex problems faced by the homeless, many of which they were unaware of,

participants expressed competing conceptions of the nature of homelessness in general, as well

as their organization's role in presenting solutions. These varied perspectives across all

policymaker and service provider participants exposed critical areas where their different views

of both problems and solutions to homelessness negatively impact the functioning of the system.

The themes that emerged from participant interviews revealed consensus across both

policymaker and service provider groups on two things: the existing system designed to address

homelessness is broken in many places and needs to be fixed, and that each individual

experiencing homelessness has unique needs and therefore the current one-size-fits-all model of

care does not work for many people. Beyond those issues, not all policymakers agreed with each

other, nor did all service providers agree with each other. These different responses across the

two groups, and even within each group, were in many cases surprising, even diametrically

opposed, and therefore revealing.

For instance, the visual storytelling employed in this study reminded all policymakers

that every decision they make needs to take into account the personal needs of the people directly

impacted by those decisions. However, while the majority of policymakers (15 out of 17 people)

acknowledged their positionality in overseeing certain restrictive policies (that in many cases were inherited from previous administrations), and confessed that it was therefore their responsibility to dismantle any existing policies that function as barriers to homeless people trying to access resources, the two remaining policymakers, both from the federal agency, claimed that given the limited scope of their personal work duties, any changes that needed to be made were the responsibility of some other department. Essentially these few obdurate policymakers held the opinion that, 'yes, that's a problem, but it's not my job to fix it.' One of these federal policymakers mentioned that in the process of scripting policy, there is no template for the most efficient, least economically painful method for housing the homeless. An urban planner by training, he said his decisions are informed by a "combination of limited research," lamenting that "there is no curriculum for homelessness and housing" in academia that offers guidance. "There's just bits and pieces," he said.

The majority of policymakers (14 of 17 people) from the municipal, state, and federal offices interviewed for this study acknowledged that "the system is broken," and consequently it is failing to reach the most vulnerable clients, either due to a problem with a policy or an issue with the implementation of a policy. From the perspective of this majority of policymakers, the disconnect between policy and implementation is a general misunderstanding of a given policy on the part of the service providers, resulting in an improper implementation of that policy by those service providers. Three policymakers speculated that the frequent turnover rate among case workers was one of the main reasons for this disconnect, placing the blame for miscues on the service providers. When pressed on this issue, these same policymakers admitted there could be a stronger effort on their part to help service providers navigate the requirements dictated by the constantly evolving policies on housing the homeless.

Fourteen of the 18 service providers described their struggle with the constantly changing policies from a different perspective. These providers shared that because they work one-on-one with clients, they can feel the emotional pain that Henry exhibited in the video since they see different versions of his psychological turmoil every day. Their empathy for clients is compounded by the frustration of trying to explain to people in crisis why a policy stands between them and secure housing. For instance, service providers are constrained by the regulations established by certain funding sources that dictate guidelines for how they are supposed to administer the resources that funding supports. These regulations, or contracts, they say, are why they blame policymakers (and their policies) for this profound disconnect in the system that is supposed to link people with resources.

One service provider pointed out that funding contracts, which often come through the federal government's Housing and Urban Development department, are grants that need to be spent in very specific ways. "If we don't fulfill these grants, then we're not going to have staff to be able to provide the services and all these other things that come along with it, right? So, we are constrained by contracts," she said. Fortunately, she added, the agency where she currently works has a diverse portfolio of funding sources, giving staff more freedom to be flexible in support of individual clients' unique needs. She said staff also tries to identify if certain "man-made barriers" can be changed internally. "If there is a challenge that a client faces, we always ask ourselves, 'is this an agency thing?…or is this beyond us?' What role do we play in changing verbiage or that document in order to get this client what he or she needs?"

Yet even with that flexibility, another service provider in the same agency noted, there was nothing they could do about Henry's 290 felony, which precludes him from ever being housed in a facility that receives federal funding. He is not allowed in permanent housing or in

the temporary shelters, even during the pandemic or under extreme weather conditions. Because of the parameters surrounding his criminal past, this service provider said, Henry is shunned by a "failed, broken justice system. We continually put up barriers to supporting the individuals that need us most," he said.

Officers with the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) team were the only participants in the service provider group who did not perceive themselves in any way accountable for any disconnects in the system. Although the officers were frustrated at not being able to "fix" Henry's obstacles to housing security, their frustration did not manifest in self-reflection or in taking any responsibility for the problem, as it did with the other participants. HOT team officers said any blame resides with the homeless person, not the system. Given their positionality as police officers, they said, they view Henry as a felony, and they therefore couldn't empathize with his need for shelter, or even a shower. This reaction from such high-profile service providers as the Homeless Outreach Team provided evidence of the role of perspectives as a troubling, underlying factor in whether or not the homeless service system can be successful.

In another example, two officers said that the segment of the video where Henry shouts in the park that "housing is a human right according to the United Nations" unnerved them. In this segment Henry walks through the city's popular Balboa Park, shouting that housing is a human right, and that people should be reaching out to their representatives to fight for more affordable housing. Then there is a sequence showing Henry in a coffee shop calmly explaining that when he is sleep deprived and frustrated with the system he will speak out like that, but on the day after such outbursts he will typically seek out people he might have offended in order to make amends. He then laughs and points to his drawings saying he prefers the side of himself that is the left-handed artist who spends his time writing in journals and sketching. The majority of

participants said their response to Henry's "rollercoaster of emotions" was a professional call to action, i.e., to do something to address the specific obstacles that triggered his frustration over his inability to find secure housing.

However, five of the 18 service providers and two of the 17 policymakers perceived this sequence differently. HOT team officers said that if Henry wanted people to sympathize with his situation he needs to act a certain way – more needy and less angry. They said he needs to quell his emotions, because they anticipated that people viewing this video would react badly to Henry raising his voice in public, as they did. "Walking through Balboa Park yelling and screaming, you know that that's what turns people off from trying to help the homeless," one officer said. "Those are the ones we get calls on – people acting like that." Asked to elaborate on what that "better" behavior might look like, a different officer said, "I wish they would just do what I want them to do."

This concept of determining whether or not any given homeless person is deserving of assistance speaks to the larger problem presented by the dominant public narrative that suggests homeless people as somehow deserving of their fate. Dictating how homeless individuals like Henry need to behave before they can receive services establishes social barriers that are insurmountable for these individuals.

In another example, one officer said, "They might be begging us for help all of a sudden on a certain day, even though the day before, they didn't want help." Another officer added, "there are no homeless emergencies." The HOT team procedure when someone asks for help getting into housing or into a recovery program is to tell the client where and when to meet the officers the following day. The officers also added that the client needs to be sober when the HOT team arrives to picks them up. "We make them work for it," two other officers told me.

These officers are disposed to make decisions about whether or not someone is deserving of care depending on norms of behavior which they, the HOT team, set forth and which are, in many cases, unattainable by someone living on the streets. Instead of providing a connection to services, the officers continue to treat the homeless as deviant and unworthy of assistance.

As my conversation with the HOT team developed, they used increasingly more cynical language about the homeless individuals they encounter. When the two highest ranking officers in the group said that Henry's felony history made it impossible for them to empathize with his story, this statement from their supervisors seemed to give the other officers permission to veer from polite language about how each person on the street needs individual attention. Instead, the officers felt safe expressing contempt for some of the personal stories homeless individuals tell them. "You can catch them in their lies," one officer said. This same officer singled out Henry being an insulin-dependent diabetic. The video shows Henry testing his blood sugar, resulting in a reading just below 400 (hyperglycemic). Despite this visual evidence the officer said, "Sure he's diabetic. And there are hundreds of diabetics down on 16th Street. Have you seen all the needles down there?" This officer was suggesting that Henry was lying in the video and instead of being an insulin-dependent diabetic he was using his needles for intravenous drug use, as were all homeless people on 16th Street. The officer then joked that homeless stories are good entertainment at home and at parties. This perception of the homeless on the part of a key service provider creates a barrier to approaching Henry or any other needle user with assistance because that behavior does not fit the profile of what the officer deems to be acceptable. Instead, it categorizes the homeless person as a problem, unworthy of resources.

Another officer expressed a similar sentiment when she said she thinks the homeless themselves are hypocritical because they say they need food, showers, and shelter but when they

are offered a peanut butter and jelly sandwich by a "drive by" church group, some homeless

folks will not take the food. When Henry explains in the video he feels a loss of personal dignity

because he can't take a shower every day, one HOT officer said she felt a twinge of emotion, but

then thought to herself, "wait, there are showers down at Father Joe's Village. They just don't

want to trouble themselves to go down there."

After mentioning these comments from the HOT team to another service provider group,

all five members of that group shook their heads and pointed out that some homeless people have

food allergies, i.e., peanuts, while for those who are diabetic, sweets and starches such as pastries

and breads, actually cause more harm than good. Making the trip through downtown

neighborhoods en route to Father Joe's Village for a shower might put some people in harm's

way if they are struggling with an addiction or have a dispute with someone else on the street

who frequents that area. These are very real concerns for individuals who choose to avoid trouble

by intentionally staying away from the area known as "The Bottoms," in the city's East Village

where Father Joe's Village is located.

The expectation that homeless individuals need to act and talk a certain way if they hope

to receive services enraged all ten members of the two service provider groups I interviewed

after the HOT team. They found this perception abhorrent and disrespectful. One person said:

> We all have the privilege of when we're having a bad day, we can isolate ourselves,
> we're not exposed to the elements, to people, and having to act according to social
> standards. People experiencing homelessness don't have the luxury, that privilege of
> hiding away when they need to. Setting a standard for how people are supposed to
> showcase their emotions is being mired in archaic thinking.

Another provider from this same agency said what stood out about the episode where Henry is yelling his frustrations in the park was seeing the general public turn away from him, giving him a virtual bubble of space. She elaborated:

Here he is letting you know his frustration. You see how hard it is for people to see that. It's right in front of them. And it's just those stigmas that we really need to break down. He shouldn't have to accept that he's never going to be housed.

In summary, different perspectives on the homeless and who is accountable for eliminating the obstacles to a homeless person's successful placement into permanent housing influences policymakers and service provider's understanding of what is broken in the system. Those who feel a sense of professional responsibility for having created those obstacles feel compelled to act to remove them. Those, like the two federal policymakers, who feel the buck stops somewhere else, are confident they are doing all that is required of them. Those who feel the homeless person is the problem, i.e., the HOT team, also feel they are doing what is required of them and therefore do not need to initiate any kind of change in the way they operate despite an awareness that the system is not functioning as efficiently as it might.

Visual Storytelling: Generating Knowledge of Obstacles, Notions of Accountability, Reimagined Solutions

The first research question for this study asks, in part, to what degree, if any, experiencing the realities of homelessness through visual storytelling affects the ability of policymakers and service providers to reframe their understanding of the problems associated with homelessness in San Diego. All participants said that while useful, "written reports are boring," and that visual storytelling, as presented in this study, is emotionally resonant and therefore much more helpful in understanding the daily and long-term obstacles faced by the

homeless to maintain personal dignity, safety, and social capital. Henry's narrative, presented in a visual format, allowed viewers to gain insider knowledge that created space for reflecting on their own and their organization's accountability in addressing those daily and long-term obstacles. This reflection on accountability generated discussions about taking a more humanistic approach to solutions going forward, and what it would take, both internally and externally, to make that humanistic approach a reality.

Standing in Someone Else's Shoes Generates Knowledge Creation

Despite having prior knowledge of some of the specific issues related to homelessness that were raised in the video, all participants said this methodology revealed many previously unknown details associated with life on the streets, and the skillsets required for survival. Only three of the 17 policymakers and two of the 18 service providers said they were familiar with the level of difficulty involved in finding a place to take a shower, accessing healthy food, and securing one's belongings when going inside a building. While all participants were aware of the complications of managing a catastrophic health issue while living on the streets, like a broken leg or open wound, this same majority of participants in both groups acknowledged that they hadn't considered the problems associated with a chronic health concern like diabetes.

In the video, Henry describes his diabetes and the need to take insulin daily. This means carrying needles and keeping his insulin refrigerated. Since he has no refrigerator and his needles are sometimes stolen, these circumstances put his health at risk. All policymakers and service providers reflected on the power of visual storytelling to focus the audience on the unique nature of each homeless person's set of circumstances. Henry's story exposed the complexity of his situation, forcing policymakers and providers to abandon their oversimplistic understanding of the challenges and to consider the various conditions that no doubt present to many other people

who are experiencing homelessness. "Storytelling is just fundamental to any type of decision that any government makes regarding this topic," one policymaker said.

All participants said they operate with a daily mindset of "I want to fix this," and were therefore frustrated when Henry explained his 13-year struggle with a system that consistently denies him access to housing. In the video Henry names the different service providers in San Diego who offer financial assistance as well as counseling help in filling out the appropriate reams of paperwork to apply for housing. He also identifies the policies and ordinances that prohibit him from sleeping in certain areas, and that thus far have rendered him ineligible for housing assistance. His awareness of available services, and the fact he consistently runs into barriers confounded all participants, who said they were listening for clues in his story that would provide an opening for them to suggest a viable plan for housing. They confessed that hearing the emotion in his voice as he talked about the obstacles he faces and what he does to deal with the trauma of continually being denied housing underscored the importance of addressing how existing policies and programs are too rigidly designed as one-size-fits-all models that does not, in fact, work for everyone.

The federal criminal code 290, for instance, is assigned to people who are found guilty of a sexual assault. Henry explained in the video that his 290 offense involved sexual assault against another adult, not a child. The other felony categorized as 290 is arson. The law prohibits people with a 290 felony from being placed in a subsidized housing facility that receives federal funding. Anyone with a 290, therefore, does not qualify for any housing programs managed by city, state or federal agencies. Henry's situation only qualifies him for facilities run by private nonprofit agencies or churches, of which there are precious few in San Diego. By watching Henry share his personal story, participants were able to hear the emotion in his voice as he

described the pain of being discarded by society. One policymaker at the state level said, "I think you can show [a politician] this video and they'll be 'Wow, I really get it' as opposed to the half hour briefing from their staff." When looking at numbers, she said, "their heart's not there because the emotional resonance piece that is part of this video is more immediately impactful."

Participants also heard Henry explain what he does for self-care in moments of depression. He explained that he sketches, writes in his journal, does "rounds" where he visits people living in the park or on the street to check on their well-being, and he thinks about his former volunteer work with the organization Act Up back in the 1980s and 1990s, bringing life affirming support to people dying from AIDS. Even though he is not able to help himself into housing, Henry helps other people on the street find housing programs. For instance, he steers young men and women with drug or alcohol substance misuse problems to residential programs.

Through the visual storytelling, participants were able to stand briefly in Henry's shoes. Policymakers and service providers were able to gain a greater understanding of the barriers the homeless face including the impact that the 290 felony creates for individuals seeking shelter or securing housing. It also led them to feel frustrated they did not have answers to Henry's complex situation. Hearing a homeless person describe their attempts to improve their situation and the psychological toll they experience when those efforts fail, increased study participants' knowledge of the complexities associated with addressing San Diego's homeless crisis.

Notions of Accountability

These discussions about obstacles, barriers and limited resources fed into a discussion about who is harmed when the system is mired in protocols rather than fully committed to administering assistance. All participants acknowledged that clients suffer when the system is broken. Just how to reconcile the aforementioned disconnects in that system led to more

challenging dialogue around the theme of accountability - who is responsible and what can be done to make transformative changes?

Surprisingly, 15 of 17 policymakers raised the issue of accountability, reflecting on their role or the role of their agency within the system, without being asked. Henry's criminal past, for instance, forced these policymakers to acknowledge their agency's role in creating that legislation that bars him from housing. Most notably, the younger policymakers who are relatively new in their jobs at the city council in San Diego said people in city, state and federal government need to accept responsibility for having created certain barriers (in the form of policies or local ordinances), and that it is therefore within their power to remove or change them. Changing existing policy is difficult, said one policymaker, "but that doesn't mean that those [homeless] individuals aren't in need of and deserving of society's help in some way." Local policymakers, however, have no control over federal regulations, she noted, which added to her frustration in trying to help people like Henry. Seeing Henry give voice to his constant struggle with the system reminded this policymaker of the big picture and her particular role within that system. She said she can see a place for employing visual storytelling as a means to keep the mayor and his staff aware of "the inequities that create the biggest barriers."

Even though they are not responsible for having created restrictive ordinances, six service providers also blamed themselves for the harm produced by these policies. They used the pronoun 'we' to group themselves with policymakers as a collective body of people whose bureaucracy stood between people in need and secure housing. "We created the barriers in the first place," a service provider said, "and therefore it is our responsibility to remove them." In theory, she added, "the homeless service system really shouldn't exist." Working for an organization "means developing the mindset of finding ways to continue to grow that

organization. And that [growth] needs to feed off the crisis," which feels like a moral question, she said. Another provider said, "we are the face of the system clients see as a barrier to housing," and therefore it is incumbent upon people within the system to eliminate those barriers.

Six of the seven policymakers from the federal agency who were part of this study, however, did not take such a self-reflective posture. This was the only group of policymakers who did not acknowledge their accountability in generating restrictive policies, nor did they discuss adapting or eliminating existing policies. They lamented that while the system needs fixing in many areas, policy changes happen several levels above their pay grade, among their supervisors within the agency.

Imagining a Humanistic Approach

The majority of participants said a reimagined approach to solving homelessness needed to center the humanity of each individual experiencing homelessness rather than trying to fit them into existing one-size-fits-all programs. They said visual storytelling has a role to play beyond helping to identify the major obstacles homeless individuals face and causing stakeholders to reflect on who is accountable when people are unable to connect with services. "These types of videos remind people that change has to come from us first," one service provider said. "I think hearing people's stories firsthand is going to inspire a lot of people to take action. It's going to start changing the narrative on homelessness."

For instance, the visual narrative in this study allowed viewers to experience homelessness through the lens of a well-spoken, chronically homeless man. It allowed viewers to consider how a diabetic might safeguard their insulin or needles. It also provided a mechanism for understanding that the free food offered by good samaritans might present a health risk for

some clients. By creating both awareness and empathy, visual storytelling inspired dialogue

about finding solutions that centered dignity and humanity, and less othering.

Participants said that accomplishing a more humanistic approach involves both internal

work and external work. A primary component of internal work, according to all policymakers

and service providers, is the importance of recognizing the personal needs and unique

circumstances behind every decision they make. This includes holding oneself and one's agency

accountable, as has already been mentioned. Internal work also involves reflecting on one's

biases and pre-dispositions to assertions about what the homeless really need. Finally, internal

work includes engaging in difficult, critical discussions within an organization.

External work involves transforming existing damaging public perceptions about

homelessness. The majority of participants felt this could best be accomplished by creating

counter-narratives in video storytelling form, then sharing them on social media platforms and

using them for training purposes with staff. Service providers and policymakers also recognized

the importance of including the perspectives of homeless individuals in decision-making

dialogue, whether it is to fashion new programs and policies or to fix existing ones.

Internal Work

As part of reimagining solution to homelessness using a more humanistic approach,

participants claimed that visual storytelling underscored the need for policymakers and service

providers to recognize that every policy decision they make impact people's lives. In

acknowledging this, the majority of participants across both groups said they need to do deeper

personal and intra-agency assessments. As one policymaker said:

 Most of our policymakers, they take a hunch from data. They love our leadership of the

 past. They don't hear from homeless folks. They don't hear from folks who are struggling

to make rent. I think that would change a lot of the policy that has been enacted or being

planned out if they heard personal stories and testimonials of narratives.

Similarly, the executive director of a service provider agency said he felt his own staff would

benefit greatly from seeing Henry's story to increase their awareness of their clients' complex

personal needs. Many of the people seeking help with his agency come from diverse cultural

backgrounds and speak several languages other than English.

Members of one service provider agency identified the standardized method used to

decide which clients get housing as one particular internal component in need of being

reimagined with a more humanistic approach. For instance, homeless individuals typically

receive income from social security, military benefits, pension, or low wage earned income.

Most housing program vouchers will pay the balance of a person's rent for a limited period of

time, after the client has surrendered a designated portion of their income towards rent.

Unfortunately, this arrangement leaves the most destitute and vulnerable out in the cold.

"Deciding who gets housing is a moral question," one provider said, adding that the system

doesn't always feel fair. By way of further illustration, two providers singled out the VI-SPDAT

(Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) form, which is a survey

that clients take to measure their 'vulnerability index' and therefore their place in line for

services according to their immediacy of need. This system prioritizes people for the limited

resources available. This VI-SPDAT system "is always going to be flawed" one provider said,

when you are talking about "allocating basic human rights." Addressing human dignity from an

institutional perspective "where there's all this bureaucracy involved," doesn't help, she added.

She suggested that a more humane and efficient solution would be implementing the process at a

community level, "where the whole process would inherently be more flexibility. It would be

more relationship-based and [they could] address their needs as they [each homeless individual] expresses them."

Until institutional changes take place, individual actors within organizations continue to wrestle with the moral question of who gets housing on their own. "I think you have a lot of choice in the way that you show up for someone [a client]," another provider told me while her colleagues nodded agreement. She added that the constant struggle to connect clients with services in the face of bureaucratic barriers and limited resources, essentially working around a fractured system, takes a psychological toll on providers, especially case workers. This psychological toll leads to burnout and high turnover. Watching Henry's story made one service provider realize there needs to be more self-care for caseworkers if they want to be their "best selves" in service to their clients.

Another policymaker said our interview session made her realize that change starts with a shift in her own subconscious, and in the way she communicates with and about homeless individuals. Her team uses the term unsheltered instead of homeless, she said, because they feel it is more humane. "I hope if we take enough of these baby steps hopefully in 2021 a lot of good things will happen. I'm trying to visualize how I conduct myself," she said.

External Work

The majority of policymakers and service providers interviewed for this study identified the outreach program as an external component of the system in need of immediate and thorough reorganization in order to establish a more humanistic approach. They adamantly felt that police officers should not be doing outreach, especially with a clientele that fears the police. No matter how nice they imagine themselves to be, "they're still cops, they still have a gun on their hip," one policymaker told me. "People will tell cops what they think they want to hear. And they

certainly don't want to get into the back of a police car." Since the HOT team offers no actual services and can only transport individuals to different programs or services, one service provider said she considers them "heavily armed Uber drivers."

Outreach is the essential connectivity linking people in need of services to those services, a policymaker told me. He was troubled by the "implicit biases that people carry with them into their roles." He candidly said police should "not be anywhere near" an outreach unit. "I've been totally frustrated that the city continues to fund them, because they're cops. What are you talking about?! We're talking about a paddy wagon!" he said, shaking his head. What the homeless see when police are involved, he pointed out, is the sweeps that move the homeless from one place to another while cleanup crews hose down the sidewalks and often remove personal belongings. "Because of what their institution is, is policing," he added, "you are automatically placing criminal glasses on." He wants to see the city create outreach teams made up of health care workers, housing navigators and people with lived experience. Outreach teams, he went on, need to "come from an institution of care and rehabilitation."

The officers acknowledged they are dealing with a population that typically runs from the police and that establishing trust takes a great deal of patience on their part. Taking the time to establish that trust means the HOT team success rate for connecting people with services in relation to the number of contacts they make on the street is extremely low. "Building rapport takes time," several officers told me, while also admitting that patience is not their strong suit. "Building rapport takes too long," said one policymaker. "I drive by some [homeless] people and ask myself why they haven't been helped yet."

Additionally, one policymaker proposed creating a universal training program for all outreach workers in order to establish ethical best practices and increase the humanity in our approach to solutions to homelessness.

Another external component of the homeless services system that needs fixing is the hotline that provides information about available resources. In the video Henry gives a detailed itinerary of where he goes each day of the week for food, for showers and for social services like help with paperwork or health care. He mentions the 2-1-1 resource hotline operated by a city agency, then adds that they are never up to date. Policymakers in city government acknowledged the critical role of this service, but also said they had not thought about how important it was to regularly update and maintain this particular component of the overall system. Because of COVID-19, for instance, only the larger operations that offer food retained their regular programs. All the small churches or nonprofit providers that offered showers shut down. In lieu of reliable information from 2-1-1, homeless individuals share knowledge about available resources on the "homeless hotline," from person to person. HOT team officers admitted they get more reliable information about resources from people living on the street as well.

Service providers acknowledged that another major disconnect in the system that policymakers might not be aware of is the quality of the services being provided. Taking a more humanistic approach would center addressing the cockroaches, bedbugs, black mold and other such maintenance issues that homeless people regard as yet another example of disregarding their humanity.

Even when service providers are able to place someone into single room occupancy (SRO) housing -- basically one room with no kitchen that may have only a shared bathroom -- one provider questioned whether that placement can be considered a success. For instance, some

SROs have documented episodes of bedbugs, roaches, leaky plumbing, an accumulation of black mold, or rules that are prohibitive for some lifestyles. Recently, a person who had been homeless for nearly ten years was placed into an SRO. Within a week he had developed a staph infection from bedbug bites and was admitted to the hospital. After his release from medical care he went back to living on the street and came down with walking pneumonia.

Service providers mentioned that families with small children staying at shelters have trouble complying with rules that dictate residents be up and out by 5:30 a.m. Anyone with a job requiring they work evening hours, like a security guard, has to choose between their job and making it back before curfew. One policymaker said we are too restrictive in the shelters, which is why so many clients leave them. During the pandemic, for instance, the San Diego Convention Center was turned into a vast homeless shelter. Despite the dangers of the pandemic and the promise of a clean bed, showers and meals, the rules at the convention center were insulting to some folks on the street, so they stayed outside. "Why can't they bring in alcohol**?**" one policymaker asked rhetorically. "They should have a no-host bar in there!" Several providers agreed with Henry's suggestion that it would be valuable to have the mayor, city councilmembers, and even service providers stay in one of these SROs for a week.

Simply placing clients into housing, handing them a key and walking away does not constitute success either, several participants from both groups noted. Because there are few transitional support systems, even clients that are successfully placed into housing often fall through the cracks. The majority of providers emphatically mentioned the need for follow up care once a person locates housing. In response to Henry's suggestion of creating a mentor program, a service provider pointed out:

Success is really built into that long term support in transition. I mean, we do it with our

military when they come back from overseas, you know, acclimating back into life. But

we take homeless folks with years of whatever it is and then try to put them in a

residency and say, 'You're going to be fine.' Nine times out of ten they're like 'I can't

have these walls around me!'

Counternarratives

All participants agreed that the storyteller's emotions in the video were powerful, and that

changing the dominant public perceptions about homelessness need to be part of meaningful

solutions. They talked about the fact that the negative public narrative about the homeless

population is typically formulated after an encounter with one homeless individual who is acting

erratically, or who has left garbage or human waste on the sidewalk. These instances become

embedded in the observer's psyche until a counter-narrative can replace it.

For instance, one policymaker mentioned being at community forums with "very angry

people who said some of the most horrendous things, including putting them [homeless] on a

cruise ship and sending them out in the Pacific Ocean; just the most gruesome things." The

person who made that comment, he added, "they likely have never spoken directly to or have any

idea about what the experience of living without a shower or a home may be."

In order to enlist the support of the general public for new approaches, therefore, all of

the participants acknowledged they need to change the existing dominant narratives around how

people fall into homelessness and replace them with counternarratives that more accurately

represent the human dignity of each individual. Discussion about how these counternarratives

might be created elicited two suggestions across both participant groups: include the perspectives

of people with lived experience in decisions about policies and programs going forward and use video stories, like the one in this study, on social media and in community forums.

These videos would be one to two minutes long and would feature stories of people in specific neighborhoods. Creating a more humane approach by changing the narrative will hopefully result in more overall compassion and less othering of the homeless people in a given community, a policymaker said. "I feel like re-envisioning who our community members are and who our neighbors are is a step in the direction of not just accepting folks who are sheltered as community members."

A policymaker at the state level pointed out the difficulty they face politically in effectively changing that public narrative. For example, in community forums she hears from constituents that homelessness is a top issue, and those people are willing to put money behind a solution. When the best site for a new low-income housing complex is in a neighborhood next to those same people, however, the public fights to stop the project. "They almost don't realize that they're in conflict with their own values," she said. All participants felt that visual storytelling can be a "powerful tool" for changing the public narrative around homelessness.

Not only do counternarratives replace damaging, often inaccurate public perceptions, but they give the homeless storyteller agency in taking back control of determining how they are represented. All but six of the participants felt that Henry's involvement at every stage of video production added authenticity and validity to the visual narrative. This collaboration would be important to incorporate in the public messaging when their own videos are shared with the public, they said, anticipating that any suggestion that the homeless be regarded as equal members of the community would evoke negative comments.

Part of changing the narrative, therefore, involves including homeless individuals in counternarrative, but also in the process of designing programs and policies. Doing so values their perspectives, recognizes their humanity, and embraces them as members of the community at large, including in a leadership role. One policymaker on the mayor's homeless task force said including homeless folk in all aspects of designing solutions is an essential asset to resource allocation and creating effective policy. She said inviting people with street awareness to become outreach workers, and therefore part of the solution, helps everyone involved. When people see the homeless as willing to be proactive in changing not only their own circumstances but the circumstances of others, when they are given a living wage and a sense of responsibility, it changes both their situation as well as the public narrative.

Empathy Motivates People to Initiate Transformative Actions

The two previous sections address how visual storytelling helped policymakers and service providers better understand the complex personal nature of problems associated with homelessness and to imagine nuanced solutions by incorporating the perspectives of the homeless with lived experience in decision making. Participants across both groups realized they must engage in some difficult discussions on multiple levels in order to initiate transformative change both internally and externally. In this section I present data relating to participants' intentions to follow through with solutions inspired by their participation in this study.

The limitation of performing this research study over the course of only a few months makes it difficult to fully answer the research question about whether or not experiencing stories of homelessness through visual storytelling motivated policymakers and/or service providers to transform their organization's current approach in some way. While the scope of this study

shows actual implementation of only a few specific programs, it can more readily speak to motivation and intent.

To identify intent or motivation I reinterviewed at least one policymaker or service providers from each organization that was part of the first round of interviews. All of these individuals envisioned using visual stories, either in the form of still images or as short videos, as part of their own organization's internal awareness and sensitivity calculus, or as a way of generating greater understanding of the homeless situation among the general public by sharing them on social media platforms. One service provider, for instance, felt his staff could benefit by seeing video stories to better understand the needs of their clients, especially since his clientele speak languages other than English, and have diverse cultural backgrounds. He envisions making short videos in collaboration with these clients and sharing them internally within the organization as a training device for staff members. Participants from both groups said they intend to pay closer attention to the quality of existing services and the possible introduction of new initiatives to replace service with substandard quality.

Using Social Media to Change Perceptions and Policies

Three different policymakers at the local level expressed enthusiasm for taking the model in this research study and documenting vignettes of the homeless individuals in specific neighborhoods around San Diego. These video vignettes would then be made available on their respective offices' social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, so that members of the housed community could start recognizing the homeless members of those communities as neighbors. The intent here is to increase compassion in the general public and reduce othering, they said. One policymaker told me their staff wants homeless individuals to feel those neighborhoods are safe spaces for them. "Either they feel a sense of safety or it's a

place that they wish to be a part of," she told me. "We want to make sure that there is something that works for everybody, that folks are supported." That also means supporting the housed members of the community while "encouraging them to not think so harshly. If anything, more kindly" towards their homeless neighbors.

One federal policymaker had a similar thought. She suggested it would be effective to post video profiles on a website much like the popular local networking site Next Door. She felt people could get to know the unsheltered individuals in their community through the website, and if they had a day job or other types of assistance for that person, they might be more willing to reach out once they know their name and their story. She is asking some newer members of her agency's community engagement team (two of whom were in the interview session) to come up with a proposal for doing this.

Since the people living unsheltered in Ocean Beach are different than those living downtown, each area needs to host its own public discussions specific to those communities, another policymaker told me. He walks by young people sleeping in their cars in Ocean Beach, for instance. Many of them, he said, are students who can't afford to pay both rent and tuition. In a popular beach community, it is difficult to discern who is just taking a nap and who might actually be homeless and in need of services. So rather than issue a parking ban, he feels this area needs more outreach workers to do assessments and connect people with services. In a previous role with a state representative, he worked on legislation that allows schools not to ticket students who are living in their cars in school parking lots. "Don't make it a crime," he said. "This is their last resort." That type of story posted on Instagram might make community members see car dwellers differently, he added. Meanwhile, he is looking into the policies on overnight parking across his district.

A group of five policymakers who represent a city councilman embraced the concept of visually documenting the homeless individuals in their communities and sharing those stories on the councilmember's social media platforms. "I know it really aligns with our vision and also our priorities and making sure stories are told first and foremost, and that people really connect to those stories," one person told me. She invited me to collaborate with the staff, to walk the neighborhoods in their district and do interviews with them. The resulting vignettes would be posted to their councilmember's Facebook and Instagram pages. She said many of their constituents enjoy connecting digitally, but it would also be useful to bring videos to community outreach sessions. Short videos can also be attached to their regular email newsletters, she said.

This person added that seeing Henry's story reminded her team to let the stories guide policy. When they evaluate programs, she said, "how do we ensure that we incorporate that story into our analysis of whether something really is reflecting those (people) it's meant to support?" She added that the timing of our research session was especially powerful because "we were in the middle of budget work, and it just made us rethink a lot. It's great to think how we can be proactive. I just wanted to let you know it was definitely impactful on our end."

Storytelling Stimulates Concrete Actions

During our follow up discussion, another city council representative said he was moving forward with developing a universal training program for outreach workers in order to establish a standard of ethical treatment as well as a database of who is actually doing outreach and what their success rate is for connecting people to services. He hoped this would unite agencies, providing city workers the ability to identify where to allocate their resources for maximum impact. It will also provide policymakers more accurate accounting of how and where public money is being spent.

On the subject of homeless outreach teams, during the same time period in which I was conducting this second wave of data collection, the San Diego mayor announced a major change in the way the city would be conducting homeless outreach work. The new approach, he said, will be a "person-centered, neighborhood-based, trauma-informed, housing-focused approach" that does not replace the police patrols but will send an additional two-person team of social workers into communities. Tackling homelessness in San Diego, the mayor added, "calls for all of us to have to work together in new and different ways because what we've been doing isn't getting the results that San Diegans want (Warth, 2021)." I complimented the head of the mayor's task force on homelessness in my second exchange with her. She replied that she had been thinking a lot about Henry's story. She envisions using visual storytelling as a regular component of their policy and program committee work going forward.

Other participants noted specific actions they would be taking that relate to issues or ideas that came up as a result of hearing Henry's story. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced so many public buildings to shut down, many homeless individuals have no way to charge their personal electronic mobile devices. This means they can't reach out to family, service providers, employers, and do many things that housed individuals take for granted. One policymaker initiated constructing several internet "hot spots" downtown with accompanying charging stations so people who have no access to the public library or to restaurants can charge their mobile devices and their electric wheelchairs.

After hearing Henry's story of being ignored by the parole system when it came to getting the housing he qualified for, and the system's failure to get him the assistance he needed in accessing the Social Security Income he was entitled to, a policymaker said she was motivated to reach out to her colleagues at the state level. She said she was very familiar with the problems

in the state's parole system and was disheartened by his story but was grateful for the reminder that that was something within her power to investigate and it was now on her agenda to do.

The Impact of Visual Storytelling on the Storyteller

Producing and sharing one's own personal narrative through visual storytelling impacts the storyteller in many ways. I assessed Henry's reaction to the process of documenting and sharing his story by giving him transcripts of the discussions I had with the various participant groups, then recorded his comments about those transcripts. I also documented some of our texts back and forth, as well as observations of his life experiences during the time I was gathering research data. Those texts and my observations are included here to provide a greater understanding of Henry's positionality in the context of this research study.

We had three review sessions about the transcripts. The first two were on a bench in Balboa Park, in an open courtyard rimmed by several museums that are closed due to the pandemic. Henry was nicely dressed in clean tailored shirt and slacks. His cart stood next to him at the side of the bench. He looked directly into the camera several times as though speaking to a live audience. Henry said he perceived this review session as a secondary platform where he could hold a virtual conversation with study participants even though they were not present.

Session One – "I Lose My Mind When I Lose My Dignity"

The first session began with Henry expressing appreciation for participants being willing to develop an awareness of the challenges homeless people face in performing the daily tasks that sheltered people take for granted, i.e., taking care of personal hygiene, privacy while changing clothes, access to Wi-Fi and the right to wake up in a bed. Henry elaborated on this by first expounding on the criminalization of homelessness. Multiple ordinances make it illegal to be homeless, i.e., sitting or standing on a city street at a given time of day. In order to comply

with all the ordinances he faces as a former felon, the only place Henry can put down a sleeping bag at night is on a freeway bridge. He pointed out, as several policymakers did, that the ordinances are created by politicians, so it is logically within their power to change or remove these ordinances. He appreciated hearing that policymakers who were unaware of certain regulations before seeing his story are now better informed, but until someone takes action to change those ordinances, he added, "I'm doing a life sentence out here no matter what." This knowledge was bittersweet for Henry. He was glad that he could help educate people, but his goal is to see real transformative results, i.e., a change in regulations about the hours when people are allowed to sleep in public, and a change in federal rules about permitting 290 felons to live in federally funded housing facilities.

He was visibly heartened by one local policymaker's suggestion in the transcripts about putting a Wi-Fi hotspot downtown, with charging stations. He spoke excitedly, asking who this person was. Henry was thrilled to know this policymaker had the ear of the council president. The younger (ages 20-35) homeless "kids" had recently given Henry a portable charger that holds a charge for four days and has outlets for multiple devices. Henry spends most of his time in the park where there is competition for the few outlets accessible to the homeless. Meanwhile, the wifi signal comes and goes in waves in the park. At night the WiFi connection is often disabled, so he wanders through the bushes till he finds a strong signal. I often receive text messages at midnight or one o'clock in the morning. Having an internet connection is a lifeline, Henry said. It means being able to look for work, reply to social workers, make appointments, or just make that human connection to friends and family. A hot spot with a charging station would be that lifeline for many people. "If I don't have my tablet, I would drop off the face of the earth," Henry said.

Because Henry chooses to present himself in clean, nice clothes he does not fit the public stereotype of what constitutes "looking homeless." Henry understands the impact of perception; that people are quick to judge according to appearances. That all participants also realized the importance of public perceptions was not a surprise to Henry, however he asked what they were doing to change that perception. He appreciates the compassion but wants to hear about concrete approaches to changing the dominant negative narratives. He would like to see actual progress on their statements about creating "more humanization, less othering" as several service providers put it. For instance, in response to a discussion in the transcripts about the success or failure of outreach teams, Henry cited his appearance as a reason he gets ignored by outreach workers. "The HOT team doesn't help. You can't deny I'm homeless; I'm pushing a cart. They just go to their certain areas, they do what they do there, and that's it." Another time he was sitting with six friends in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant when a group of people stopped and gave everyone new backpacks. They skipped Henry. A friend had to tell the outreach group that Henry was homeless also. "But he doesn't look homeless," the people told him. This contrast in behavior is an irony he doesn't believe the general public realizes about themselves. They don't want people looking dirty or ragged sitting for long periods of time in public, surrounded by their belongings, and yet when he presents himself in clean clothes with his belongings safely stored out of view he can't get service providers to pay attention to his needs. Henry felt empowered by being able to share his story with study participants so they can better understand the predicament some homeless people who "don't look homeless" are facing.

Henry said it seems most of the researcher participants have an understanding of the psychological importance of basic dignity for homeless individuals. This buoyed his spirits to know he has allies in both groups. He wanted to know who they were, i.e., which providers and

the names of specific policymakers and which politicians they work for. He reflected that at the beginning of the shut down in March of 2020 a pastor asked him to write an open letter about what the homeless need. Henry wrote about the importance of keeping the public bathrooms open. "Don't deny us the ability to keep some form of dignity. I mean that's inhumane," he wrote. Holding on to one's dignity, he added, isn't easy and leads to occasional mental breakdowns, the kind that he gives voice to in the video.

During production of the video I wasn't sure if Henry would want to include this segment where is yelling in the park. Knowing his awareness of perception, as was just mentioned, I felt it was important for him to make the final decision. Henry was very happy with how I had documented his rage. He felt the video was another platform through which he could be heard. In the video, as he walks past the dog park area and on to the bridge over a freeway, he shouts out his frustration with the lack of affordable housing. People in the park look away. What Henry sees in that moment is society turning its back on his cries for help. He explained:

> I can't verbally have a moment. So, I look at people and say, 'I'm sorry. I'm schizophrenic and I'm homeless.' In all honesty, I know there are moments when I'm losing it, and I find it embarrassing. I lose my mind when I lose my dignity. And it comes out. I can't help it.

Henry was eager to hear how study participants reacted to this segment of the video, understanding that reactions would vary. Henry was buoyed by the compassion in most participants, and felt his status in advocacy had been elevated; that he now has a role in motivating leadership to make actual transformative changes. When it came to the HOT team's comments that shouting about his frustrations would turn people away, i.e., that if he wanted sympathy from them or anyone in the general public that he needed to tone it down, Henry's

voice got louder in his own defense. He stood up and began walking in circles, dropping his shoulder bag so he could wave his arms as he talked. When I calmed him down and addressed the part of the transcripts where HOT team officers said they didn't believe he was a diabetic, he started asking rhetorically what proof they needed. Did they want to be there when he took his blood test? Would they like to store his insulin for him? And then, how dare they be so judgmental when all they do is make it harder and harder to survive on the streets? The HOT team was calling him and other homeless individuals liars, and Henry took it personally. Bearing his soul in the video was an act of complete vulnerability in pursuit of connecting empathetically with people in leadership positions with the power to make change happen. Being called a liar by people ostensibly paid to be the bridge to services epitomized everything negative homeless people perceive about service providers and policymakers. Instead of helping the homeless, Henry said, they judge them. So, while the reactions from most study participants made Henry feel validated and elevated to a co-equal position in society with decision-makers, the HOT team diminished him psychologically. It took me a while to calm him down, but clearly the session was over. Several weeks later he reflected on this moment together and said he was glad he had concrete evidence of the HOT team's insensitivity, in spite of how personally painful the process had been.

Session Two – "I May Run for Mayor"

When I arrived for the second session at the same bench, Henry was listening to daily morning meditation chimes on his phone. The parking lot was full of fire engines, police cars and park ranger vehicles. In the two weeks between sessions, the area had been turned into a vaccination site for first responders. Henry was enjoying confounding the police who stood nearby, by staying put. I made sure the officers saw me bringing coffee and food for the two of

us. I set up my camera on a tripod in front of us, then we pulled out the paper copies of our transcripts and started laughing and talking as though no one else was around. Henry was better dressed than I was. He had on clean trousers and a tailored shirt, I had on jeans and a sweatshirt and my hair was tied back but uncombed.

"This is the only platform I have, and I'm grateful for it," Henry began. "The last time we were recording we talked about the importance of this dialogue. This is the only platform where I get to the city council, the state, the feds, and I am grateful. I may run for mayor," he laughed.

In this second session Henry chose to discuss participant comments that lean towards successful housing placement. He cautioned that a new wave of homeless people are coming, as they do every year when harsh winter conditions elsewhere in the country drive unsheltered people to warmer climates. He suggested the county build new housing along the trolley lines. And for every new multi-unit structure, a percentage should be rent controlled for seniors, veterans, foster youth and the homeless. He waved his arm around at all the first responders and said if we can afford to vaccinate the whole country we should be able to house people.

Henry appreciated comments from several participants across both groups that talked about the importance of transitional support for people who are newly housed, especially if they had been on the street for a long time. Once you create housing, he said, building on a comment from the transcripts, just giving someone a key and walking away is not successful. Henry said he has seen close friends continue to sleep outside even after securing housing because after decades of conditioning that is what felt right.

As an activist, when Henry sees a need, he wants to be able to fill it, not unlike study participants who said they want to "fix" homelessness. He sees this issue as a platform where he can do good for others in a way that permanently improves their lives. After reading this set of

transcripts from a mix of service providers he felt like he had kindred spirits among these study participants, hoping that his story will make this group think of him when they do create some form of transitional mentoring program.

This subject clearly made him happy as he talked about his own experiences mentoring several friends who have secured housing. He told me stories about how he reminded his friends to clean the kitchen if they don't want to attract roaches. He offered to cook if they would clean – a ploy that usually worked, since Henry brags that he is a good cook. He tricked them into doing their laundry by telling them he was going to the laundromat and asked if they want to bring their laundry along as well. He encouraged these policymakers and service providers to create a volunteer program for life skills mentors. He made it clear that he was excited about this idea and he felt he could put together an appropriate training program for them. I could tell he was hoping I would immediately relay this message to them so he could get started right away.

Henry said he hopes this secondary platform creates a dialogue that leads to something; he feels that the audience (study participants) values his ideas. He knows that the general public perceives him through stereotypes "born out of their own experiences, which is normal behavior," he said. "They don't see me as gay right away either because I'm not flamboyant," he added. Henry worried that some study participants whom he characterized as "number pushers" won't be willing to look into constructive solutions. "I wish they could understand the frustration of being out here for 13 years." Nevertheless, the act of storytelling legitimizes his importance, his dignity, he said. "Having a voice gives me that agency. I know I'm worth it."

Session Three – "Could Use a Friend. Hen. Thx."

Our third session was at a church downtown, as per his request. He called me on a Friday and said he really wanted to talk about the new transcripts he had read from my discussion with

two policymakers and one service provider group. We met at a church an hour before their regular Sunday afternoon meal. He had well-worn transcripts and a local newspaper in his hands. He pushed his cart to the small alcove where we sat on the steps outside a back door. He began by bringing out the newspaper article about cockroaches and bedbugs at a local single room occupancy (SRO) hotel where service providers had placed many homeless individuals in temporary housing during the pandemic. It was one of our mutual friends who had been put into an SRO and gotten a staph infection from the bed bug bites and ended up in the hospital. Rather than go back to the SRO, this person went back to the street where he caught walking pneumonia dur to the rainy weather at that time.

Once again, this real life episode of a broken system manifesting in physical and psychological damage to the homeless community enraged Henry, and he had thought long and hard about how he wanted to voice his frustration in our next meeting. He wanted to express his outrage in a way that he felt study participants would be able to hear him. He walked through our friend's experience chronologically, from placement in an SRO to the hospital and back to the street. Waving the newspaper article in the same hand he held the transcripts he wondered if the people represented in this set of transcripts had knowledge of what was in the article.

"Officials need to experience what we do," he said. They need to stay in these places for at least a week, to understand why some people leave. "If I go to these places and see one cockroach, there are a 100 behind the wall," Henry said. "I'm a cockroach. This is one story. There are 100 people like me out here." He stood up at that point and said he was fed up with not seeing people face to face. The fact that these study participants get to see him in the video and he can't see them was frustrating. He wasn't talking about having a zoom session. "When are they coming down here to speak with me face to face?" he asked, knowing I didn't have an

answer. He appreciated everyone's comments about his artwork and journaling, and while he is grateful for their acknowledgement of his humanity, at that moment he wanted something more concrete; what he wants is housing. He is getting older and the concrete is getting harder. It takes longer to get up every morning. No doubt dur to his diabetes, his eyesight is failing. "I'm going blind! How much longer do I have to stay out here?!" he said. While telling his story had created a bridge to service providers and policymakers on one level, making him feel valued and in many ways empowered, his life was still centered around his own most basic need for housing. He hoped that someone among the study participants would do something to eliminate the barriers that kept him mired in homelessness.

He handed me all the transcripts and the newspaper, stood up and pushed his cart down the street to the freeway bridge. The session was over. He had come wanting to make a statement and nothing more. When I caught up with him he was leaning against the railing, tearing his artwork into pieces and tossing it to the wind so it littered across two traffic lanes. He was having a breakdown moment. I felt that he was destroying his artwork as an act of self-mutilation, since that was what so many people have said they appreciated about him. I asked what I could do and he told me I should go. I said I wanted to make sure he was going to be okay and asked if the transcripts had upset him. He said it was the inhumanity of the bedbugs that set him off, and with all these people saying they wanted to help, well, here was a place they could help and yet where were they? He accepted accountability for his situation. "I screwed up my own life. I take responsibility. I'm just tired of being a 290."

As I stood on street corner about 50 feet away, a mutual friend appeared with the sodas she had gone to the store to buy for us. She talked with him, and we both watched him toss his shoulder bag over the fence so it landed on the hillside of ice plant that sloped down towards the

freeway. Three days later Henry checked himself into a behavioral psychiatric ward with the help of a social worker. Henry called from the hospital to apologize for his behavior. We talked and laughed, and I promised to visit when it was approved by the hospital staff. The doctor was kind, Henry said, and knew him from a similar episode last year. That doctor tried to get Henry into housing but failed.

On March 14 he was released. Early on the morning of March 15 he was grazed by a hit and run driver and went back to the hospital with mild abrasions. That same day, an hour after Henry was hit, three homeless individuals were killed by a DUI driver just a mile and a half away. On March 16, I received the text: "I'm at the Ace parking lot…When you have a chance please… Stop by. Could use a friend. Hen. Thx."

On March 19 Henry texted, "Ok Peggy I'm in a gr8 MOOD. A word from Papa Hen." The next day he had someone he wanted me to interview for my website Talesofthestreet.com. What is significant here is Henry feels the process of telling his story and sharing it with the world is cathartic, empowering, and validating. When he introduces me to one of his friends and asks me to tell their story as well, it is an act of love on his part, wanting his friends to also experience that feeling of validation. We joke that he is my production manager. So on March 20 he texted, "Can I count on U??? 2 meet me @ Date St & 4.. by noon time?? Have set up an interview 4 tale's of the st. S/D." Later that day he added, "Thx Peggy Ur the best!! Going to have him Get lunch 4-us.. It's a production manager job. Blessings. Enjoy your day. Ur worth it. Hen out."

In the afternoon following my interview with one of the "kids" who has been clean and sober for nine months now, Henry's text read:

Hello Peggy, I cannot tell you HOW blessed to Day… Thank you for being a part of my

inner circle thank you for helping me fulfill this documentary. I hope you get what you

needed out of it and I hope well I'm just going to believe it's the beginning of the new

age for us here after covid.

Then later, a few minutes before midnight (punctuation left as it was typed):

Peggy we did a great job together thank you for working with me on this project. My

sense of accomplishment with this project is overwhelming thank you for helping me do

it. thank you for helping me get it done this is a great documentary Peggy thank you for

your help Henry.

The language he used in these last texts speaks volumes about his sense of ownership of

the video. He talks about me helping him get the documentary done, and about it being a

harbinger of a new age. In terms of positionality and collaboration on this project, this effusive

message from Henry is the exact opposite of the emotional energy he expressed in the park when

his pleas for humane treatment fell on deaf ears; "I lose my mind when I lose my dignity."

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

In chapter one I identified the degree to which homelessness is one of society's

intractable human crises. I also described ways in which visual storytelling has been used to

amplify the narratives of traditionally marginalized communities, resulting in both empowering

those communities and generating knowledge that can lead to meaningful, transformative social

change. The literature reviewed for this study in chapter two presented previous research on

homelessness. Much of that literature identified the magnitude of the current alarming increase in

the homeless population, underscoring the need for new approaches to solving homelessness.

The literature review also revealed the dearth of research that uses visual methods to engage

homeless individuals in discussions to address the problem. Chapter three explained the structure

of the visual critical ethnographic method used to produce the video that is central to the data

collection phase of this study, as well as the arts-based lens used in analyzing the data.

In the findings, chapter four, I explained that research for this study identified the

processes that impede the homeless services system's ability to fulfill its purpose of solving

homelessness. I also demonstrated how visual storytelling, as a mechanism for better

understanding problems and for coming up with new ideas for solutions, also has the power to

motivate people who are in decision-making positions to take those ideas and manifest them as

tangible transformative actions. In the last section of chapter four I explained how producing and

sharing his life story, as well as his reactions to participant interviews, impacted Henry. As the

research collaborator and homeless storyteller, Henry was at the center of this study.

In this final chapter I explain the significance of these findings, specifically how visual

storytelling was able to present policymakers and service providers with insider knowledge about

some of the less obvious underlying problems of homelessness that had not been previously known to them. I explain how an elevated awareness of these problems created space for the majority of policymakers and service providers to view these underlying problems as essentially sabotaging the homeless service system. I go on to explain how visual storytelling also functions as the critical practice that can fix those disconnects in the system. I conclude this chapter with an explanation of the additional research I conducted to investigate the potential for visual storytelling to work as a critical practice in other situations involving social work leadership and vulnerable populations.

Overview of Findings

The findings in this study contribute to solutions for addressing the complexities of homelessness in several ways.

Emotions Matter

The first major finding was that visual storytelling evoked powerful emotions in all participants for this study, including Henry, which triggered responses that varied from empathy and compassion to derision and resentment. These responses revealed the different perceptions of the complexities of homelessness on the part of policymakers, service providers and the general public, and how those perceptions influence people's behavior when carrying out their jobs and in how they treat the homeless in general. The findings also revealed the power of visual storytelling in its ability to facilitate examination of those perceptions, exposing the role of perception as a major factor in the disconnect in the homeless services system.

Reality Check

In the second major finding, all participants agreed that the process of learning through visual storytelling about the daily and long-term obstacles faced by homeless individuals gave

them a more comprehensive understanding of the realities of homelessness. Awareness of these obstacles caused people in leadership positions to acknowledge the importance of engaging in self-reflection and accountability in their professional roles overseeing those policies and programs purportedly designed to assist people out of homelessness. This awareness created space for a more informed, albeit difficult at times, dialogue that generated new ideas toward solving homelessness using a more humanistic lens.

Transforming Ideas into Action

The third major finding was the degree to which the empathetic connection created by visual storytelling motivated policymakers and service providers to not only imagine new solutions to assist the homeless, but to find ways to put those ideas into tangible projects that are immediately beneficial to homeless individuals. The visceral reaction inspired by Henry's story demonstrates that using visual storytelling to center empathy has the power to transform behavior. Key factors emerged from the data that allow us to understand why this is so.

Truth and Consequences

The fourth major finding was the importance of the positive and negative consequences for Henry in taking back control of his personal story by coproducing it on video and then sharing it with others. The significance of the psychological impact this had on Henry has long-term implications for his overall mental and physical well-being.

Visual Storytelling Evokes Powerful Emotions

The first major finding demonstrates how the visual storytelling method as used in this study was able to examine policymakers and service providers' perceptions of the complexities of homelessness and expose the role of perception as one of the primary disconnects in the homeless services system. Previous qualitative research (Banks, 1998; Becker, 1998; Collier,

2003; MacDougall, 1995; Pink, 2001) supports the concept that images evoke strong emotions, typically resulting in the viewer experiencing an empathetic response to the story being shared in the images. These sensory responses trigger personal memories and the emotions associated with those memories (Biehl-Missal, 2013; Belova, 2006), reflecting the profound influence that embodied cognition plays in the viewer's response to visual storytelling, and therefore in each person's construction of reality (Pink, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Several of the policymakers and service providers, in fact, said they either had a personal lived experience of homelessness in their family or were involved in some form of outreach when they were young, bringing food and blankets to the homeless. Henry's story triggered those memories, inspiring some people to share their own stories in our discussion groups among colleagues who had no prior knowledge of that individual's personal experience with homelessness.

Henry's emotional outburst in the video while walking through the park, giving voice to his frustration at being consistently denied housing, inspired most participants to acknowledge they fall into a pattern of seeing homelessness from a big picture policy point of view, forgetting that each person faces different obstacles that require a more personalized approach, and that the system needs to function interactively in order to be helpful to all clients. "Visual storytelling humanizes a complex issue," one service provider said, echoing a sentiment that many others shared. "He is crying out for help and people are turning away," another service provider said of the episode in the park. Another service provider added that the public ostracization of someone calling on them to act illustrates how public perception of the homeless represents a major disconnect in the system. "Setting a standard for how people are supposed to showcase their emotions is being mired in archaic thinking," she said. Telling people they need to act a certain

way in order to receive assistance, she added, "it's those stigmas that we really need to break down. He shouldn't have to accept that he's never going to be housed."

Police officers in the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) also had strong reactions to Henry's outburst in the park. However, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, theirs was a strong negative emotional reaction, forcing the officers to reveal a bias against the homeless individuals they are supposed to be serving. Acknowledging the power of the visual storytelling to evoke strong emotions, the officers said if the purpose of the video is to stimulate compassion, then the person in the video needs to fit a certain profile that the public is conditioned to care for, i.e. a mother with children, not someone yelling his frustration. In other words, the perception of what type of person deserves help and what type of person does not is so ingrained in our psyche that it is easier to ask the homeless person to change than to try and transform public or personal biases. "Walking through Balboa Park yelling and screaming, you know that that's what turns people off from trying to help the homeless," one officer said.

The officers said it was impossible to shed their law enforcement identity, and they therefore listen to each person's story waiting to "catch them in their lies." Even after seeing Henry with his insulin kit in the video, one officer joked "Sure he's a diabetic. And there are hundreds of diabetics down on 16th Street," referring to an area of downtown where intravenous drug use is prevalent. The lieutenant said that her experience working nearly five years in sex crimes made her especially sensitive to Henry explaining his criminal record as a 290 offender, which in his case involved a sex crime with an adult, as a permanent obstacle to any housing that is federally funded. "So, I'm very familiar with 290," she said. "That type of thing turned me off. Frankly, I just tuned out the rest of the video after he said that." This siloed perception on the part of police officers demonstrates the degree to which using the HOT team as homeless

outreach workers is a profound disconnect in the system. As several policymakers and service providers pointed out, people with lived experience should join mental health professionals and housing program navigators to form entirely new outreach teams.

Out on the street, negative public perceptions perpetuate the stereotypes suggesting that all homeless individuals are lazy, substance abusers, and somehow deserving of their plight (Boydell et al., 2000; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Miller, 2008). A lack of understanding coupled with these stigmatizing perceptions cause housed community members to pressure their leaders to remove the homeless by any means necessary, resulting in ordinances that criminalize homelessness (Masenthin, 2017; Phillips, 2015). As was mentioned in the previous chapter, one policymaker recalled being at a public forum on homelessness in their community where members of the audience suggested putting all the homeless people on a cruise ship and sending it off into the ocean. People experiencing homelessness must overcome these psychological challenges (Miller, 2009; Phillips, 2015; Williams, 2016) of being perceived as less than" or other" while at the same time attending to their daily physical needs. A service provider pointed out that even among her friends and family who don't work with homeless individuals, "people are apathetic because they just think it's life choices that lead somebody down a certain path, when it really is about life opportunities."

This spotlight on the problems caused by pre-existing perception and bias, exposed through visual storytelling, also points out that the current mechanisms policymakers and service providers use for understanding the complexities of homelessness are inadequate. As many study participants pointed out, written reports are often uninteresting, while visual storytelling is engaging and adds meaning to the data. A steady stream of funding, for instance, fuels endless quantitative reporting on demographic statistics, but this information does not always inspire

meaningful change in the way programs currently approach homelessness (Henry et al., 2020; Schneider et al., 2016). Even the National Alliance to End Homelessness suggested in their annual report there needs to be more storytelling in the documents they produce (NAEH, 2020). "Personal stories and testimonies of narrative are very helpful," one policymaker said, adding that the common perception among people who work within the system is that the existing programs work just fine. He pointed out that Henry mentioned in the video he had been to all the housing programs and none of them would take him in. "They (policymakers) don't hear from homeless folk, they don't hear from folks who are struggling to make rent," this policymaker said. "I think that's the key – having leadership, having our committee members hear those stories. And there's so many other stories." The majority of other policymakers and most service providers agreed that including the perspective of people with lived experience in homelessness contribute to dialogue around designing programs and in policy decisions going forward is essential for fixing what is broken in the system.

The limited qualitative research investigating the positive and negative reactions homeless individuals have to existing services and programs (Culhane et al., 2007; Huey & Quirouette, 2010; Roche, 2004; Washington, 2002) supports the idea that homeless individuals can identify the key factors that contribute to systemic failure in our efforts to permanently house more people. Staff at these programs, for instance, believe themselves to be experts (Buck et al., 2004; Culhane et al., 2011; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Mosley, 2012) and therefore fail to see homeless individuals as having the necessary agency to manage their own care. Hoffman and Coffey (2008) found the majority of the homeless clients they interviewed described such intensely negative interactions with shelter staff that despite their extreme depravity they would rather sleep on the street than remain in those facilities. Service providers said they see this

frequently in San Diego, adding to their own frustration. This recidivism causes the public to wonder exactly what is being done with their tax dollars, several policymakers told me.

A Reality Check Creates Behavioral Awareness, Humanistic Solutions

The process of learning the realities of homelessness through visual storytelling caused study participants to more deeply consider their own and their organization's accountability in addressing the obstacles to success that the storytelling identified. Visual storytelling was therefore able to create behavioral awareness and an acknowledgement of positionality among policymakers and service providers, underscoring the power of this process to inspire informed, albeit difficult, dialogue among decision-makers. The majority of participants said the visual storytelling made them aware that any meaningful solutions going forward need to center a more humanistic approach. Accomplishing this goal requires focusing on internal work, both personally and within an organization, that centers self-reflection and accountability. External work involves including the perspectives of people with lived experience as partners in policy decisions, program design, and generating counter-narratives that challenge existing perceptions about homelessness.

Behavioral Awareness: Acting on Accountability, Doing Internal Work

Henry's story, for instance, reminded participants of the critical role that human dignity plays in a homeless person's physical and psychological well-being. It caused them to reflect on their positionality as part of the system that is failing to reach some of the most vulnerable members of society with daily necessities like clean drinking water, showers, and restrooms. One policymaker said

> The barriers that he mentioned that prevent him from getting access to the basic
>
> necessities, you could just hear the desperation in his voice. We're not even making it as

easy as possible, we're making it more difficult. And it's within the government's power

to remove those restrictions. … It's just another reminder of the human element of policy.

I think we have to recognize there's real people facing real experiences with every

decision we make.

Citing the ineffective outcomes of previous city staff decisions, one policymaker said, "Mistakes

have been made. And there s a lot of ground to cover" in correcting those mistakes and making

better decisions.

In order for significant change to happen within an organization, solutions strategies need

to move beyond existing program models (Mosley, 2012; Schneider et al, 2016) where being

tethered to federal grants means service provider leadership is more focused on establishing

partnerships with financial donors than they are to developing nuanced, creative solutions for

addressing the needs of their clients (Mosley, 2012; Schneider et al, 2016; Von Mahs, 2013). In

the context of internal work for organizational management, projects involving visual narratives

for meaning construction have been shown to offer a path to inclusive, collaborative advances in

leadership theory and practice (Bell & McArthur, 2014; Buchanan, 2001; Foss, 2005; Greene et

al., 2018; Messaris, 2001; Meyer et al., 2013; Shortt & Warren, 2019). None of these studies,

however, involve homeless services organizations.

Ahlquist (2015) explains how the creators of the social change model (HERI, 1996)

define leadership as being concerned with "effecting change on behalf of others and society."

The social change model emphasizes a collaborative, value-based process that focuses on "self-

knowledge and leadership competence" at the individual level before change can happen at the

community level. The majority of participants in this study spoke about this difficult internal

work as part of the overall process. "A lot of what the video really displayed was my perception

of the population that I serve and how I see them," one service provider said. "For me it will be important to continue to consciously and intentionally bring that humanity into the conversation every time I hear my constituents complaining about the shelter" in our neighborhood, one policymaker said. "I can start that shift in my subconscious. I can start that shift in the way that I talk and that I communicate with them (the homeless) and about them," she added.

Connecting to Henry's experience viscerally, emotionally, caused policymakers and service providers to focus on the immediate daily and long-term obstacles to success that were brought up by Henry in the video. "Without knowing Henry's story, or the barriers to getting him housed, I wouldn't have paid attention to those laws," one policymaker on the mayor's homeless task force told me. This lack of knowledge represents another major disconnect in the system.

External Work: Including Homeless Voices, Changing the Narrative

Several policymakers and service providers stated that amplifying the authentic narratives of people experiencing homelessness, so they are represented in community and policy dialogue, is one such solution. "There's some work to be done at the regional and local level to better incorporate those voices," another policymaker said. This requires using different mechanisms for gathering and sharing information than have been used in the past (Mitchell, et al., 2017). "There's consensus that we lack a clear path or enough paths for individuals with lived experience to provide feedback on the city's policies and programs," this same policymaker added. "So that is identified in the Community Action Plan as a priority in the short term."

All participants said they see visual storytelling as the mechanism by which they can make informed adjustments to the existing one-size-fits-all model that is not serving many homeless individuals. Creating visual narratives in specific neighborhoods and sharing them on social media platforms representing a councilmember, the mayor or a state senator generates

counter-narratives that challenge existing perceptions about homelessness, while also producing more of the insider knowledge that identifies the daily obstacles that need to be addressed. Counter-storying, or creating counter narratives as was done with this study, is a methodology primarily used by people of color to disrupt dehumanizing narratives that society perpetuates about their communities (Asimeng-Boahene (2010; Johnson, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). "It just reminded me of changing the narrative from where we normally have a negative perception," a policymaker told me, "to actually actively try to have a more positive-enforcing perception of our unhoused neighbors and their experiences."

Participants who were eager to embrace this process acknowledged that these visual stories would trigger the same full spectrum of emotions that we saw emerge in this study. As a result, some of those conversations in public forums around authentic narratives from homeless individuals might not be pleasant, "but we need to agendize it and have the discussion," one policymaker said. "It's going to be a difficult discussion but those are the places …where the ethos of the community is formed." Another policymaker told me, "We need more of it in San Diego because we do have to paint a picture for people like Henry, but also people like the student who is living in their van because they can't afford rent, the veteran who has gone off track due to family issues and has been rejected." Ultimately, having difficult discussions around the realities of homelessness and the general public perception of those realities, can serve as an educational tool for all involved. "Decision makers could potentially use it as a tool to inform the public not just of the solutions, not to sell the programs we already have," one policymaker said, "but to really be honest about the scope of the problem, because it's going to take a deep and sustained long term effort." Unless people understand why homelessness is so difficult to solve, she added, "they may lose patience with (that effort) quickly."

Elevating the perspectives of homeless individuals into leadership spaces values their knowledge as part of the process in addressing the nation s homeless crisis (Buck et al., 2004; Donley & Wright, 2012). A small number of articles discuss the outcomes when the perspectives of homeless individuals were intentionally sought out. Donley and Wright (2012) focused on the subset of homeless individuals who are unsheltered, i.e., those who are living in the open rather than in temporary shelters or staying with friends. In a few cases homeless individuals were hired as consultants. In this capacity they were able to direct program coordinators to previously undetected problems with administering health care to people on the street (Buck et al., 2004; Culhane et al., 2007), and to demonstrate the effectiveness of housing first models (Sanburn, 2016; SDRTFH, 2019; Roche, 2004). However, research that analyzes alternative social programs in which homeless individuals are either invited into policy dialogues or to become part of program management (Buck et al., 2004; Gaetz et al., 2013) engage traditional written interview and observation research methods. None of these studies use visual methods.

In the case of this study, visual storytelling caused policymakers and service providers to generate ideas that specifically address the needs expressed in Henry's story. In fact, several of them had been thinking about these ideas, but hearing the lived experience of a homeless person who identify where the system is broken inspired them to speak their ideas out loud. "People are seeing unsightly things as a result of our fractured system," one policymaker said. The city spent a million dollars on outreach teams provided by local service providers, he added, "and these groups have gotten away with big city contracts, and not been held accountable to the results." He sees bringing in people like Henry and paying them to do daily surveys, in partnership with health care professionals. Another policymaker who advocates for changing the make-up and nature of outreach teams is fully on board with this idea. "We're trying to push more homeless

individuals to be outreach caseworkers," she said. "They know more of the right thing to say. They would have a better outcome definitely than a police officer."

<h3 style="text-align:center">Centering Empathy Motivates Leaders to Transform Ideas into Actions</h3>

The strong empathetic connection evoked by visual storytelling motivated policymakers and service providers to not only imagine several possible projects inspired by Henry's story, but to actually find a way to manifest those ideas into tangible programs. Putting this call to action into practice validates the process of using visual storytelling to center empathy as a means of transforming behavior from one that marginalizes or treats people as other, to one that focuses on a shared humanity. Of special significance are the conditions that allowed for the storytelling to inspire that motivation.

The first notable condition was that the majority of the policymakers and service providers in this study, including some of the officers on the HOT team, either had a lived experience with homelessness in their family, currently has friends who are experiencing housing vulnerability, or they spent time in their youth handing out donations to the homeless. The centering of empathy as motivation for transforming policies, practices, and public perceptions was therefore personal for many participants (Eagly & Chin, 2010). "I myself have been close to being homeless," one policymaker told me. Without supportive parents, he added, "I very much may have been like Henry. So, to me it's personal." This person added that he has friends from high school who are currently on the street, or close to it. Several policymakers shared that they had been homeless at one time. The majority of policymakers said they came from low-income households. "We've been on the brink of it and understand the importance of what shelter and safety means for every individual," one policymaker said. "My family struggled paycheck to paycheck," another policymaker said, adding that he is "still trying to make peace

with a lot of that stress and tension that comes along with financial instability." Changing the narrative so it recognizes the humanity in the homeless, as well as in working class families is one of the primary missions for his team of council district representatives, he told me.

One service provider shared that during all four years of high school he and his mother would take food to the homeless on Friday nights. "I was in tears, because we saw a whole spectrum of people out there," he said. He didn't know his father until he was 23, he said, adding that when he finally did meet him the experience was very emotional because his father was homeless and diagnosed with schizophrenia. "I went through a bad period in life," he said, essentially mourning what felt like the loss of a father. "I realized that it was kind of my calling to go into some sort of service provider role."

Second, most of these policymakers and service providers are young adults. The concept of learning and communicating using visual methods has been part of their social fabric most of their lives (Collins, et al, 2017). "A lot of people learn visually," said one policymaker. "There's also an emotional aspect to it and that's what's needed in these types of conversations between people, is that emotional piece." This generation of leaders also understands the creative latitude afforded through digital tools for developing and appreciating emancipatory dialogues (Raelin, 2012). "In terms of homelessness, I've just become a tic toc obsessed person," one policymaker said of how she gathers and shares information about homeless issues. While watching Henry's story, "I found myself shaking my head at the whole problem with individuals who have those sex offender charges on their record," she added. "How can you focus on treatment if you're unhoused?" A policymaker who strongly advocated for posting short, edited clips of Henry's story on Instagram to reach a broader audience and generate public dialogue pointed out the

difference between using visual storytelling to communicate rather than using traditional

quantitative reporting with text and graphs. He said that:

> A lot of policymakers are reading white papers and they're reading reports. And they're
>
> getting briefed on very boring Power Point slides that show percentages and progress. It's
>
> easy to just look at your phone and say, 'Ok, I've got the stats.' But it doesn't hit the
>
> heart as much as when you have someone who shares emotion that is brought in through
>
> storytelling, especially through video. It brings the average staffer into the actual place
>
> these people are living in. It provides an emotional context to it that you don't get with a
>
> lot of these research papers.

Another policymaker said, "this type of media presentation would do a good job at reminding

people that these are individuals. Not being able to take a shower robs him of his dignity."

Third, several participants raised the issue of Henry's involvement in the video

production and the degree to which his role as coproducer and research collaborator validated the

authenticity of the narrative and the trustworthiness of how it was presented (Heron & Steckley,

2018; Lambert, 2008). Both policymakers and service providers said knowing that Henry

oversaw the video production process motivated them to come up with nuanced solutions

(Greene et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2017) since the current system has rejected him. The

collaborative aspect of social research, Banks (2001) pointed out, needs to be about collective

engagement. The traditional fieldwork approach of parachuting into people s lives," suggested

Prosser & Loxley (2008), is morally dubious and intellectually flawed" (p.123). Adeagbo

(2021) points out that the researcher must engage in constant reflection on their positionality to

avoid slipping into the traditional power relationship in which the researcher controls the content

and analysis while the researched individual becomes a subjugated artifact.

A recent article by Warr et al. (2021) explored the potential of art-based community projects to challenge long-standing stigmas assigned to low-income populations. The greatest value of nontext-based means of expression, they point out, is in the power of the content to identify the impact of social inequalities in these people's lives. The authors remind readers that the storyteller has undoubtedly spent years internalizing the dominant, demeaning narratives about them (Freire, 1970/2000; Pink, 2001), and it is important to acknowledge the personal strength required of the storyteller to overcome the vulnerability associated with sharing their story with strangers. When we connect emotionally to a lived experience other than our own, it deepens our understanding of that reality and all its complexities, challenging what we hold as cultural, social and behavioral truths (Broadbent, 1998; Rose, 2012; Wray-Bliss, 2003).

In order to gauge whether the empathetic connection generated by visual storytelling actually motivated participants to transform their ideas into tangible policies and programs, I conducted follow up interviews with at least one person from each organization approximately two months after my initial interview. The tangible products that study participants put into practice during the limited time frame of this research study sought to provide homeless folks with some of the basic dignities that housed individuals typically take for granted.

One policymaker said in a follow-up interview that he had facilitated installing charging stations for people's electronic devices, along with free WiFi. The city also established more public hand-washing stations. One group of policymakers began creating their own visual stories of homeless community members in their respective districts and posting those stories on their social media platforms. Their goal is to use the visual stories to transform existing negative perceptions, and therefore behavior among the general public, from one that marginalizes to one that focuses on a shared humanity (Peñaloza & Thompson, 2014; Pink, 2001; Trau et al., 2019).

The executive director of a service organization is using Henry's story as a training devise for his staff to generate internal agency dialogue about their client's individual and cultural needs.

Finally, between my first and second interview with members of the mayor's homeless task force, the San Diego mayor announced a major change in the way the city would be conducting homeless outreach work. The new approach, the mayor said to the press, will be a "person-centered, neighborhood-based, trauma-informed, housing-focused approach" that does not replace the police patrols but will send an additional two-person team of social workers into communities. Tackling homelessness in San Diego, the mayor said, "calls for all of us to have to work together in new and different ways because what we've been doing isn't getting the results that San Diegans want (Warth, 2021)."

Visual Storytelling and the Storyteller: Truth and Consequences

Producing and sharing his personal story had both positive and negative outcomes for Henry. He felt immense pride at being able to control the narrative about his life (Boydell et al., 2000). "I may run for mayor," he told me at one point, laughing. The sense of agency this gave him vastly outweighed the vulnerability he felt as a result of exposing his raw emotions and intimate details of his life to an unknown audience. Henry expressed the upside of the experience when he introduced me to his friends and asked me to tell their story as well. It was an act of love on his part, wanting his friends to have that same feeling of validation that came with being heard and having control over the narrative about his life. The downside revealed itself in a moment of frustration. During one meeting with Henry, he began tearing up his drawings and tossing the pieces into traffic lanes. I got the impression he was destroying his artwork as a form of self-mutilation, since he had read in the transcripts that people felt they could connect to his humanity through his artwork.

The psychological impact on Henry, therefore, is two-fold. While visual storytelling can be empowering, it can also make the storyteller vulnerable to further stigmatization. This ties back into the viewer's pre-existing perceptions of homelessness, and the homeless person's unwitting internalization of those negative public narratives (Freire, 1970/2000; Moletsane et al., 2007; Warr, 2021), which all have long-term implications for his mental and physical well-being (Bell, 2020). Henry made it clear, however, that the sense of agency he felt at being co-producer and research collaborator vastly outweighed the negative consequences of being judged by outsiders. As I mentioned before, he referred to me as his biographer, and introduced me to friends so I could interview them as well. He wanted his friends to experience the same uplifting emotional outcome that he did after sharing his story. "We did a great job together," he tweeted at me after our final transcript analysis session. "My sense of accomplishment with this project is overwhelming. Thank you for helping me do it…This is a great documentary."

That is not to say that the negative consequences Henry felt as a result of sharing his personal story were trivial. The vulnerability that Henry experienced by exposing some intimate details of his life revealed his acute awareness that people he had never met could potentially judge him. This ended up being the case when he read that some HOT team members said Henry was probably lying about being a diabetic so he could get access to clean needles. Standing on the sidewalk outside a church, he started yelling multiple expletives. He said when he is in the park pushing a cart with all his belongings "you can't deny I'm homeless. And yet the HOT team does not stop when they see me." One of the officers had said they recognized Henry in the video. "I've worked with him several times, multiple times over the years and there's, I don't want to say [there is] an excuse for everything, but he's been through a lot," the officer said. Henry pointed to this statement as evidence of the HOT team's hubris. He said the HOT team

never stops for him and he didn't know this officer. He took umbrage with the officer's pretense at concern, and the suggestion that Henry disregarded offers of assistance. "If the HOT team is doing their job," he said, "why don't they stop me when they see me with my cart and say 'How can I help you? Oh, you're 290? Well let's refer you in this direction.'" The fact that they don't even try to help, Henry said, "is condescending to me."

Henry's reaction to being judged triggered an emotional outburst that left him despondent for days. The reason Henry was able to get beyond this psychologically debilitating episode was that he understood his story to be authentically the truth (Meyer et al., 2013), and he believed that any negative comments about it revealed a bias in the viewer (Copes et al., 2018; Moletsane et al., 2007; Umurungi, et al., 2008). Henry was able to see the long-range value in exposing that bias. He was proud of his role in advancing the application of a more humanistic lens to homelessness by sharing his story with policymakers and service providers.

Appreciation for using visual storytelling methods to amplify insider perspectives from communities traditionally marginalized or undervalued by the dominant society has given rise to projects that hand cameras to people in those undervalued communities (Greene et al., 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warren, 2005). Greene et al. (2018) explained how *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling – two methods that invite study participants to document and reflect on significant areas of their lives – typically set out to engage socioeconomically and racially marginalized youth, migrant families, and low wage workers, in the democratic process. The authors identified specific outcomes that resulted from using a visual mode of discourse, i.e., reframing identity, reimagining social spaces, uncovering personal capacities for democratic engagement, and unpacking sociopolitical contexts that contribute to inequality. Taking back one's story is at the heart of personal and social empowerment (Benmayor, 2008; Grossman &

O'Brien, 2001; Pink, 2001), and yet the majority of participatory projects using visual methods among homeless individuals fail to identify a mechanism for elevating those narratives into conversations where they can have an impact on leadership, as this one does.

Since whoever controls the 'seeing' determines where the viewer's attention and perception will be fixed (Kenney, 2005; Wagner, 1979b), researchers are encouraged to keep in mind that the story they are documenting does not belong to them, and the proper approach is to involve the 'researched' individuals in the entire process (Collier, 1967; Greene et al., 2018; MacDougall, 1995; Wagner, 1979a). Aveling (2012), for instance, suggests researchers can either choose to learn methods of conducting inclusive, non-exploitative, culturally appropriate inquiry, or step aside to "make way for Indigenous researchers" (p. 203). Fortunately, the current evolution towards studies that seek out the insiders' worldviews means that visual ethnographers no longer identify fieldwork as 'capturing the truth' or assign meaning to a phenomenon from their outsider's perspective (Peattie, 2021; Plummer, 2001; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Instead, it is understood that there are multiple truths depending on who is telling the story, the audience's interaction with the narrative, and the social context of that narrative (Meyer et al., 2013).

For instance, when I set my camera on a tripod in the park to record a discussion session about participant transcripts, Henry and I were surrounded by police, paramedics, park rangers and fire fighters, all waiting to get their COVID vaccine in a nearby municipal stadium. Henry made a point of dressing in clean, tailored clothes, his pushcart neatly packed with belongings and topped by a folded blanket, resting beside him. Henry's truth was that this was his home (the park), and he had every right to sit on a park bench sipping coffee while talking with a friend. Henry controlled the narrative; I did not. He knew his appearance would confound the dominant stereotype of what a homeless man looks like. "Everyone who looks at me looks at me as a

stereotype," he said. "And that's normal behavior because we only look at things according to our own perceptions and experiences." Storytelling created by homeless individuals presents a more holistic understanding of the realities of homelessness (Masenthin, 2017; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Among the few studies that invite homeless individuals to create counter narrative as a challenge to the narratives that diminish them (Boydell et al., 2000; Hakanson & Ohlen, 2016), however, none use visual storytelling in the manner employed by this study.

Implications for Critical Practice

Strong empathetic responses to visual storytelling from policymakers and service providers in this study revealed the power of visual methods to expose why homeless service policies and practices are not working. Visual storytelling also provided participants with a mechanism for making those policies and practices function more humanistically.

In order to investigate whether visual storytelling is potentially transferable to other practices, i.e., to inspire meaningful actions for social change in other social services sectors, a third set of participants was interviewed for this study. Participants in this third group included restorative justice practitioners from different parts of the country, a psychologist who works with veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a school administrator who works with refugee youth, and university researchers studying housing inequity. All of these participants work with individuals who are also either physically and/or psychologically vulnerable, and in many cases marginalized by dominant society.

All the participants in this group said they felt visual storytelling was a valuable tool for identifying underlying, unforeseen problems in caring for their clientele. They also felt using visual storytelling methods would provide a mechanism for healing, for identity support, and especially for self-expression among individuals for whom the spoken English language is not a

comfortable means of communication. The overarching themes that emerged from discussions with these participants include: 1) voice equals agency, 2) perceptions dictate how we make meaning from a social phenomenon, 3) visual storytelling creates empathy. A subset of secondary themes identified by this group include education, safe space, validity, and identity.

Voice Equals Agency, Challenging the Meaning We Make

All participants in this third group felt that giving someone a voice through the platform of visual storytelling allows the storyteller to challenge the existing, often harmful narratives that dictate how we make meaning of social experiences (Warr et al., 2021). A visual method allows the storyteller to speak their truth without fear of judgement," the school administrator said. The psychologist mentioned how telling one s story gives them agency in how they are represented and portrayed to the world." Veterans, for instance, are excited to be invited to tell their story, she said. They are not only "excited that someone cared enough to ask about their life," but the act of sharing their story allows them to see themselves as part of the greater social narrative (Pink, 2001). They just want someone to listen, they want to be seen," she added.

"Stigmatization is taught to us early in life" a researcher told me. This means a pre-existing perception is not challenged until someone has a personal encounter that forces them to confront what they hold as truth (Meyer et al., 2013; Warr et al., 2021). That encounter can serve to either reinforce the stereotype or to challenge it. Henry's appearance, for instance, does not fit the stereotypical image of a homeless man. "He is not floridly psychotic, or sleeping in the middle of the day, or a body covered up on the sidewalk," the psychologist said. Stereotypes are the opposite of reality, the school administrator said, adding that visual storytelling "bursts the bubble of preconception."

Visual storytelling elevates our awareness and involves active listening (Chodron, 1995; Warr, 2021), putting us in someone else's shoes to challenge the meaning we had previously made of certain social phenomena. Henry's story therefore "creates space to confront the truths of lived experience as they relate to inequity and barriers," one restorative justice practitioner added, forcing us to see complex issues differently.

Visual Storytelling Generates Empathy

The power of visual storytelling is its ability to create an emotional pathway for audiences to connect empathetically with the storyteller. Seeing ourselves in others increases the urgency to help, it is a call to action, several restorative justice practitioners noted. As has been described throughout chapters four and five, this empathy initiates change by transforming perceptions and creating space for the difficult discussions that lead to transformative policies and practices. "It's hard to dismiss a story," one of the researchers told me. Another researcher commented on how an empathetic connection reminds her that a person is more than a number, that "the method of delivery animates information in a way that other formats can't." In that context, she added, the data she gathered from Henry's story didn't present new insights per se, but rather that "the insight I've already learned just became more meaningful."

Henry's story inspired another researcher to commit to developing better active listening practices and to make sure she creates space during future interviews that allows people to fully elaborate on their story (Chodron, 1995; Wagner, 2002; Warren, 2005).

Other participants admired his self-awareness and willingness to be vulnerable by sharing intimate details of his life with the world. "It s very powerful to hear from the individuals themselves," one restorative justice practitioner said. When told that Henry would be reviewing the interview transcripts, most participants thanked him directly for being so vulnerable. His

honesty allowed them to see life from his perspective, they said, allowing them to see his humanity in caring for others on the street, and allowing them to empathize more fully with the obstacles he and other homeless individuals face.

Education, Safe Space, Validity and Identity

A subset of themes that emerged among the majority of participants include the educational potential of this method, how safe space can transform physical and psychological well-being, the trustworthiness of evidence as a result of researcher-participant collaboration, and how Henry's art is his identity.

The psychologist especially felt that visual storytelling has potential as an educational tool for health care professionals. One restorative justice practitioner pointed out that Henry narrated "the consequences of what's going on structurally in our social support systems," which provides valuable information for staff training sessions with a myriad of social service agencies.

The majority of participants reflected on the issue of safe space and the role that psychological security plays in a person's physical and mental well-being. Safety allows us to be vulnerable, to get deep sleep and to make decisions about goals rather than just survive, both the psychologist and the school administrator said, while insecurity leads to physical and mental instability (Hakanson & Ohlen, 2016; Mosley, 2012). Clients who are in safe spaces find it easier to have vulnerable discussions and find solutions, the psychologist told me, otherwise their energy "is 100 percent devoted to hyper vigilance." Visual storytelling from vulnerable individuals reminds us how critical security is, allowing clients to comfortably reach out for help. "Once you stop trying to get help, you lose hope," she added. Without that safe space there is no lifeline, she said. "People go down a dark path because that's all that's available."

The researcher-participant collaboration of this method is impactful largely because it amplifies the validity and trustworthiness of the evidence (Adeagbo, 2021). One researcher said this deeply personal method of data collection posed the question, "how can this be a tool for empowering policymakers?" Another researcher said, "collaborative in-depth storytelling is confrontational," adding that combining visual storytelling with literature and previous research is a potent tool for changing policy "because you can't look away." The data in visual storytelling are "verifiable in a way that figures are not," she said (Banks, 2001; Warren, 2015). We have the aggregate but we need the story, two researchers said. In quantitative reports "you looked away from the numbers and were not moved to act because the numbers didn't touch you," one researcher elaborated. Despite the empathetic power of the collaborative visual method, she added, many policymakers can be set in their plans despite testimonials and impactful visuals. Visual storytelling reinforces the need for having people with lived experience in the room contributing to policy discussions," another researcher commented.

In pointing out how Henry identifies as an artist, restorative justice participants noted that Henry was already manifesting a form of storytelling or self-expression through his drawings (Warr et al., 2021). His artwork and journaling allow him to persevere, reveal his humanity and provide a way to express his identity as a meaningful social actor. His art allows him to fight back "despite the world telling him he doesn't belong," one restorative justice practitioner said.

The Future of Visual Storytelling Research

Learning from storytelling that is generated at the margins of society is an important way of seeing the social world more holistically (Bell, 2020). Extant literature supports the idea that photographs unlock social meaning that is contextual and assigned by the viewer, that meaningful visual research is best produced through collaboration, and that it enhances the

potential to express identity and values (Leon, 2008; Lomax, 2003; MacDougall, 1995; Pink, 2001; Sorenson, 2014), as it did here with Henry's story. Recent research acknowledges that using visual methods is a new paradigm for the humanities (Benmayor, 2008; Collins et al., 2017; Pink, 2001; Wagner, 2002), moving qualitative inquiry beyond "realist, positivist paradigms holding us back from validating visual methodologies" (Meyer et al., 2013). As Prosser & Loxley (2015) suggest, referencing Rieger (1996), the challenge for today's visual sociologist "is to find the indicators of change." This study provides a template for using visual storytelling as a critical practice to advance the compassion and efficacy of social services programs, providing a model for identifying those indicators of change.

Implications for Further Research

As visual and multimodal approaches are more broadly adopted, future researchers must first develop a framework for reflexivity and collaboration to more thoroughly address ethically sensitive topics (i.e. image representation, stereotypes, cultural myths) in the design phase. Researchers, participants, and audiences all need to have a clearer understanding of whose story is being told by whom, how, and in what context.

Secondly, visual research methods used in leadership studies is in its infancy and cries out for further development. Empirical evidence from the few existing studies showed how visual research projects allowed workers to express authentic representations of identity and share workplace concerns (Glegg, 2019; Gylfe et al., 2016; Meyer et al., 2013; Shortt & Warren, 2019). In the context of organizational management, projects involving visual narratives for meaning construction, for instance, can offer a path to inclusive, collaborative advances in leadership theory and practice (Bell & McArthur, 2014; Buchanan, 2001; Foss, 2005; Greene et al., 2018; Messaris, 2001; Meyer et al., 2013; Shortt & Warren, 2019).

A third concept worthy of further research is a recognition of visual research as unique unto itself, not as illustration for text. Knowledge construction through *PhotoVoice* and digital storytelling have shown that visual research has more potential than simply analyzing visual data (Greene et al., 2018; Pauwels, 2012). Several authors suggested attention to audience response is also warranted in future research, focusing on creatively designed research "about how one person can see through the eyes of another" (Messaris, 2001, p. 555). Audience response therefore merits a fourth area for further study. As Banks (2001) noted, "social research has to be about engagement, not an exercise in data collection" (p. 179).

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide

Policymakers and Service Providers

This interview guide was meant to introduce topics for discussion, while encouraging dialogue in

pursuit of identify disconnects in the system and new ideas for programs and policies

Personal Background

Briefly, by way of introduction, *before* **viewing the video**

1. What is your role at your organization/agency?

2. In what ways do you interact with homeless individuals?

3. Where do you get most of your information about issues of homelessness?

4. Why are you personally interested in helping find solutions to homelessness?

For the discussion *after* **viewing the video**

1. What are the main takeaways for you, from seeing this video?

2. What was it about the visual method (rather than reading reports and viewing charts)

specifically that helped you gain new insights?

3. How can leadership in your organization best use this information?

4. What are some of the possible challenges in taking up this information to initiate new ideas?

5. The nature of policies is that they tend to be generalized, for obvious reasons, and programs

tend to be formally structured, how do we veer outside the lines to accommodate the need for

more personalized care in individual cases?

6. How might this methodological approach provide opportunities in other areas of community

need, to stimulate engagement?

7. Is there anything else I neglected to ask?

Interview Guide

Third Group of Participants

This interview guide was meant to introduce topics for discussion, while encouraging dialogue

around whether or not visual storytelling as a critical practice is transferable

Personal Background

Briefly, by way of introduction, *before* viewing the video

1. Why are you personally interested in helping find solutions to homelessness?

2. Where do you get most of your information about issues of homelessness?

For the discussion *after* viewing the video

1. What are the main takeaways for you, from seeing this video?

2. What was it about the visual method (rather than reading reports and viewing charts) specifically that helped you gain new insights?

3. How might this methodological approach provide opportunities in other areas of community need -- for healing and to stimulate engagement?

4. What are some of the possible challenges in taking up this methodology to initiate new paths to healing, and solutions?

5. What are you going to do with this information going forward?

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