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FINDINGS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF 'HOME':

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HOW HOMELESS PEOPLE
AND DISPLACED PERSONS NEGOTIATE THE WORD 'HOME'

By

Abby F. Perez

BA, University of Louisville, 2013

MA, Morehead State University, 2016

A Dissertation

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 21, 2022

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother,

Candace Denise Brown,

Who taught me the value of 'home' and the importance of family.

You are my sunshine, always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my friend, my professor, and the chair of this dissertation, Dr. Lisa Björkman. Even continents apart, she has been ever-present, providing not only guidance for this research but loving words and support throughout the tragedies I have endured in the past few years. I am forever appreciative of her for continuously motivating me during those tough times and having constant faith in my successes. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. David Imbroscio, Dr. Margath Walker, and Dr. Susan Buchino for their support during this journey. I am extremely grateful for each one of you.

Second, I would like to thank my ethnography writing group members, Drew Tucker, Aneri Taskar, Kelsey Combs, and Capucine Tournilhac, who provided monthly advice and feedback on my chapters for this research. I am forever thankful for their friendship and support.

Last, I would like to thank my family and friends for who without their unwavering support and love I would be completely lost. Tyler, you are my rock

and my biggest fan, and I couldn't have made it without you. Livy, my sister, I love you to the ends of the earth, to infinity and beyond, times a million.

To my two sisters I lost recently, Heather and Ashley, I DID IT! I am not sure where you are, but I know you are dancing and singing my praises wherever that may be. I will never stop missing you, but I know you are proud.

ABSTRACT

FINDINGS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF ‘HOME’: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HOW HOMELESS PEOPLE AND DISPLACED PERSONS NEGOTIATE THE WORD ‘HOME’

Abby F. Perez
May 13, 2022

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of various meanings of the word ‘home’ and how the word ‘home’ is used by homeless, evicted, and displaced persons, and by the researcher of the study, to negotiate boundaries and relations of power to achieve goals, both moral and material.

Scholarly research on home in urban studies and sociology has produced many definitions and meanings of the word ‘home’ and concepts of home, but often neglects to consider the way the word itself is experienced, personally, by individuals and how to make sense of the way these personal experiences relate to official meanings of ‘home’. This dissertation takes the question of this relationship as a point of departure: while the word ‘home’ and concepts of home are certainly bound to official meanings of the word, this ethnography demonstrates how ‘home’ is a personal experience, one that is related to societal and cultural meanings, but also bound to individual experiences. The word ‘home’

and concepts of home are linked to memories, and memories are linked to connections we have with both emotions and physical places.

In chapter four, I draw on the tools and techniques of autoethnography to write analytically about memories from my past, memories of “home”, and methodologically to connect that analysis to my own experiences of “home” and how I negotiate the meaning of the word “home.” As a person who identifies with people who also seemed to me to be without a “home,” writing about my own life experiences with ‘home’ can produce new questions and offer new insights about broader social and cultural phenomena.

In chapter five, I show how the ‘homeless’ conceptualize the word ‘home’ which, in turn, shows how personal experiences of ‘home’ are bound up with a person’s particular experience of ‘home.’ This chapter also examines the politics surrounding public and private spaces as they relate to the homeless and shows how the ‘street homeless’ negotiate their ways through various obstacles to their livelihood. The research for this chapter was ethnographically conducted within several homeless camps throughout the city of Louisville and two prominent shelters. Much of this research was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and after mandated closures. In this chapter, I uncover several themes that show how ‘homeless’ peoples’ understandings of the words ‘home’ and ‘homeless’ often contradict institutionalized meanings and values of these words.

Chapter six employs Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) theory of access approach to studying mechanism by means of access to housing to understand the multiple

mechanism at play within pandemic politics, mechanisms not limited to property alone. Using the theory of access approach, this chapter examines how other mechanisms of access, such as access to technology, capital, labor and labor opportunities, knowledge, and social identity and relations also affected the ability or inability for low-income renters facing eviction to remain in their residences during the pandemic. The stories presented in this chapter show how people facing eviction navigated their way through pandemic politics to secure their housing needs, or not.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION NEGOTIATING THE WORD 'HOME'

Home is a notion that only nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend – Wallace Stegner, 1971



A TENT WITH HINGES

At 5 pm on a miserably sticky, hot summer day, I meet Donna, a member of the a local homeless outreach group at Camp Mercer, a homeless camp in downtown Louisville. Donna and I meet under the bypass in a neglected, pavement cracked parking lot littered with loose gravel, glass, and old soda cans. We make small talk as we communicate our plan for the evening (*“We’ll hit Mercer first, then 5th and M, Wayside, and then the smaller camps”*), sorting through cardboard boxes of clothes and blankets, organizing the brown paper lunch bags and cases of water provided by various donators. After our plan is decided, we get back in our vehicles and make our way towards the camp. The large camp is methodically concealed by a small urban tree forest, parallel to the Louisville Loop, a path used by walkers, runners, and bikers. Tires crunching gravel, I attempt to avoid the pothole covered path towards the camp created by numerous outreach workers, weather, and time. In a few, short moments of exiting our vehicles, we are surrounded by friends and acquaintances, various campers’ pets, and showered with ‘hellos’ and ‘how are yous’ and ‘did you hear about so and so.’ While Donna begins unloading supplies, I survey the camp for anything new, something I may have missed on my last trip, a puzzle perhaps. I notice one tent has a small, metal folding table in front of it with a vase and some flowers, a small, tattered rug at the door, and a woman sitting in a plastic chair smoking a cigarette and surveying the other campers. Before I have time to think more on this, Donna is beckoning me to follow her to the back of the camp where a few people isolate from the larger camp. Dodging broken glass, more potholes, and random patches of tall weeds, we round a corner and enter ‘the backside’ as the locals like to call it. The

backside is home to a small group of people who, Donna tells me, prefer to stay away from the bustle of the larger camp, who refrain from drinking and drugs, and look out for one another. There is not a soul in sight until Donna shouts, “we’re here,” and a small, white beagle mix exits a tent, followed by a man I presume to be its owner. Shortly later, all the backside campers, six in total, are outside welcoming us. Donna is the unofficial spokesperson for the outreach team, and while she converses and catches up on the news and gossip, I begin handing out water and sack lunches. A train slowly chugs along a few hundred feet away, the sun slowly sinks, cars are roaring by above on the bypass, the humidity still oppressive, and the group of homeless campers take seats around a burnt-out fire pit to eat their dinners. I take a seat on an upturned plastic bucket and Tony, one of the backside campers, offers me a cigarette to which I reply, “I have my own, thanks though.” I light one and puff and listen while Donna recalls a night a few weeks ago where she had to administer Narcan, an emergency medication used to treat a narcotic overdose, to someone in another camp.

While listening, I notice something unnoticed before; something so intriguing I am unable to focus on the train chugging and the cars roaring, and I almost forget to wipe a bead of sweat before it rolls into my eye. Hinges...there are hinges on the door of that tent, real, metal hinges. The tent is fashioned from several large brown and blue tarps, secured to the ground by mounds of loose rock, and while I had noticed the battered, wooden door before, I had never noticed the hinges. Not only hinges, but the door also has a makeshift lock on it, a cord that loops through a hole where the doorknob would go, drawn tight inside the tent. An American flag, attached to a tree, flutters next to the door, a bright, red grill sits waiting for its next cookout, and next to it a tub full of clothes

soaking in water while another set of clothes hangs above drying. This does not look like a temporary camp, a place to be packed up and away on a whim: this looks to me like “a home”: there’s safety and security with the wooden door, lock, and hinges; the comfort of being able to have clean, dry clothes; the stability and permanency of a grill and a flag secured to a post. This site fits, in other words, my default idea of ‘home’: a physical structure that provided stability, security, permanency, safety, familiarity. This was also the idea of ‘home,’ I realized, that informs much scholarly research and writing. But this hinge-door-lock arrangement destabilized my go-to notion of ‘home’ – i.e., the idea that a structure’s material form served straightforwardly functional purposes (security, stability, and so on): first, anyone could lift a flap of the tent and crawl inside, which is to say, the hinge-door-lock provided no clear ‘security’ from intrusion; and second, the tarpaulin walls and roof (not to mention the structure’s legally precarious location on public land) belied any notion that this was a ‘permanent’ structure. So, if the hinge-door-lock combination wasn’t about either safety or permanence, what was it for? What do the hinges mean and to whom? What was the tent resident trying to achieve or signal with those hinges? Further, what makes this tent with its hinges and flag different from my own ‘home’?

HOME AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I began researching concepts of the word home, eviction, homelessness, and displacement long before the global pandemic profoundly impacted life as we knew it. Pre-pandemic, I sought to explore homelessness using ethnographic methods; why some resist traditional services, what does “house” mean in terms of housing the homeless,

what does “home” mean to different individuals? I would study concepts of ‘home’ as it relates to private and public property regimes in the city of Louisville to understand how normative ideals of property ownership and liberty contribute to the criminalization of the homeless. However, the pandemic hit, and everything changed. Schools went virtual, we were told to stay home unless absolutely necessary. It was imperative that we stay ‘home’ and ‘shelter in place.’ How could I *do* an ethnography if I could no longer observe my research subjects in their homes on the streets? If I am unable to talk to them, observe them in person, how would I write an ethnography? Can an ethnography be digital, using only virtual meetings, texts, phone calls? What does virtual ethnography look like? I mused over these questions for weeks while adjusting to life in a pandemic; I puzzled them out. I researched ethnographies that employ digital resourcefulness, I sought guidance from my advisor and spoke with others attempting to navigate the field as a researcher in a pandemic.

Then, tragedy halted my research. After a year-long battle with cancer, my sister passed away in her ‘home’ two months after the pandemic reached our city. After sheltering in place, only going out for essentials, not seeing family in person for weeks, I was compelled to leave the safety of my house to be with my family and my sister at her ‘home’ during her final days. For weeks, my research froze. Just when I was finally able to open my laptop, start reaching out to research subjects again, tragedy struck our family once again. My eldest sister passed away suddenly at her home from a heart attack. At that point, I had no idea if I would ever finish my research, my doctorate, or how I would be able to continue living a normal life again. All seemed hopeless.

And then, a few weeks later, I started journaling. While journaling, ideas and memories of ‘home’ continuously emerged in my jottings. Journaling led to a retrospective study of ‘home’ and displacement throughout my own life. Losing a parent as a young child, living with various relatives for years while my mother was incarcerated, rediscovering and learning to live with a mother after she was released, and then losing her to cancer when I was in high school. After which, I spent years trying to figure out my ‘home’ in the world, to figure out who I was without her, to reconfigure a meaning of ‘home’ without my mother. Writing about my own experiences led me to the realization that after all this research and studying others, homelessness, and displacement, I identified with people who also seemed to me to be without a “home” – or at least without a “home” that was legible to societal norms. I too have been displaced; I too have lost (and regained) my sense of ‘home’ time and time again. I wondered, could this be a part of my research? Could what I have experienced personally contribute to literature on homelessness and displacement? Scholarly? Ethnographically? I then discovered that autoethnography would be a central part of my method and methodology. Because from the pandemic-season losses, a new insight and question had come into view: what does home mean to *me*? How can my ideas of home help others? How can their ideas of home help me and others? Further, how do crises create new meanings of home, homelessness, dispossession, and displacement?

WHY AN INTERPRETIVIST ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

This dissertation uses ethnographic methods and methodologies to research discourses and practices of “home” in Louisville, Kentucky. I research how the word ‘home’ is used by “homeless” and other displaced persons, and by the researcher of the study (i.e., by me), to negotiate boundaries and relations of power and to pursue goals, both personal and political, moral and material. The first chapter of this dissertation is autoethnographic, in which I write retrospectively about personal histories that derive from my own search for ‘home.’

Why is ethnography the best approach to this research? During my coursework, I continued volunteering outreach to the homeless community. Each night I spent canvassing the streets with our team, I became more intrigued by their plight, and questions continued to build in my mind: do they really want to be out here, why don’t they stay in the shelters, do they consider themselves a community, are they actively looking for ‘home’ or have they already made one? Do they consider themselves homeless in the sense that they do not have ‘homes’ in the emotional, social, and psychological sense of the word, or do they consider homelessness to mean without a fixed, regular residence in a building with four walls, electricity, and running water? How do homeless people, in the generalized use of the word, negotiate meanings of words such as ‘home’ and ‘house’ and ‘homelessness’?

In a course on ethnography, one of our first assignments was to access a site of interest and produce fieldnotes from the fieldwork conducted. I quickly realized I had been performing fieldwork for years without producing physical fieldnotes. The

fieldnotes produced from my first ethnographically mindful fieldwork led to puzzles and questions that natural science, or positivist methodology, would be incapable of answering: “how do persons categorized and treated as “homeless” make sense – and socially negotiate – the meaning of the word home.” Positivism follows that the researcher, and the object of study are two separate, independent things and that the foundation of human knowledge is produced from an objective, independent reality from the human experience (Weber, 2004). Interpretivist ethnography, on the other hand, would allow me to explore how the object of study (the idea of ‘home’) and my own work of sense-making are inextricably bound together, both subjectively and objectively: subjectively in the way people reflect “perceptions about the meaning of the world,” and objectively in the way we “constantly negotiate this meaning with others with whom we interact” (Weber, 2004, pg. v). Positivist methodology would be unable to answer my question, “how do homeless persons socially negotiate the meaning of the word home” because the natural sciences, statistical analysis, and generalized data collection cannot produce socially constructed knowledge of the lived experience. Further, positivist ontologies do not account for how “everyday action” can play a valuable role in constructing and deconstructing social and urban systems (Mjøset, 2001, pg. 15645).

An interpretivist ethnographic approach can provide answers to questions of the lived experience, why people do what they do and how they make sense of their actions. Ethnography requires a commitment to “chronicle aspects of lived experience and to place that experience in conversation with prevailing scholarly themes, problems, and concepts” through rigorous participant-observation in certain social activities of a studied community (Wedeen, 2010, pg. 257). The best way to explore the puzzles I found during

my fieldwork and to answer the questions these puzzles produced is through interpretivist ethnography.

OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD HOME

With this research, I ethnographically examine what the word home *does*, and I show how personal experiences of ‘home’ are bound up with a person’s particular experience of ‘home.’ But personal experiences of ‘home’ are also bound to multiple, contradictory meanings of ‘home,’ official meanings, legal and culturally valorized meanings. To understand how “the homeless” conceptualize home, it is important to address the various ways that ‘home’ is conceptualized, both in scholarly literature and in public discourse. This conceptual elucidation allows for an investigation, as social science methodologist Fred Schaffer (2016) writes, of “the way the social world is built up linguistically,” in understanding the meaning and use of concepts in social reality (pg. 7).

ELUCIDATING CONCEPTS

Schiff (2003) argues that there is a power in defining terms, that conceptualizing words, or our own definitions, assists with determining what “we can find and understand” through research, as well as in our everyday lives (pg. 493). Definitions, while seemingly obscured in the background, can significantly shape our lives, as well as social and public policies.

Geertz (1983) makes a distinction between experience-near and experience-distant concepts to show how anthropologists and ethnographers “grasp” words for another people, how they use them and what they do when they use words. An experience-near concept is one that someone “might himself naturally use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others” (pg. 57). An experience-distant concept is used by specialists (ethnographers, scientists, analysts) to “forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims.” For Geertz, “love” is an experience-near concept while “social stratification” is an experience-distant concept. Geertz (1983) further explains that

“People use experience-near concepts spontaneously, unself-consciously, as it were colloquially; they do not, except fleetingly and on occasion, recognize that there are any concepts involved at all. That is what experience-near means—that ideas and the realities they inform are naturally and indissolubly bound up together” (pg. 58).

The trick to analyzing concepts used by another people is to understand how the other people use experience-near concepts “well enough to place them in illuminating connection with experience-distant concepts” (pg. 58).

According to Schaffer (2016), the goal of the interpretivist is not to “reconstruct” words and concepts, but to “elucidate” them. He calls the positivist approach to concepts “reconstruction” and the interpretivist approach “elucidation.” He writes that positivists “reconstruct everyday words to meet their research needs” and to eliminate ambiguity and vagueness, but they do not usually form new concepts but rather, refashion existing

terms (pg. 5). Interpretivists, on the other hand, have an understanding that “social reality cannot be understood apart from the language people use to operate in it,” and their goal is to explain the meanings and use of concepts “in lived practices, not to fashion precise conceptual tools” to meet a researcher’s needs; he calls this approach elucidation (pg. 7). Typically, interpretivists study experience-near concepts used by people not to understand how *individuals* make use of concepts, but how concepts are *shared* by a social reality (pg. 6). Because experience-near concepts are essential to how the social world operates, it is necessary to take concepts “as objects of study in their own right” to “shed light on how shared understandings are created, reproduced, imposed, disputed, and changed,” and to understand how “social actors deploy concepts to pursue their goals” (pg. 6-7). In what Schaffer (2016) calls “the politics of concept use,” he explains how social actors use concepts to pursue goals, to “promote interest, right wrongs, affirm power or to challenge it...shape and wield existing concepts” to achieve their goals (pg. 9). What do people *do* when they use a word; what is the goal they wish to achieve when they use the word ‘home’, for instance?

DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD ‘HOME’ AND THEIR CONTRADICTIONS

The word home often symbolizes freedom, choice, and power; it can be a physical place that shapes one’s identity, a reflection of a person’s “inner” being, where a person is able to act as they please without the interference of others (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 568). Notions of home and identity, where identity is formed in the childhood home or at home in one place/country, have been challenged in scholarly literature (Horwitz and Tognoli, 1982; Vasta, 2017; Ebert, 2017). Constructing notions of home and identity and the

experience of this construction can occur at different times in a person's life and in various geographical places.

Horwitz & Tognoli (1982) argue that concepts of home “fit differently at different times” in a person's life (pg. 335). In their study of the role of home in adult development, they find a distinct difference in the way their participants viewed concepts of house and home, finding that “home is a term used to link a state of being and a sense of self with a place, while a house (or apartment) refers to a dwelling unrelated to this experience of self or inner movement (pg. 340). Notions of home and relations to identity do not have to be experienced inside a dwelling but can also be formed outside of the home setting at work, with friends, or groups with a common purpose or goal.

Notions of home and identity have been discussed in relation to migration and displacement. Vasta (2017) explores how the experience of constructing home by migrants, arguing that for the “migrant stranger at home,” the idea of home “becomes an ambiguous space” where the migrant is “both insider and outsider” (pg. 42). In this “hybrid” status, “migrants are able to actively construct ‘home’ from various vantage points and practice both affinities and differences with the cultural others surrounding them.”

Ebert (2017) argues that the terms home and identity “carry shared normative meanings referring to, for example, places, languages, families or ancestry” and are “a vital part of what we call the lifeworld” (pg. 21). But in modern society, “we can ‘be’ or ‘are’ at home in many lifeworlds.” For instance, we can speak multiple languages and we work at different places throughout our lives; we travel, and we move to different cities and countries. What remains constant, Ebert argues, is not our physical place in the

world, but our “unique individual experiences” of struggles to create a sense of identity that occurs in multiple lifeworlds.

Home has often been defined as a safe place, a haven, a refuge from the outside meaning it is a place inside somewhere (Altman and Werner, 1985; Hochschild, 1997; Wardhaugh, 1999). Following this ideal of home, a distinction between public and private space is often made; ‘home’ is a private space “often familial realm clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance” (Mallett, 2004, pg. 70). The private home space offers freedom, security, and safety (Dovey, 1985), and a place to be oneself with kin, while the public sphere is where we work and with non-kin relationships (Mallett, 2004).

However, there are contradictions to the idea of home as a private sphere distinct from the public and a place “free from surveillance and external role expectations” (Mallett, 2004, pg. 71). Due to technological advances, and especially due to the global pandemic, people are able to work from ‘home’, bringing work into their ‘home’ life. People also are working outside of the home more and spending less time at home, making work life and social relationships created there “home.” This work-life/home-life is a balancing act that causes contradictions and challenges to the ideal of home as a space distinct from private space (Lloyda and Vasta, 2017).

For “homeless” people, home does not mean either inside or outside, and they are not free from public scrutiny and surveillance. However, my research demonstrates how people treated and/or defined as “homeless” nonetheless make ‘homes.’ Their ‘homes’ may contradict ideas of ‘home’ as a safe place or refuge, yet they still feel their homes are their havens. Researchers have argued that the difference between the concepts “house”

and “home” is the emotional relationship a person has with a particular place; the psychological significance of a place is what distinguishes the home from house (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1980; Horwitz & Tognoli, 1982; Case, 1993; Moore, 2000). Hayward (1977) concludes that, "although 'home' is objectified as an environment, a dwelling, a physical structure, it is concluded that a person's concept of 'home' is better understood as a relationship to such an environment, rather than the environment itself” (pg. 13).

The Theory of Place Attachment studies “the affective components of the attachment bond with places” (Moore, 2000, pg. 210; see also Schumaker & Taylor, 1983). This theory states that “people develop affective bonds with places, that are in part to do with satisfaction, but also to do with evaluation, and more identity related aspects as well as objective criteria such as length of stay, involvement in the local area, social networks etc.” (Moore, 2000, pg. 210). Instead of focusing on the bonds people create with places of home, theorists of place attachment emphasize the processes by which people develop relationships with places of home.

Home has been discussed in relation to place and memory (Massey, 1992; Hook, 1991, Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Saunders, 1989). Massey (1992) writes that there is “no single simple authenticity” of place or home that can be explained now or in the past (pg. 13). The boundaries of the identifies of place and home are “inevitably unfixed” and constantly changing “because of the continual production of further social effects.” However, Massey explains, “this does not mean that the past is irrelevant” to place (pg. 14); the past and our memories of place and home are constantly being produced and transformed to “illuminate and transform the present” (Hooks, 1991, pg. 147). Place and home are often constituted by memories and a “nostalgic longing for something to be as

it was in an idealized past” (Mallett, 2004, pg. 70); but place and home are also constituted by social relations and individual constructions of the concepts that continuously change over the course of a life, so place and home are never fixed to the past (Mallett, 2004; Somerville, 1997).

What constitutes ‘home’ and how people make ‘home’ has been critically analyzed as rates of geographical mobility increases and local contexts constantly change. Sociologists and anthropologists ask if ‘home’ can be placed at all or is the sense of home something that is “practiced as a process rather than a stable thing” (Lloyd and Vasta, 2017, pg. 4). ‘Home’ is seen as “a complex interactional achievement between persons, spaces, and things that requires us to constantly ‘make homes’ rather than ever finally ‘be at home’” (pg. 5).

Home is spoken of as a place of control, where we have rhythms and routines, and sets of everyday practices that make home a process (Easthope, 2004; O’Mahony, 2013). Mary Douglas (1991) describes her classic description of home as a place of control and where we store meaningful objects and practice everyday activities in particular spaces. Her description is worth quoting in length:

Home is "here," or it is "not here." The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?" It is always a localizable idea. Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat, or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control. Having shelter is not having a home, nor is having a house, nor is home the same

as household. For a home neither the space nor its appurtenances have to be fixed, but there has to be something regular about the appearance and reappearance of its furnishings (pg. 289).

Is this the kind of control sought after by the hinge-door-lock apparatus in the vignette introduced at the beginning? Do the hinges and lock signify regularity and control over a space in attempts to create 'home'?

Veness (1993), a homeless advocate and researcher, agrees that habits and routine are important to home. Homeless people adopt new habits in their untraditional habitats to avoid issues with law enforcement and gain access to assistance, but also resume old habits to "uphold a sense of self." However, she disagrees that home is a fixed place. She quotes one homeless man who says that home "is not *where* you live, but *how* you live," indicating that "space does not dictate whether a person is homed" (pg. 324). Again, home is not a fixed place.

Home has often been defined as a place of family relationships (Finch and Hayes, 1994; Jones, 2000; Bowlby et. al., 1997; Mallett, 2004); so often that "ideas about home life and the terms family and home are used virtually interchangeably" (Jones, 2000, pg. 184). Traditionalists, those observing outdated ideas of family and home, argue that without family, a house cannot be a home (Gillman, 1980; Leonard, 1980). Family is defined here as a domestic idyll, nuclear family; a heterosexual couple and their children, and the home is the birth family dwelling and the origin of the family (Mallett, 2004). It is the place where children are born and raised, where they are nurtured, and it is the place they leave when they become adults (Bowlby et. al., 1997; Jones, 2000). For this

reason, our home or birth dwelling remains a part of us for the rest of our lives (Mallett, 2004).

But these traditionalist ideas of home are often contested (Allan and Crow, 1989; Somerville, 1992; Jones, 1995). The nuclear family is “irrelevant in contemporary Western societies” where a family does not have to consist of a heterosexual couple and their children; it can also include extended family, friends, and pets (Saunders, 1989, pg. 180). Critics argue that traditionalists fail to acknowledge that home is often not a domestic idyll but a site of struggle for equality and power relationships (Somerville, 1992). In some instances, home is not a site of nurture and security, but a place of abuse, family breakdown, and abandonment (Jones, 1995, 2005). Traditionalist ideas of home are highly contradictory for homeless people – those officially categorized as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act). For many homeless people I encountered on the streets and in shelters, they have made family with other homeless people and with outreach workers who have become a daily presence in their lives. For some, the outreach workers are the only people who have ever cared for them or shown them any sort of love that resembles the love traditionally spoken of within families.

Home can refer to a country or a birthplace, “happiness, belonging, a process of self-fulfillment, death, the end of life’s journey” (Moore, 200, pg. 208). Home often refers to a place of self-identity, a place seen as a “symbol of the self” (Moore, 2000, pg. 210). Theorists of Place Identity study the relationship between people and places, suggesting that the bonds created between people, or groups of people, and particular places can produce a sense of belonging and contributes to self-identity (Giuliani &

Feldman, 1993; Proshansky. 1978). Putnam and Newton (1990) determine through research that the main themes associated with the meaning of home are privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, and control. Similarly, Somerville (1992) finds home associated with seven dimensional meanings: shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode, and paradise (the ideal).

Home can also suggest a commodity, “an object of monetary value that reflects the owner’s value,” but it can also refer to a conceptualized space of emotions, used to signify relationships between persons or groups (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 568). Home, in this sense, refers not to the creation of one’s identity but, rather, refers to an “institution that shapes the identities of those within it” (pg. 568). Kozoll et. al (2003) explore the “homed-homeless dichotomy” which is “the association of ‘home’ with a house and ‘homeless as its lack,” arguing that it “is supported by the white, suburban, middle-class worldview that many of us assume in which home is a commodity rather than a relationship,” a view that shapes policies surrounding homelessness in the U.S. (pg. 574). They argue that this view of the home as a commodity is historically rooted in social and public policy, in educational research, and in institutional assumptions that make it difficult for Americans to think any other way. Through this homed-homeless dichotomy, “owning a home is a measure of success,” and the construction of home as a physical commodity signifies relationships between “people, power, family, and values” (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 574). One problem with this institutional assumption, the authors confer, is that it does not account for the various images of ‘home’ and fails to recognize that the sense of power assumed to be connected to the physical home can also be found in relationships between people, within families.

WHY THESE DEFINITIONS ARE PUZZLING

Taking these official definitions of home in mind, “homeless” would mean the lack of self-identity and the lack of security, family, intimacy, comfort, and control. According to these definitions, homeless would mean the absence of shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode, and paradise. But both scholarly research and official policy documents on “homelessness” define and use the word differently. The National Coalition for the Homeless defines a “homeless person” as one who has “no residence, owned, leased, or shared” and where they can ‘live safely, healthfully, and legally both night and day and in which they can meet their social and basic needs in privacy and with dignity” (Veness, 1993, pg. 321). So, “the homeless” are here defined as people without physical housing and property ownership, legal rights, and basic needs. Scholarly research also defines “the homeless” as the deserving and undeserving poor, those who are deemed worthy of aid and those who are not (Wagner, 2012; Neale, 1997;), vulnerable (Grigsby, 1990, Burt, 1992), alcoholics, drug addicts, and felons (Rossi, 1989; Stein and Gelberg, 1995), mentally ill and disabled (Rowe et. al., 2001; Hopper et. al., 1997), a public safety concern (Roman and Travis, 2006; Amster, 2003; Hodgetts et. al., 2008), visible and invisible (Blau, 1992; Jencks, 1994), and they are “a problem” (Stern, 1984; Kozol, 1988; Wolch et. al., 1988; Wright, 1989; Kusmer, 2002; Lee et. al., 2010). Some scholarly research simply defines “the homeless” tautologically, as being “without a home” (Watson, 1984; Elliott and Krivo, 1991; May, 2000).

But this is not what my ethnographic research has found on the streets, in the camps, and in “homeless” shelters. Some of the people I met do have security, family, intimacy, comfort, and control; they do have shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode.

They live safely and healthfully with privacy and dignity. Most importantly, by their own reckoning, they have “homes.” They have self-identity and a sense of belonging; they have memories of other “homes” and of what “home” has meant to them in the past and present, and often have sophisticated awareness of how those meanings have changed over time, in conjunction with their own changing circumstances and self-understandings.

Scholarly research on home in urban studies and sociology has produced many definitions and meanings of the word ‘home’ and concepts of home, but often neglects to consider the way the word itself is experienced, personally, by individuals and how to make sense of the way these personal experiences relate to official meanings of ‘home’. This dissertation takes the question of this relationship as a point of departure: while the word ‘home’ and concepts of home are certainly bound to official meanings of the word, this ethnography demonstrates how ‘home’ is a personal experience, one that is related to societal and cultural meanings, but also bound to individual experiences. The word ‘home’ and concepts of home are linked to memories, and memories are linked to connections we have with both emotions and physical places. In my own experience, ‘home’ has been a physical place, but the deaths of my sisters and the grief have bound my conceptualizations of ‘home’ to the new relationships formed with my family in the aftermath of my sisters’ passings. Similarly, each person I met on this journey to uncover meanings of ‘home’ have their own personal experiences of what ‘home’ means to them. One might be “homeless,” as the word is officially defined, but the relationship between that policy/policing category and people’s affective experiences of “home” is not given by institutionalized meanings and values ascribed to the word. Practices of homemaking

is a way of articulating new forms of value for the word 'home' and the emotionally meanings ascribed to the word.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This dissertation uses ethnographic methods and methodologies to research discourses and practices of the word “home” to show how the word is bound to official, societal, and cultural meanings of the word but most importantly, how the word is bound to personal experiences of meanings of the word. This chapter provides a review of the terms used in this dissertation and the conceptual framework that provides the foundation for this research. This research is founded on theoretical conversations on the word ‘home’, homelessness, eviction, and displacement. In the first section of this review, I examine ‘home’ and homelessness through three theoretical conversations. In the second section, I provide a brief overview of conversations on the processes and impact of eviction and displacement, particularly on low-income renters. This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and all subjects in this study were significantly impacted by its consequences; therefore, an introduction to the protections provided for renters during the pandemic is provided. A background on the formal eviction process in Kentucky is also provided.

‘HOME’ AND HOMELESSNESS

Scholarly literature tends to explain homelessness through some combination of three theoretical conversations: those related to property and land ownership; those related to citizenship and belonging, and those related to changing regimes of accumulation held to characterize contemporary forms of urbanism. In what follows I will lay out the contours

of each of these three debates. The first section will explore the role of property rights as it relates to the homeless. This section will also explore conceptualizations of the terms 'home' and 'homeless'. The second section will focus on the relationship between a lack of property rights and a lack of freedom/liberty as it relates to the homeless. Jeremy Waldron, a leading scholar on the relationship between property and homelessness, will be given special attention in order to understand his connection between property, freedom, and public space. The third section of the will focus on ideas of citizenship as it relates to property, public space, and the homeless. The politics surrounding public and private spaces as they relate to the homeless will be explored in order to address several issues/questions, for instance, why are the homeless seen as lacking normal citizenship rights that most of us take for granted? What has led to this ideal, and what does it do the homeless individual? The fourth section will focus the current state of homeless management in the US, with a particular focus on the neoliberalist, revanchist/punitive approaches to homeless policy, as well as a focus on Compassion of Care agendas, rehabilitation, and coercive techniques to managing a population of the homeless that resists management.

PROPERTY AND CONCEPTS OF 'HOME' AND 'HOMELESS'

Essert (2016) writes "to understand homelessness, we need to understand property, and to understand property we need to understand homelessness" (266). While homelessness *is* a problem of the unequal distribution of resources, it is also a problem of property, the role of property rights in society. Blomley (2009) argues that "the plight of the homeless

is that they are in many ways thoroughly entangled with property, as well as excluded from its benefits” (pg. 581). Rather than thinking of the homeless as situated outside of property, “homelessness itself is caught up” in property (Blomley, 2009, pg. 581). Essert (2016) writes that “to be homeless is both to be subject to the property rights of others and to lack property rights of one’s own,” which means that the homeless are always being subjected to the rights of others, of property owners; they are always dependent on the rights of others, they are always unfree (Waldron, 1991; Essert, 2016). They have nowhere they are allowed to *be* and act on their own without the permission of someone else. Consequentially, the homeless are homeless because they are propertyless.

What is property? Property can be a general term used to explain the rules that govern who has access and control over things like land and natural resources, ideas and inventions, the manufacturing and production of goods (Waldron, 2004). But it is more than that. Krueckeberg (1995) writes that “property is not just the objects or possessions or capital in isolation, but a set of relationships between the owner of some thing and everyone else’s claims to that same thing” (pg. 307). Property can be representations of ourselves, our identities (Krueckeberg, 1995; Moore, 2000; Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995; Somerville, 1992; Sparks, 2012). Locke argued that material objects, such as property, can embody an individual’s identity (Christman, 1994; Schultz, 1992). Locke reasoned that:

Your first and foremost possession is your body. When you utilized that body in the form of labor and mix your labor with land and other materials, these things become entwined with yourself. Thus, the product of labor becomes your property by natural right as an extension of your liberty, social status, and personality. The

protection of that property, in the form of state-supported property rights, is a protection of one's liberty as well as a definition of the limitations of state intervention in personal affairs" (Krueckeberg, 1995, pg. 303-304)

Waldron (2004) argues that it is important to understand property by examining three definitions of the term: common/public property, collective property, and private property. Common property or public property is governed by a set of rules that allows all members of society to take advantage of the space (Waldron, 2004). Common land, such as parks, can be used by any citizen of a community for picnicking, recreation, etc. Any restrictions placed on a plot of public space is done so in order to ensure "fair access for all," and "to prevent anyone from using the common resource in a way that would preclude its use by others" (Waldron, 2004). Spaces like city streets and sidewalks, subways, and national parks are all considered common property. Collective property, on the other hand, is land with no private owner; instead, a community or group of people determines who land and resources will be used, based upon collective interest and decision-making (Waldron, 1991; 2004).

Waldron (1991; 2004) argues that private property is something different completely from common or collective property. In fact, there is a lack of consensus on an actual definition of the concept (Becker, 1977; Waldron, 1985; Ryan, 1986), with some going so far as to say it is impossible to define 'private property' without understanding the concept itself (Waldron, 1985). A general consensus of private property explains it as a view of ownership that is rooted in the conception of property which assumes that "one easily identifiable person having complete control over a well-

defined material sphere” (Hoffman, 2018). Waldron (2004) argues that private property is a system in which rules are governed and organized in a manner which assigns decisional authority to a particular individual (or individuals); this individual has complete control over the object in question. With this control, the person can do as they please with the object/property assigned.

However, displacement theorists argue that private property rights are not always so definite (Hern, 2017; Bhan, 2016; Ghertner, 2014). Natural disasters and housing insecurity in the form of urbanization, state-led construction, urban renewal and gentrification, and population growth can result in the involuntary displacement of homeowners from their homes and land (Lovering and Türkmen , 2011; LeVan and Olubowale, 2014; Smith, 1996). Under these circumstances, control over rights to property are separated from the original property owner and often, these rights are transferred to state or governmental bodies. From this perspective, Essert’s and Waldron’s theories of freedom and property rules as they apply to the homeless (“they are always dependent on the rights of others, they are always unfree”) can be applied to all property owners, particularly to other marginalized populations. For instance, homeowners living in or near prime real estate for urban renewal projects may be asked/pressured to vacate/sell their property by state or governmental officials, similar to the ways the homeless are often asked to vacate their own residences. In this sense, all citizens, regardless of property ownership, are dependent on the rights of others.

Above I refer to residences of the homeless, the places these individuals call their ‘home’. What is ‘home’ and what effect does this definition have on how people think about property and property regimes? Schiff (2003) argues that there is a power in

defining terms, that conceptualizing words, or our own definitions, assists with determining what “we can find and understand” through research, as well as in our everyday lives (pg. 493). Definitions, while seemingly obscured in the background, can significantly shape our lives, as well as social and public policies. Here, I will examine the words ‘home’ and ‘homeless’ to show how these definitions shape American conceptualizations of homeless.

The word ‘home’ is an integral part of one’s identity as a citizen of the U.S. (Somerville, 1992). The word home symbolizes freedom, choice, and power; it can be a physical place that shapes one’s identity, a reflection of a person’s “inner” being, where a person is able to act as they please without the interference of others (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 568). Home can refer to a country or a birthplace, “happiness, belonging, a process of self-fulfillment, death, the end of life’s journey” (Moore, 200, pg. 208). Home often refers to a place of self-identity, a place seen as a “symbol of the self” (Moore, 2000, pg. 210). Theorists of Place Identity study the relationship between people and places, suggesting that the bonds created between people, or groups of people, and particular places can produce a sense of belonging and contributes to self-identity (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Proshansky. 1978). Putnam and Newton (1990) determine through research that the main themes associated with the meaning of home are privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, and control. Similarly, Somerville (1992) finds home associated with seven dimensional meanings: shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and paradise (the ideal).

Home can also suggest a commodity, “an object of monetary value that reflects the owner’s value,” but it can also refer to a conceptualized space of emotions, used to

signify particular relationships between persons or groups (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 568). Home, in this sense, refers not to the creation of one's identity but, rather, refers to an "institution that shapes the identities of those within it" (pg. 568). Kozoll et. al (2003) explore the homed-homeless dichotomy, one that "is supported by the white, suburban, middle-class worldview that many of us assume in which home is a commodity rather than a relationship," a view that shapes policies surrounding homelessness in the U.S. (pg. 574). They argue that this view of the home as a commodity is historically rooted in social and public policy, in educational research, and in institutional assumptions that make it difficult for Americans to think any other way. Through this homed-homeless dichotomy, "owning a home is a measure of success," and the construction of home as a physical commodity signifies relationships between "people, power, family, and values" (Kozoll et. al., 2003, pg. 574). One problem with this institutional assumption, the authors confer, is that it does not account for the various images of 'home' and fails to recognize that the sense of power assumed to be connected to the physical home can also be found in relationships between people, within families.

A failure to consider the various conceptualizations of 'home' and 'homeless' are consequential to the creation and implementation of homeless policies in the U.S. Attempts to explain homelessness often fail to recognize the "multidimensional complexity" of the terms, instead, accepting as "fact" the "official or commonsense definitions" that refer to lack of affordable or adequate housing (Somerville, 1992, pg. 531). Official definitions often refer to a breakdown of family life or individual inadequacies (Drake, 1989), flaws in the housing market (Minford et. al., 1987), or a failure of both the market and the state (Clapham et. al., 1990) to "meet the needs of

disadvantaged households” (Somerville, pg. 531). Somerville (1992) argues that these definitions are “too narrow,” and “must be placed in the broader contexts both of poverty and the housing system,” as well as in the context of the current political and economic system (pg. 531). The terms ‘home’ and ‘homeless’ must be explained in terms of broader social forces, how people live in the world, for instance, in terms of “social status, tenure, domestic relations of production and reproduction” and so (Somerville, pg. 535). The commonsense definitions most often used when explaining homelessness fail to consider the everyday lives of the homeless, their own meanings of home, and how various other social forces, such as social exclusion, stigmas, and discrimination intensify the experiences of and create further barriers for the homeless (De Venanzi, 2008; Wagner, 1993).

ACCESS (OR LACK OF) TO HOUSING, FREEDOM, AND THE HOMELESS

What is the connection between property (both private and public), freedom, and the homeless? This section of the review will focus on theories of freedom to understand how the actions of the homeless are governed by property rules and how their actions are always dependent on the rights of others.

Berlin (1958) examines two senses of liberty/freedom, positive and negative. Negative liberty is a type of freedom that refers to the capability of a person to “act unobstructed by others”; positive liberty is a type of freedom that refers to “being one’s own master,” the freedom “to be the instrument” of one’s own wishes, to depend on oneself rather than depending on any external forces” (Berlin, 1958, pgs. 155-160). The negative sense of

liberty is used to answer the question, “What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons,” while positive liberty answers the question, “what, or who, is the source of control or interference, that can determine someone to do, or be, one thing rather than another” (Berlin, 1958, pg. 155).

Skolnik (2018) argues that our current understanding of the relationship between access to housing and liberty is limited because examining this relationship through the lens of positive and negative liberty overlooks a third conception of liberty: the republican conception of liberty (pg. 236). Positive liberty is “the freedom to be and the freedom to act in ways that are consistent with human flourishing and self-government,” while negative liberty concerns itself with “freedom from obstructions or impediments by others” (Skolnik, 2018, pg. 232). The republican conception of liberty, most influentially explained by Philip Pettit (1997), on the other hand, interprets liberty or freedom as “non-domination,” implying that “others lack the unilateral power or capacity to interfere with an individual’s life actions,” i.e., non-domination is “a form of *secured* negative liberty” (Skolnik, 2018, pg. 236).

Pettit’s (1997) conception of liberty as non-domination encompasses the idea that of people “not living at the mercy of others...not subjected to another’s will,” and he argues that there can be interference with domination and domination *without* interference (pg. 547). Skolnik (2018) illustrates how people living precariously, doubling up with friends and families, or couch-surfing from place to place are subjected to domination without interference at the hands of those allowing the homeless individual a place to stay. A critical component of lacking access to housing is that those lacking

access “become increasingly vulnerable to others’ power and are subject to domination”; for example, the property owner can evict the homeless individual from their premises at any moment for any reason, so the homeless individual is constantly vulnerable to the threat of eviction (Skolnik, 2018, pg. 237).

Skolnik (2018) argues that homeless people experience a distinctive type of domination, one that exists because the state is able to more “justifiably regulate basic human acts on public property than on private property” in the name of public welfare, sanitation, and security (pg. 239). Private property owners are protected against the state regulation and policing of basic human acts, such as urinating, sleeping, and bathing, all of which homeless individuals must do in public spaces. Because the homeless lack access to housing and private property of their own, they are always subjected to domination by the state and private property owners (Skolnik, 2018, pg. 240).

Many homeless advocates and researchers turn to Jeremy Waldron when exploring ideas of freedom and liberal rights as they relate to property and the homeless. Waldron (1991) argues that there is a powerful and demeaning relationship between the homeless and the rules of private and public property. He writes, “everything that is done has to be done somewhere. No one is free to perform an action unless there is somewhere he is free to perform it” (pg. 296). A function of property rule is to determine who is allowed to be in particular space, as well as who is not allowed to be there. Waldron (1991) notes that under the concept of “being allowed” to be in a place, someone who is in a space where he is not allowed can be forcibly removed from that space, he can be charged with criminal activity, he may be dragged away by the police (pg. 297). “Someone who is allowed to be in a place is,” Waldron writes, “in a fairly straightforward sense, free to be

there. A person who is not allowed to be in a place is unfree to be there” (1991, pg. 302). However, when we think of freedom, we usually think of freedom to *do* something, an action; what is the connection, then, between the freedom to do something and the freedom to be somewhere? If someone has nowhere to go where they are free, are they still free agents?

Waldron (1991) writes that the homeless, while poor and lacking property rights, still have ideas and plans of their own; however, their ideas and plans differ from the property-owning individual who comes home every day to running water, a private bathroom, and a refrigerator full of groceries. Waldron writes:

When a person is needy, he does not cease to be preoccupied with freedom; rather, his preoccupation tends to focus on freedom to perform certain actions in particular. The freedom that means most to a person who is cold and wet is the freedom that consists in staying under whatever shelter he has found. The freedom that means most to someone who is exhausted is the freedom not to be prodded with a nightstick as he tries to catch a few hours sleep on a subway bench” (pg. 303)

The homeless still desire freedom, but a “series of fences” constantly stand in the way of their freedom to be and act *somewhere* (Waldron, pg. 302). For the homeless:

Their homelessness *consists* in unfreedom. Though it may not be anyone's fault that there is no place they can go without being dragged away, still their being removed from the places they are not allowed to be is itself a

derogation from their freedom, a derogation constituted by the deliberate human action of property-owners, security guards, and police officers” (pg. 306).

For the homeless, Waldron argues, there is nowhere to be free, nowhere to freely do the things that property-owning individuals take for granted, such as sleeping, urinating, or washing. One can argue that the homeless are able to perform these tasks inside homeless shelters; however, they are only allowed to do these things with the permission of others, by signing a form when they check, by obeying orders of staff (Essert, 2016; DeVerteuil, 2006; Kawash, 1998). Even so, most shelters are only open in the evenings and nights, which leaves the homeless without places to rest and urinate during the daytime. Waldron writes, “a person's freedom is his freedom to act in public, in places governed by common property rules. That is the difference between our freedom and the freedom of the homeless” (Waldron, 1991, pg. 301). With no home of their own, no private place to do personal, everyday necessary tasks, the homeless must perform these tasks in public spaces, where these tasks are prohibited. The homeless are, therefore, constantly being moved from place to place, being stopped from performing every day, necessary tasks, being faced with various ordinances and laws that prohibit them from performing various acts in public. So, what then? Where do they go when they need to bathe, urinate, rest their weary feet? They are denied use from public restrooms, denied sleeping in subways, on sidewalks, in libraries. For many homeless people, there seems to be no officially sanctioned place to *be*.

PUBLIC SPACE, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE HOMELESS

In this section, the politics surrounding public and private spaces as they relate to the homeless will be explored in order to understand how different types of urban space affect homeless individuals in different ways, as well as to understand how they negotiate their ways through various obstacles to their livelihood. Why are the homeless seen as lacking normal citizenship rights that most of us take for granted? What has led to this ideal, and what does it do the homeless individual? Roy (2003) writes:

The idea of citizenship is of course inextricably linked to the public domain—to what is considered to be the public interest as well as to a body of citizens conceived as public beneficiaries...in the American context, homelessness has been criminalized and institutionalized in the name of such a public interest and in the attempt to reclaim urban space for legitimate (propertied) citizens” (pg. 475).

Different types of urban space affect homeless individuals in different ways, forcing the homeless to negotiate and respond to different spaces as they encounter them. Duncan (1978) and others (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001) distinguish between two particular types of space in which the homeless must negotiate and weigh their options when entering: prime and marginal. Prime spaces are spaces in communities used by “domiciled citizens for residential, recreational, or navigational purposes; by entrepreneurs for commercial, financial reasons; and/or by politicians and their agents for political and symbolic purposes” (Snow and Mulcahy, pg. 157). In contrast, marginal space is “space that has

little if any use value to most residents; little if any current economic or exchange value to entrepreneurs, except perhaps as a tax write-off; and no immediate political or symbolic value” (pg. 157). Marginal space, due to their relative lack of value to members of a community, are most often abandoned spaces, ignored by most urban actors, and “marginalized—that is, to the powerless and property-less,” i.e., the homeless (Snow and Mulcahy, pg. 157). Vacant lots, homeless camps and shantytowns, skid rows, and abandoned buildings are examples of marginal spaces.

For the most part, the homeless are able to take advantage of these valueless, marginal spaces, avoiding harassment by authorities and other citizens. However, the problem arises that homeless individuals are unable to meet all of their essential needs unless they venture into prime urban spaces (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001). In prime spaces, the homeless can go on “foraging expeditions,” including lucrative panhandling opportunities, day labor jobs, and dumpsters to rummage through (Snow and Mulcahy, pg. 158). Other necessities also force the homeless to leave their marginal territories; most importantly to receive social services. Social service facilities are decentralized, scattered throughout cities, which means that the homeless spend much of their daytime traversing the city in search of services (Hennigan and Speer, 2019; Sparks, 2012; Snow and Mulcahy, 2001). Additionally, urban revitalization, including gentrification, is transforming many marginal spaces into prime spaces. Confluently, decentralization and urban revitalization projects are increasingly the visibility of the homeless to “domiciled citizens,” constituting “a rupture of the urban order that engenders a sense of unease and discomfort among many citizens” (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001, pg. 158). Consequentially, city officials and politicians are pressured by citizens to control this ‘rupture’ which most

often results in the criminalization and exclusion of the homeless from *all* public space through punitive, discriminatory measures (Blomley, 2009; DeVerteuil, 2006).

Kawash (1998) writes that “there is no place in the contemporary urban landscape for the homeless to *be*” (pg. 326). Although many current responses to homelessness promote an idea of ‘compassion’ towards managing individuals, actual communal responses seek not to eliminate homelessness for the good of the homeless person, but to eliminate the homeless themselves from public spaces (Mitchell, 1997; Kawash, 1998). The homeless are constantly being forced to move from place to place, they are constantly being excluded from spaces that are openly available to the public. The homeless “exist in a perpetual state of movement,” constantly being forced into motion, “not because they are going somewhere, but because they have nowhere to go” (Kawash, 1998, pg. 327). They are tolerated in public spaces so long as they keep moving.

The homeless are denied the use of public toilets, so they must do this business wherever and whenever they need to. The elimination of public toilets does not eliminate homelessness/the homeless, but it does something powerfully destructive to the image and ideal of the homeless. The elimination of public toilets further enforces a stereotype of the homeless person as one who lacks self-control, who is unable to control their bodily functions, and who, consequently, is shunned for not being an ideal citizen (Kawash, 1998, pg. 332). Removal of public toilets reinforces “the divide between public and homeless,” between domicile citizen and the “deviant other” (Kawash, 1998; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Waldron, 1991).

American cities have increasingly begun outlawing particular behaviors in public spaces that overwhelmingly affect the lives of the homeless, outlawing behaviors that the

homeless are forced to do in public for lack of any alternative. Anti-homeless laws are spreading through cities like wildfire. Panhandling, sleeping on sidewalks and in subways, urinating in public, begging for food, pushing shopping carts, all behaviors that are unacceptable if a city wants to attract tourists and new capital (Blomley, 2009; Hennigan and Speer, 2019). These behaviors are outlawed, legally, by erasing the only spaces the homeless have left, what Mitchell (1997) refers to as “the annihilation of space by law” (pg. 7). Mitchell (1997) writes:

[Cities] have turned to a legal remedy that seeks to cleanse the streets of those left behind by globalization and other secular changes in the economy by simply erasing the spaces in which they must live... by redefining what is acceptable behavior in public space, by in effect annihilating the spaces in which the homeless *must* live, these laws seek simply to annihilate homeless people themselves, all in the name of recreating the city as a playground for a seemingly global capital which is ever ready to do an even better job of the annihilation of space” (7)

Anti-homeless laws are changing our conceptions of citizenship towards one of exclusion (Mitchell, 1997), one that situates the homeless as “the constitutive outside of liberal citizenship” (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1513). The homeless, by ‘being out of place,’ threaten how citizens think of space, particularly public space, but more than that, the homeless threaten the “very ideals upon which we have constructed our rather fragile notions of legitimate citizenship” (Mitchell, 1997,

pg. 16). Mitchell (1997) notes that the American ideal of citizenship is built about notions of ‘volunteerism,’ in which private citizens are able to meet in public (as a public), but they are also able to withdrawal from the public into their private domains whenever they choose (pg. 16). Hence, the public domain is a voluntary domain, and the involuntary presence of the homeless is disturbing and unsettling to the private, voluntary citizens. So, what do cities do to fix this issue? They recreate what we know of ‘public’ by redefining its boundaries, redefining public as exclusionary, openly available only to those ‘legitimate’ private property-owning citizens, excluding the homeless from participating as citizens in these spaces. Private property, once again, “becomes a prerequisite of effective citizenship” (Mitchell, 1997, pg. 16-17).

Roy (2003) explores what she refers to as “the American paradigm of propertied citizenship,” a model that defines fundamentals of a model citizenship, this particular case referring to “the rights-based relationship between individual and state” (pg. 464). She studies this paradigm by “mapping its edges of exclusions: social groups that do not meet its propertied mandates and are therefore rendered marginal in the discourses and practices of citizenship,” and she uses the case of homelessness in American cities to do so (pg. 464). The concept of home as it relates to the American citizen and liberal rights is a “a site of identity formation, patriarchal self-governance, and social reproduction,” all of which are tied to this “legal concept of property” (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1513-14). The connection drawn here between citizenship and property contradicts liberal theory “in which the inalienability and universality of citizenship are bounded by their relationship

to property and labor” (Sparks, 2012, pg.1514; See also Blomley, 1998; Macpherson, 1964).

Taking cues from Locke’s vision of rationality and citizenship, Sparks (2012) writes:

while the right to property is universal to all, the possession and management of property becomes the visible manifestation of the owner’s rationality and industriousness. In this context, liberal citizenship reveals itself as ‘performative’ insofar as the ‘natural’ proclivities toward property and labor must be rendered visible to the state in ways that reveal the ‘rational’ character of the citizen (pg. 1514).

Sparks (2012) calls this, the “performative cartography of citizenship,” which essentially means that “one’s place, or lack thereof, signifies one’s fitness for liberal citizenship” (pg. 1514). The homeless person, placeless and, “therefore incapable of liberal autonomy,” becomes “citizenship’s other” (Sparks, 2012; Kawash, 1998; Arnold, 2004). The homeless person is defined by their divergence from the liberal norm. The “homeless body” (Kawash, 1998) is the “constitutive outside of “propertied citizenship, the alien figure that at once violates and thereby reinforces the norms of citizenship” (Roy, 2003, pg. 464).

AN AGE OF COMPASSION?

These normative conceptualizations of *home* (private space) and citizenship (public space) are bound up with a range of globally hegemonic policy prescriptions to combat issues of homelessness that are largely revanchist and punitive in character. Clintons' Continuum of Care attempted to shift the language of homeless policy from a revanchist perspective toward a language of compassion; however, this new approach to homeless policy still seeks to create a manageable subject, and approaches toward managing the homeless often result in either the institutionalization or the criminalization of the homeless. In this section, I explore revanchist and punitive response measures to issues of homelessness, neoliberalist responses, and the pros and cons of interventionist.

The arrival of post-Fordism, along with globalization, has led to a scaling-up of national governance and accumulation strategies to global institutions, while simultaneously scaling-down to localities through processes of devolution and localization (DeVerteuil, 2006; Hennigan and Speer, 2019). Local authorities have taken on responsibilities such as social service provision, welfare, and housing, and, faced with these new risks and responsibilities, are forced to seek market-based solutions to manage urban issues (Marcelli et. al., 2005). Localities are “further constrained by intense inter-urban competition that is now thoroughly globalized” (DeVerteuil, 2006, pg. 110). In order to compete for capital, cities “must create positive images for themselves, especially with regards to the all-important tourism and convention industry,” which means the visibility of the homeless on the streets is unacceptable for growth (DeVerteuil, 2006, pg. 110). In response, local authorities tend to conceal homelessness

from its streets, to conceal the obvious wealth disparities in its communities, and this desire to conceal has progressively led to a dramatic increase in punitive response tactics towards the homeless (DeVerteuil, 2006; Hennigan and Speer, 2019).

Neil Smith (1996) refers to these punitive responses as “revanchism,” and the cities in which these responses are manifested, “revanchist cities” (pg. 45). The concept of the revanchist city refers to the “vengeful and reactionary viciousness against various populations accused of ‘stealing’ the city from the white upper classes” (Smith, 1996, pg. 45). Revanchism manifests itself in cities as a way to “reclaim city spaces...through greater privatization and more aggressive policing (DeVerteuil, 2006, pg. 110; See also Duneier, 1999). Revanchist strategies are apparent in the increase of citations and arrests in cities of ‘quality of life’ crimes in public spaces, which includes panhandling, loitering, petty left, and impeding the flow of traffic on sidewalks (Kawash, 1998; See also my field notes).

In 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (renamed the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1999) was enacted, becoming the first federal legislation to directly address homelessness in the US (Pavlakakis and Duffield, 2017). This Act initiated a “roll-out” phase of neoliberalist homeless policies that produced the image of the homeless as “deviant and dependent citizens” that required control, management, and rehabilitation (Sparks, pg. 1515, 2012). This roll-out phase has transformed the geographies and spatial management of the homeless by emphasizing discipline, control, and management of homeless individuals and the space they are allowed to occupy (DeVerteuil, 2006).

Clinton's 'Continuum of Care' shifted responses to homelessness toward a "neoliberalization" of federal homeless policy by emphasizing market-based approaches to homeless policies (Sparks 2012). This shift resulted in the decentralization of homeless service provision from the federal to the local level, cost-cutting of services, and an increasing federal landscape of neoliberalist values (Bogard, 2003; Sparks, 2012). This new approach toward combatting homelessness "operated on the assumption that homelessness was the result of a personal failing," not caused by any economic crisis, and the solution required the homeless individual to be rehabilitated "to the norms of entrepreneurial individualism" (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1516).

In 2001, President Bush announced plan to "end chronic homeless by the year 2012" as part of his 'Compassion Agenda' which emphasizes enhanced shelters, as well as shelter requirements to include on-site counseling, job training, and drug/alcohol treatment (Sparks, 2012). One of the most distinctive aspects of the 'Compassion Agenda' included a "reorientation of funding and policies," most notable in the shifting "simple shelter provision to a competitive system based on outcomes" (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1517). Funding allocations were shifted to "a competitive and results-based system that seeks "visible, measurable, quantifiable change." This shift meant that organizations and governments must compete for funds by showing that they are taking a rehabilitative approach towards combatting homelessness by moving individuals from the streets into permanent housing (US Department of Health and Human Services 2003). In practice, this means increasing surveillance and spatial management of the homeless (Sparks, 2012). A new electronic system (Homeless Management of Information System) of monitoring the movements and progress of homeless individuals was created, not only to

track the progression of the homeless individual, but also to track and measure the effectiveness of programs offered (Fitch, 2010). When cities have to compete for funds, there is often an increase in anti-homeless and the criminalization of their activities in order to show state and federal governments that a community is really trying to manage their homeless issues.

This competition for funds and the neoliberalization of approaches to homeless policies also affects homeless individuals in a peculiar way. The decentralization of service responsibility from the state to the local level produces “neoliberal subjectivities” (Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard, 2007) in which “individuals are empowered to actively make self-interested choices and be responsible for their own well-being and risk management (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1513). Rather than focusing on emergency shelter services and provisions as policymakers did in the 80s, now the focus relies on rehabilitating the homeless through various treatment programs directed at producing ideal, law-abiding, property-owning citizens, independent of state and local welfare services. The neoliberalization of approaches to homeless policies tend to produce what Wacquant (1997) refers to as “pernicious premises,” where homelessness is characterized as “individual irresponsibility and social deviance, with causality resting squarely in behavioral choices such as alcohol and drug abuse” (Roy, 2003, pg. 471). Under these ‘pernicious premises,’ which continuously shapes current homeless policy, homeless bodies need to be managed, and this management comes in two forms: the criminalization of the homeless or the institutionalization of the homeless (Roy, 2003). So, while a “language of rehabilitation and treatment” appears to create a shift from revanchist/punitive measures towards compassionate approaches, this language conceals

the fact that a rehabilitative approach still seeks to produce “domicile homeless subjects” (Sparks, 2012, pg. 1520).

Since the early 90s, an interventionist approach to managing and removing homeless from the streets has become increasingly visible as cities compete to attract capital and tourism (Murray and Johnsen, 2011). This approach involves an increasing presence of local authorities in the involvement of managing homeless issues in cities. An interventionist approach includes hard enforcement measures, including the forcible removal of the homeless and their possessions, the demolition of homeless encampments, hosing off sidewalks (along with personal possessions) to prevent homeless from returning to particular spots, and an increasing administering of citations for disobeying anti-homeless laws and ordinances (Murray and Johnsen, 2011; Snow and Mulcahy, 2001; Mitchell, 1997).

While interventionist approaches explain the current landscape of homeless policy in the US at state and local levels, non-interventionist community hospitality initiatives have been increasing throughout communities in response to the authoritative and often hostile approaches to engaging the homeless. Non-interventionist community hospitality initiatives are mostly run by volunteers, of churches, schools, and various homeless outreach organizations that all run on donations from community members. These initiatives run adopt an approach of “make a cup of tea first, ask questions later” (Murray and Johnsen, 2011, pg. 327). They do not ask personal questions until they have gained an individual’s trust, and even then, the homeless individual speaks first. Little demands are placed on the homeless they service, with few rules; the exchange of names is not important. This type of approach is popular with the service-resistant because there is

little pressure to enroll in treatment programs or to move into a shelter, with hospitality and kindness being the main goals of the provider (Murray and Johnsen, 2011). It is also a popular approach with this particular group of homeless because it is completely voluntary, from both sides, which challenges the “us/them boundary” that some homeless individuals are weary of when interacting with institutional organizations (Cloke et. al, 2010, pg. 241).

Since 2009, efforts to reduce homelessness have amplified due to the increase in funds available to the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Shinn et. al, 2013). In the past, responses to homelessness focused on temporary fixes that sought to manage the crisis with costly emergency services rather than permanent solutions (Shinn et. al, 2013; Colburn, 2014). Shelters providing temporary relief are pertinent to our cities and assisting low-income and homeless persons; however, temporary fixes are not solutions to the homeless crisis. Federal and local governments, as well as private and public organizations, have begun focusing on more permanent solutions that seek to prevent homelessness rather than simply managing the problem, particularly through transitional living programs and Housing First initiatives that emphasize the importance of getting people permanent housing (Culhane, 2010). Rather than providing temporary shelter for homeless individuals and families, a Housing First approach responds by providing stable and affordable housing that does not discriminate or require lengthy applications and requirements. Through evidence-based analysis, “permanent supportive housing” is found to be the most beneficial means of achieving stable housing for individuals who experience chronic homelessness, particularly those with particular challenges to

obtaining housing, such as severe mental and health disabilities, as well as chronic substance abuse (USICH, 2010, pg. 15). People who have not lived in houses of their own for years are proving to be successful under HF programs, where their rents are subsidized, they receive case management to assist with any financial or health related issues, and they are provided with services that allow them to become self-sustainable and successful (Culhane, 2010).

While housing first approaches have shown positive results for some populations of homeless persons (Culhane, 2010; Pearson, et al., 2009; Padgett, et. al., 2011; Stahl et. al., 2016), this approach is not suited for all people experiencing homelessness. There is a population of homeless persons who not only refuse shelters, but also do not desire to live a ‘straight’ life in traditional housing. Some people remain homeless as a way to live alternatively, independent of a traditional lifestyle; this leaves policymakers, housing advocates, and outreach workers with an unanticipated predicament: how do we manage a population of street homeless that refuse traditional housing? Do they require management?

EVICTION IN AMERICA

A brief review of relevant scholarly literature on evictions in the U.S. is presented to provide the conceptual framework for which this study is founded upon. While no subject in this study was formally evicted from their residences due to the federal eviction moratorium, the threat of eviction was a continuous presence in some of their stories. Some of the subjects had experienced evictions in their past. It is commonly known that

homelessness is a cause of eviction (Crane and Warnes, 2000; Cusack and Montgomery, 2017; Merokee, 2011). Homeless reports from both New York City and Columbus, Ohio show that 33% of families in emergency shelters reported that the main factor in their homelessness was eviction (Hartman and Robinson, 2003). A 2010 report on New York City homeless shelters found that 47% of homeless families reported experiencing eviction at some point within the previous five years (Seedco, 2010).

Because of this existing data and common knowledge of the relationship between homelessness and evictions, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump issued an Executive Order banning evictions until January 2021 to protect renters from displacement from their residences and possible homelessness. In September 2020 when the eviction moratorium was first issued, Michael Bars, a spokesperson for the White House stated:

“The eviction moratorium was specifically crafted to target renters at risk of becoming homeless as a means to prevent further spread of the coronavirus. It is critical that Americans have a place to effectively quarantine, isolate, and observe social distancing to protect their health and safety and those in the surrounding community” (Swenson, 2020).

Under the CDC order, tenants “who meet certain conditions cannot be evicted if they have affirmatively exhausted their best efforts to pay rent, seek Government rental assistance, and are likely to become homeless due to eviction” (Swenson, 2020). While the declaration first appeared to be an unprecedented safety net during a time of great fear

of eviction and displacement, the wording of the declaration left room for interpretation by landlords who wished to pursue evictions. For instance, while landlords were banned from evicting tenants for failure to pay rent, they were still allowed to evict for lease violations, criminal activity, for health and safety reasons, and for damages to property. Landlords were finding loopholes in the declaration, the biggest one being not renewing leases as a means to force a tenant from their residence (Swenson, 2020).

Federal and state protections against evictions failed many tenant renters nationwide. According to state data, between August and December of 2020 in Louisville, 1,298 tenants were formally evicted from their residences in Jefferson District Court (Loosemore, 2021). According to the Eviction Lab (2022), 802,086 evictions have been filed since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. However, while many tenants were forced from their homes during the pandemic through the eviction process and twice as many renters reported being behind on rent in 2021, a current report estimates that at least 1.36 million evictions were prevented in 2021 due to the federal tenant protections enacted by the CDC (Hepburn et. al., 2022). While millions were at risk of displacement due to lost wages during the pandemic, the CDC's eviction moratorium, an "unprecedented amount" of emergency rental and financial assistance, and benefits from extended unemployment aid and stimulus checks from the American Rescue Plan act provided protection from formal evictions and displacement (Hepburn et. al., 2022).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, each year in the United States, 1 in 19 tenant households receive an eviction notice (Desmond et. al., 2016). Recent literature on eviction often attributes the rise of evictions in America to the lack of affordable housing

in urban areas (Desmond, 2016; Garboden and Rosen, 2019; Greenberg et. al., 2016). Housing, particularly for low-income tenants, has become unaffordable nationwide as housing costs continue to rise and wages decline or remain the same (Purser, 2016; Desmond, 2016). Due to an increase in rent, stagnant wages, and a decrease in federal financial support, millions of renters are faced with eviction and potential displacement each year (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015). According to a 2016 housing study, one out of four renters spent over half of their income on housing (Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2020). The cost burden is even greater for those experiencing poverty, with one in four spending over 70% of their income on rent.

Attention by researchers to the eviction crisis in the U.S. has seen a massive increase due to Matthew Desmond's 2016 best-selling novel on eviction, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City*. His novel put the eviction crisis "housing insecurity, and displacement of low-income Americans at the forefront of research on inequality and poverty" (Balzarini and Boyd, 2021, pg. 426). As a result of his influential contribution to eviction research, the nation saw a substantial contribution by scholars and researchers on many areas of eviction, including both physical and emotional impacts evictions and displacement have on low-income renters (Balzarini and Boyd, 2021; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Garboden and Rosen, 2019; Hartman and Robinson, 2003; Immergluck et. al., 2019). Much of my own research follows Desmond's significant contributions to eviction research.

INFORMAL EVICTIONS

The reality of evictions is that it does not just consist of a summons to court and possible displacement of a tenant. Eviction is a complex process that can follow both formal and informal methods of displacement that have a lasting impact on a tenant. For each formal eviction notice issued, twice as many informal eviction notices are issued to tenant households, affecting 1 in 8 tenant households, and low-income minority tenants are affected the most (Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015; Collinson and Reed, 2018).

Some landlords use informal methods of forcing tenants to vacate a property and often times a tenant vacates a property before a formal eviction is filed (Desmond, 2016) for fear of sudden displacement (Purser, 2016). Informal evictions are less expensive than formal evictions and can also be more efficient for both the landlord and the tenant (Desmond and Shollenberger, Informal evictions can occur when the landlord asks a tenant to leave a property, changes the locks, or threatens and harasses a tenant until they involuntarily vacate their residence (Desmond et. al., 2018). Whichever method a landlord uses to informally evict a tenant, a claim to evict is not filed in court and the eviction is not recorded. Because informal evictions are off record, it is challenging to accurately track how many informal evictions occur in the United States annually (Desmond, 2016).

IMPACT OF EVICTIONS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY/INSECURITY

The connection between poverty and housing instability is widely documented (Desmond, 2012; Sampson and Sharkey, 2008), and poverty is intensified by other issues. For instance, low-income households, particularly single parent households, may have

difficult affording living expenses given rising rent, low wages, and other instances of inflation (Medina et. al., 2020). Evictions not only result in displacement and/or possible homelessness; the impact of evictions can last for indefinite amount of time causing a “domino effect” on the renter’s ability to find affordable housing in the future (Balzarini and Boyd, 2021, pg. 426). With an eviction on record, landlords are less likely to rent to a tenant (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015). Further, the ability to obtain federal rental assistance becomes more of a challenge with an eviction file (Cranes and Warnes, 2000; Rosenblatt and DeLuca, 2012). This “domino effect” extends beyond residential insecurity often leading to financial insecurity and poor mental and physical health (Body, 2019). The negative impacts of evictions and housing instability are intensified by food insecurity, educational attainment, and unattainability of employment, as well as medical resources which results in poor health outcomes (Medina et. al., 2020; Desmond and Gershenson, 2016). Stress caused by evictions affect families and can lead to child neglect or mistreatment (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015).

HOW THE EVICTION PROCESS WORKS IN KENTUCKY

Kentucky follows the Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (URLTA), a set of rules and regulations that both the landlord and tenant must follow when renting property (Dillman, 2022). Under this act, a tent must pay rent on time and honor the contractual lease. The two most common reasons for eviction filing are the failure to pay rent or a violation of a lease contract. Before filing an eviction, the landlord must hand deliver the tenant a written seven-day notice. If the eviction cannot be personally hand delivered, a copy must be sent through the mail. If a lease contract is violated, the landlord must give

the tenant a 14-day notice that informs how the lease was violated; if the tenant does not fix the issue within 14 days, the landlord can proceed with an eviction. If the lease is violated again with a six-month period, the landlord is only required to deliver a 14-day notice that states the lease will be terminated in 14 days; the landlord does not have to give the tenant time to fix the issue. If the tenant is behind rent and does not pay the rent in full or if they do not move out in the given time, the lease can be terminated, and the landlord can lead proceed with official eviction processes.

In order to proceed with an eviction in court, the landlord must file a complaint and summons, which will be delivered the tenant via a sheriff with a date and time for the hearing (Dillman, 2022). The eviction lawsuit is called a forcible entry and detainer suit. In order for the tenant to challenge the eviction order, they must be present for the hearing. The only legal way for a landlord to evict a tenant is through the court eviction process. Sometimes, landlords attempt to evict tenants illegally, for instance, by shutting off utilities or changing locks on doors. In Kentucky, these illegal evictions are known as “self-help” evictions or unlawful ousters. If a landlord attempts an illegal eviction, the tenant can use this in court to defend their eviction.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW

This review of literature examines discourses and practices of the word “home” to show how the word is bound to official, societal, and cultural meanings of the word but most importantly, how the word is bound to personal experiences of meanings of the word. It also examines how homelessness is discussed in scholarly literature through some

combination of three theoretical conversations: those related to property and land ownership; those related to citizenship and belonging, and those related to changing regimes of accumulation held to characterize contemporary forms of urbanism.

The research that follows seeks to explore these conversations on homelessness and these official definitions of the word home ethnographically in order to answer three sub-puzzles or research questions that will be addressed in the following section.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to ethnographically study various meanings of the word ‘home’ and how the word ‘home’ is used by homeless, evicted, and displaced persons, and by the researcher of the study, to negotiate boundaries and relations of power to achieve goals, both moral and material.

SUB-PUZZLES/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the word ‘home’? What does the word do?
2. How does being identified or categorized (for policy and policing purposes) as “homeless” interact with other ways in which people identify?
3. What new insights into the processes by which people “become homeless” (whether through eviction or other forms of displacement) were brought into view by the changes to housing and eviction policy during the COVID-19 pandemic?

UNDERSTANDING ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography provides both the theoretical framework and methodology for this research. Ethnographic research is an interpretivist approach that is about talking *with* people, not just writing about them. With this approach, a researcher can see how groups and individuals interact with others, to explore and understand how “social actions are

comments on more than themselves”; how small stories and actions create ‘shared meanings’ that “inform and structure” the world in which a group lives (Pachirat, 2017, pg. 36; Schaffer, 2016). It is about exploring how people make sense of the things happening in their lives, their surroundings, their communities, and what they do with this sense-making (Yanow, 2006).

An interpretivist approach to research seeks to “shed light on how shared meanings and their relation to power inform or structure the social world and the study of the social world” (Schaffer, pg. 2, 2016). In an interpretivist ethnographic study, theory is “built from the ground up,” grounded in the physical observations encountered within conversations and various interactions with people (Herbert, 2000, pg. 552; See also Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The construction of theory is “an ongoing pragmatic process of ‘puzzling out’ and problem solving” (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, pg. 167); and this ‘puzzling out’ requires a unique type of interpretation, one based on the researcher’s own senses and emotions, “because the tissue of life is not always directly observable” (Herbert, 2001, pg. 553).

To understand the social and cultural aspects of a group of people, participant-observation, the observation and interaction with a particular group, is an extremely valuable methods approach. While interviews are crucial to this research, both formal and informal, participant-observation offers a closer, more dynamic exploration of the “everyday activities and social constructions” of a group of people which offers “unreplicable insight” into the “actions and intentions of people as knowledgeable agents” (Herbert, 2000, pg. 551).

WHAT IS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In chapter four, I present an autoethnographic study of ‘home’ i.e., a study of what ‘home’ means to me. I draw on the tools and techniques of autoethnography to write analytically about memories from my past, memories of ‘home, and methodologically to connect that analysis to my own experiences of ‘home’ and how I negotiate the meaning of the word ‘home.’

Autoethnography, a subcategory of ethnography, is an approach to research that combines principles of autobiography and ethnography to explore, analyze, and describe *personal* experiences in order to understand *cultural* experiences (Ellis, 2004).

Autobiographers often write about epiphanies in their lives, remembered experiences that considerably altered the course of a person’s life, moments of crisis that forced the person to focus on and analyze their own lived experiences (Bochner and Ellis, 1992; Zaner, 2004). Ethnographers study cultures, the shared experiences, beliefs, and practices of a group of people, and they do so by immersing themselves within the group as participant observers. *Doing* an autoethnography involves the combination of both of these methods. Researchers doing autoethnography retrospectively write about personal epiphanies that derive from being a member of a particular community. Using theoretical and methodological tools, the autoethnographer analyzes these experiences, along with other community members and previous literature, to produce new perspectives and to familiarize others with these community characteristics (Ellis, 2004).

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND FIELDWORK

“Ethnographers do not merely make observations, they also participate (Spradley, pg. 51, 1980). Participant observation is integral to an ethnography, and this research relies substantially on this method. Participation allows for an immersive experience where the researcher experiences situations directly, they can better understand particular cultural activities, and then record their personal observations. Participant observation allows researchers to physically observe what people are doing as opposed to other empirical methods “limited to reporting what people say about what they do” (Gans, pg. 540, 1999).

My participant observation began as a volunteer for two homeless outreach groups, going into camps to meet individuals at their homes, talking to people on the streets and sidewalks, under bypasses and hidden away in areas sheltered by trees (mostly on private property without consent). My participation as a volunteer opened trust with the homeless in the city; they trust the organizers; they semi trust me. Every Wednesday evening, I accompanied Donna, a member of a local homeless outreach group, as she handed out food, water, and essentials, driving around 30-40 miles a night to get from camp to camp. Sometimes, we stayed out until 10 pm, other nights we headed home around 2 am, all depending on the climate of the evening. Some camps, mostly the smaller ones, we would spend more time chatting with individuals, sitting down with them to hear their

needs, which gave me time to probe for insights relating to my research. Some nights, we sat on sidewalks with certain homeless individuals, experiencing police harassment, as well as good Samaritans offering clothing, blankets, food, and water. Some nights there were major fights between individuals and Donna would interfere; other nights were calmer, and we shared boxed coffee from Panera while they told us stories of their pasts, their struggles to obtain and hold a job, difficulties procuring various ID cards, their worries for tomorrow, and their disgust with how the city is “managing” the homeless problem.

I also volunteered at several homeless shelters in the area, working front desk check in, doing laundry, taking phone calls, helping with intake for individuals seeking assistance with housing, employment, and ID procurement. Working in the shelters I was able to see a different side of the homeless: more reserved, timid, and less trustworthy. Clearly, I was not a full participant in this community, but I was able to engage with, be present, and observe a very important part of their lives. For many homeless persons, the day begins with a shower, coffee, and mail check at a local shelter.

Once the pandemic hit, in person observation came to a halt; however, I maintained contact with shelter and outreach organizers who continued to canvas the streets and camps for those in need. I was able to keep up with participants virtually via Facebook messenger, Skype, and through phone text messages.

FIELDNOTES

Writing fieldnotes is a crucial part of any ethnographic study and have been an integral part of this research. During participant-observation (which includes semi-structured interviews), I took notes on what I observed (with all five senses). Taking notes/jottings is exceptionally important during participant-observation because so much can happen during any type of interaction that it is impossible to remember everything. Within 24 hours of notetaking, I converted these brief jottings into more detailed fieldnotes so that no important information is lost. With the consent of the individuals observed, I took photos and videos to refresh my memory for future fieldnote writing. Photos and videos allow me to notice details that I may have missed in a particular interaction. They also help refresh my senses of a particular interaction (what was the weather during that interaction, time of day, were there any sounds that I could have possibly missed) in order to get a better sense of “being there” (Pachirat, 2017, pg. 116). All of these minute details are important to examining in greater detail the actual lives of the individuals studied.

Following the advice of Pachirat (2017), I organized my fieldnotes into three sections: Description, Reflexivity, and Analysis. Under the description section, I physically describe what is going on in a particular situation, the people, the sights and sounds, the smell of the environment. Here, I write down particularly interesting parts of conversations, stories individuals share with me of their current and past selves, and the relationships I have with particular individuals. This is also a great place to include direct

quotes from subjects, as well as the non-verbal conversations encountered during interactions with others (body language, for instance). The reflexivity section is exactly what it appears: a section where I reflect on the interactions I encounter and observe. Here, I reflect on my own reactions, how I *feel* about the things I have observed (with all five senses), and what all this means to me as not only a researcher but as an outsider. The last section, analysis, is an area where I reflect on my own speculations, map out various themes I am uncovered in my observations in order to clarify and interpret meanings gathered.

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In April 2020, one month after the pandemic shut down Kentucky, I presented my dissertation proposal virtually. I still donned my best dress for the occasion, and I prepared my speech as if I were presenting in-person. Going into the meeting with my committee, I knew my proposed research would change dramatically. How do you perform participant observation with a particularly vulnerable group during a statewide shutdown? How could I safely interview people in-person? We were mandated to “shelter at home,” to practice the “healthy at home” initiative. I was struggling to make sense of how to do ethnographic research without leaving my house. After presenting my proposal, my committee recommended that I incorporate COVID-19 into my research; how could I not? The pandemic had literally changed every aspect of our lives.

I began thinking of ways I could use virtual meeting apps to interview participants. But many homeless people do not have access to the internet, and if they do, connection and access is unreliable. But there is one app that almost everyone utilizes

daily, even homeless people: Facebook. Although their access to internet is unreliable, the homeless people I spoke with still found ways to connect to Facebook daily, mostly by visiting libraries or connecting to WIFI at establishments that would allow access to passwords. The first step I took to safely reach the homeless population in Louisville during the pandemic was to peruse homeless outreach Facebook pages with hopes of finding individuals willing to speak with me through messenger or Facetime. This method proved to be extremely beneficial to my research from 'home.' I also posted on my own social media pages asking friends and family to share their experiences, if they have encountered any, of displacement or eviction during the pandemic. The responses I received from both the homeless outreach pages as well as from my personal page was fantastic! I had no idea so many family members, friends, and acquaintances had experienced displacement since the beginning of the pandemic. People began sending me private messages, eager to share their experiences and struggles with me. Although an eviction ban was in place during the time, people were still being evicted and displaced. Several people I spoke with had been forced to move two, three times during the pandemic. Landlords were finding loopholes in the system, ways around the ban to evict tenants. Some people who reached out told me that their landlords did not actually evict them but left them with no choice but to move. Others shared stories of buying and selling houses during the pandemic and the struggles encountered. Students were mandated to leave their dorms and forced into rental properties they couldn't afford, or to temporarily move in with friends or family. Due to loss of jobs and inability to acquire unemployment due to an overburdened and unprepared unemployment system, many people were unable to pay rent and mortgages, forcing them from their 'homes.' Others

were forced to give up their jobs due to the statewide shutdown of childcare facilities and suspension of in-person classes. They had no one to watch their children, and their places of unemployment were unable to provide accommodation. Some people who reached out to me told stories of couch-surfing, moving back in with parents, and having to ask for money from friends and family to hold them over. They often shared feelings of embarrassment, failure, and stress.

Learning how to navigate the field during a pandemic had its difficulties and learning how to conduct studies in digital environments was imperative to continuing research with previous subjects. Online interviews, both live and not, formal and informal, contributed greatly to knowledge production on evictions, issues of homelessness, and how the city handled these issues during and before the pandemic. For live interviews, appointments were made to chat over Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangout. Most of these interviews were semi-structured; I had a set of questions I wanted to ask, I would ask a few to get the conversation started, and then I would let the participant lead the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were beneficial in that I was able to direct the conversation where I wanted if the conversation deviated from the subject matter. This type of interview is also helpful in allowing for observational surprises to appear in conversation, those that encourage abductive reasoning and insights into “surprising” evidence. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Facebook messenger proved essential to my research during the pandemic. Unable to physically go out into the field for months and speak with people in person, digital

messaging proved crucial to knowledge production and understanding the cultures in my study. Through Facebook messenger, I was able to make new contacts with homeless persons who I otherwise never would have met, possibly even if I were able to be on the streets conducting research. Canvassing various outreach group pages for the homeless in our community, I was able to contact several subjects who have greatly contributed to my research. I made initial contact, we would chat for a bit, and then set up an appointment to talk in greater detail either through messenger, a phone call, or through Skype. Later, once vaccinations were made available, I was able to meet with some of these subjects in person.

Social media also proved a useful approach to gathering data, stories, and cultural insights through the use of prompts to produce discussions among members of a particular group. For instance, I began following a few groups for homeless individuals, and I posted prompts on these pages to encourage discussions among members. These prompts provided various avenues for stories and surprising discussions, high participant engagement, and thick and significant data collection.

Most notable, the vital digital environments made possible by virtual conferencing/meetings opened important avenues for participant-observation. Virtually, I was granted access to sit in on eviction courts where I heard hundreds of people tell their stories (what they were allowed), to witness firsthand the court eviction process, and to better understand relationships between tenants and renters, tenants and attorneys, attorneys and judges, judges and renters, etc. etc. I was invited to participate in virtual

eviction response team meetings comprised of housing advocates and activists, landlords, researchers, students, attorneys, and city officials who worked together to keep renters in their homes during and after the pandemic, who organized and distributed funding for affordable housing, rental assistance, court fee assistance, and utility bill assistance. The collective work accomplished during these meetings proved to be highly beneficial for those hit hardest by the pandemic, and the ability to observe these meetings virtually provided remarkable guidance and information for this study.

SECONDARY DATA/EXISTING DATA

Secondary data is also vital to this study. To better understand eviction and homelessness data in the city, various governmental and community sites were searched. Again, employing snowball sampling, an informant would direct me to their organization's website, which would lead me to other websites offering similar or important information to this study. Reports and newsletters from various homeless organizations in the city proved extremely beneficial to understanding and documenting how the city responds to issues of homelessness, affordable housing, and evictions. Local community organization's websites provide valuable information on how community groups assist with homeless groups and individuals. University databases were used to research previous and current literature on homelessness, evictions, disaster crises, concepts of home, and global pandemic responses.

IRB AND SUBJECT CONSENT

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Louisville¹. All names of the subjects in this study were changed to protect their identities. Consent for participation in this research followed the informed consent process whereby each subject was informed about my position as a researcher and given information about the study in an understandable language to the subject. Voluntary agreement was obtained with signatures. During the pandemic, electronic signatures were provided through email, or we made safe arrangements to exchange copies of the consent forms.

SELECTING SITES AND GAINING ACCESS

Conducting research with any vulnerable group of people often presents unexpected and unique challenges, and great care and consideration is required to understand these challenges before entering the field. The homeless population is a very vulnerable group of people, and before entering the field and beginning this study, I was aware that there would be challenges in studying this group with ethical consideration. Building trust is crucial for any ethnography, and this group of people often has issues trusting any outsiders for various reasons, but one being that they love their privacy. As I entered hidden camps with outreach organizers, I was reminded of the importance of keeping

¹ IRB number 20.0589

their homes a secret, mostly for fear of law enforcement finding the camps and the city clearing them out. The homeless population is constantly open to discrimination and mistreatment by not only law enforcement, but also citizens who find their homes to be an eye-sore or dangerous.

One of the most challenging processes of this study has been the recruitment of participants to observe, interview, and maintain contact. I was blatantly aware that finding homeless and evicted individuals to participate in my study was going to be difficult. Having volunteer experience was a great benefit, but I had never probed individuals on their backgrounds as deeply as I intended for this research. How would they accept my curiosity of their pasts? Would they distrust my approach? What if no one would talk to me for fear of exploitation, being taken advantage of, or loss of privacy? Further, how would I remain in steady contact with these individuals? Homeless persons are often on the move and tracking them down can be very challenging.

SITE SELECTION

This study is multi-sited in two important ways: it follows relationships across physical space but also examines intangible sites such as cultural meanings and identities over time-space (Marcus, 1995). When I first began searching for sites, I focused only on tangible sites, places I could physically go to, such as homeless camps and shelters.

While these proved beneficial to my research, I soon discovered that intangible sites are just as important, if not more. Exploring intangible sites, such as lifeworld's of subjects

and discourses, metaphors, and themes that arise from stories told allow for the examination of the systems and institutions created through the experiences of homelessness, displacement, eviction, and dispossession.

GAINING ACCESS

Pachirat (2017) writes, “there’s no single moment of access. Just lots of moments of access” (pg. 102). Gaining access in an ethnographic study requires building relationships with subjects, gaining trust, developing informants and building rapport. Fortunately, my years of experience volunteering with various homeless outreach organizations has allowed for valuable opportunities to speak with and observe homeless individuals in the community.

Valuable access came via the use of snowball sampling, or chain sampling. This method of sampling is particularly useful when studying homeless individuals or other subjects who are difficult to find because subjects are introduced to a researcher through trusted informants. “Informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet another informant, and so...hence the evolving ‘snowball’ effect” (Noy, pg. 330, 2008). Having trusted contacts in homeless outreach groups allowed access to homeless individuals I otherwise would not have been able to meet and speak with. Gaining access to these individuals allowed access to other homeless individuals. Having contacts with various persons working with evictions and

affordable housing allowed entry into private meetings and eviction court where valuable information was gathered and new contacts were made.

POSITIONALITY/REFLEXIVITY

As an ethnographer, it is important to consider the ethical implications of this method of study. Understanding one's positionality as a participant-observer is crucial for several important reasons.

When studying any group of marginalized subjects, it is imperative to always remain attentive to one's own positionality as it may appear to that subject. My position is that I am a privileged doctoral candidate seeking to understand the lives of people living in a situation that I have never experienced. I am privileged in this setting because I have a physical, stable house to go to once my research has ended for the day. When I am ready to call it quits, I can get in my warm vehicle, perhaps pick up some fast food, and drive home to a warm house with a dry bed. I can retreat to my private domain; I do not have to worry about being harassed for sleeping on a sidewalk when my body can no longer keep moving or worry where my next hot meal will come from, or if the manager at McDonalds will let me relieve myself in their bathroom, maybe, if I'm lucky, brush my teeth and wash my face. All of this is important to be attentive to. Not only would an inattentiveness to my positionality be cruel and demeaning, but it would also mean losing valuable connections and trust that I have built over time, a crucial part in studying any marginalized population. Because I have spent several years with various homeless

outreach organizations in the city already, I have come to know various homeless members of our community and losing their trust would be devastating to myself and my research. I also have to be attentive to the relationships I build/have built with the various outreach workers I volunteer with because most of them have been doing this far longer than I have, and I would never want to jeopardize those relationships by asking difficult questions that may put them in a difficult position with their supervisors/group organizers.

While it is important to be immersive as a participant-observer, it is more important to remember my part in this research. I am not houseless, I have not been evicted, and while I may share some sort of understanding of their plight, I have a stable, secure house to sleep in when the day is done.

CHAPTER 4: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE WORD

‘HOME’

“The ache for home lives in all of us.” – Maya Angelou



²

INTRODUCTION

I have been searching for home for as long as I can remember.

When I first began researching ‘home’ as a subject for my dissertation, I was unacquainted with autoethnography as a research method. I knew I wanted to use ethnographic methods to research to explore concepts and ideas of ‘home’ in the “homeless community.” I knew why I wanted to use an ethnographic approach, but I

² A photo of my family

wasn't sure why 'home' was so puzzling to me. After numerous conversations with my advisor and peers, after months upon months of struggling to articulate what it was that I found puzzling (and therefore meriting research material), I began to focus on the word 'home' itself. Instead of asking 'what is home' or 'what makes a home a home for this person or that' or 'what is the significance of home,' I turned the question and the words inward, asking why am *I* so fixated on this word; what has driven me to dissect this word so passionately; what new insights might an exploration of this word yield for scholarly knowledge about cities; what does this word *do*? Ah, a moment of enlightenment. What does the word 'home' *do*? Why does it matter what this word can do? What do *I* have to do with it?

When I presented the proposal for my dissertation in April of 2020, we were a month into the global pandemic. The proposal I presented at the time was for an ethnographic study that would use in-person participant observation fieldwork to explore the experience of homelessness in Louisville, Kentucky, to explore housing and sheltering practices among the homeless, and what 'home' means to people described and treated for policy purposes as 'homeless.' Although I have spent much time doing outreach/volunteering with the homeless over the years, and I was able to complete some fieldwork before the pandemic, I was missing valuable information and observations, interviews, and conversations, that would answer my questions. So, I began to look elsewhere for ways to produce an ethnographic account while 'sheltering at home.' Is that even possible, to participate, ethnographically, with a group of people without being face-to-face? Maybe there is another way to approach this, I asked myself. There must be. For weeks after presenting my proposal, I struggled with these questions, reading everything I

could find on digital ethnography and ethnography during pandemics, and doing an ethnography during Covid. Before I could find an answer, tragedy struck my family. A month after presenting my proposal, I lost my sister Ashley to ovarian cancer. My research came to a halt. Just when I began regaining momentum and rediscovering motivation, I lost another sister, Heather, one month later from a heart attack. In two months, I lost two sisters, two pillars in my life. I spent the next few months trying to figure out how to live without them and trying to make sense of their deaths. Their children and my other sisters lived a 35-minute drive from where I lived in Shepherdsville in my second hometown of Elizabethtown, so I decided the best thing I could do for myself, and my family was to move back 'home'. That is the word I used repeatedly: home. *I am moving back 'home'*, I told friends and family. *They need me at 'home'*, I would say. *I need to go 'home'*. Even though I had a 'home' in Shepherdsville, a 30-minute drive from Elizabethtown, with my fiancé. We had created a 'home' there years ago with our dogs. When I would visit my sisters in Elizabethtown before they died, I never thought I was going 'home' to visit them. I was visiting them in *their* homes, sure, but my 'home' was elsewhere. I thought my 'home' was in Shepherdsville. So, why did I deliberately use that word while looking for houses to move to in Elizabethtown? Why did I use that word when people asked me where I was moving to after my sisters' deaths? What had changed in my mind to make Elizabethtown 'home'?

I moved back to Elizabethtown in October 2020, a few months after my sister Heather passed away. Being closer to family allowed me to see them much more often. I began hosting birthday parties and holidays, events Heather would have hosted before her death. When she was living, her 'home' was our sanctuary, a place we could all go to at

any time. We spent countless hours on her side porch talking about life, sharing stories and jokes, watching her grandkids and my nieces and nephews grow into teenagers. Her 'home' was a place we could turn to when there was nowhere else to turn; a shelter from the storm, where she would welcome us with a cigarette in one hand and the other on our shoulder. Her 'home' was a an easter egg hunt playground, her pool a summer getaway, her dining room a place where we shared so many laughs, I can still feel them in my belly, her living room where we exchanged Christmas presents, but also difficult news, like, "They are calling in hospice for Ashley." Heather's 'home' was our home; we just didn't know it until she was gone.

I vividly remember our lasts moments at Heather's after she had passed, and we had gathered the last few remaining tokens of her life we wished to keep before the house went up for sale. I stood in her bedroom and breathed in her scent, the last remaining smells of the cigarettes she smoked while getting ready for work, the Love Spell perfume she wore for as long as I can remember her aroma, the fabric softener on her comforter. Standing at her window, tears falling, I said out loud, "This will be the last time I ever smell her." My family is very big. Sisters, significant others, cousins, nieces, and nephews filled those rooms like bowling pins stacked closely together. Every holiday, we would gather in front of Heather's front door and take a picture of the whole family. At Christmas, we would be huddled together for warmth, thanksgiving our bellies full of foods mom used to make. On the last day at Heather's 'home', my sister, my niece Jade, Heather' daughter, and I gathered in front of Heather's front door, one more time for one more photo. On one of the hottest days of summer in July, sweat and tears on our faces, we hugged each other and looked back at the house. In a dreamlike haze, with tears in our

eyes and lumps in our chests, we forced smiles for the camera on the steps of Heather's 'home', our home.

I needed to move back to Elizabethtown to be 'home' again. I needed to make a new 'home' there, something Heather would be proud of; a place where her children and Ashley's children could gather and tell stories and jokes and easter-egg hunt and open presents and share good news and bad. I felt compelled to move 'home' for family. I knew it would never be the same. My 'home' would never be Heather's 'home', but maybe I could build something new, something similar from the wreckage using what she left behind. I hope I have made her proud.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Once I was able to muster up enough motivation to begin researching and writing again, I discovered autoethnography as a research method. I read everything I could find, stories and narrative accounts other ethnographers have written using the method, literature reviews and articles explaining this approach. Immediately, I knew this was the approach I should take in my own research, but this new-to-me method was difficult to comprehend after years of retraining my mind to 'write like a scholar.' I hold a master's degree in English Literature and Composition, and as a student of Urban and Public Affairs, I had to train my mind to write in a way that I had somehow come to think of as more academic - and less creative. Professors would tell me not to use "flowerful language" when writing essays, and this was a struggle for me as a student. As an undergraduate student, I had learned to write artistically using my senses and emotions, to use metaphors, to show rather than to tell to "write what you know." In my second

semester of graduate school, I discovered this magical form of research and writing called ethnography. Ah! A way I could use my senses and emotions to write in a way that was at once scholarly *and* creative. Further exploration led to subcategories if you will, of ethnography, one of those being autoethnography. *Autoethnography* is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) *personal* experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011 pg. 273). Richardson (2000) writes that autoethnography is “a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (pg. 923). Writing about my own life, in other words, can be a way of exploring new questions and generating new scholarly insights about broader social and cultural phenomena. Mendez (2013) writes, autoethnography “is not just writing about oneself, it is about being critical about personal experiences in the development of the research being undertaken, or about experiences of the topic being investigated” (pg. 281).

In this chapter, I draw on the tools and techniques of autoethnography to write analytically about memories from my past, memories of “home”, and methodologically to connect that analysis to my own experiences of “home” and how I negotiate the meaning of the word “home.”

WHAT I DO WITH THE WORD ‘HOME’

This dissertation is an exploration of the way people use words, how they, and *I*, socially negotiate meanings of words such as ‘home’, ‘homeless’, and ‘house’; how boundaries

and relations of power are negotiated to pursue goals, both personal and political, moral and material. The word 'home' has different social, moral, and political values and ideations for each person who uses the word. For some, home is a feeling, a state of mind; for others, it's a place of permanency, a physical place where belongings are kept. Schaffer (2016) writes that words are tools that we carefully choose to meet specific ends, "instruments that people use to do things, in the same way that people use clamps, wrenches, and screwdrivers to do things" (pg. 27).

In this dissertation, I use the word 'home' in quotations to signify that the word home is not merely a concrete word or concept that can be clearly defined and/or understood; it is not tangible, not specific. It is an abstract, connotational word, a conceptual signifier with various usages and meanings. Each person in this research uses the word 'home' to their own advantages or disadvantages, to achieve certain goals, to express emotions, both positive and negative. The word 'home' is used as a performative tool to negotiate discussions and relationships both past and present; it is used as a device of sense-making and a tool to convey meaning. This dissertation examines how 'homeless' people use the word 'home', but because of my own personal relationship with the word, first, I present an autoethnographic examination of my own experiences with the word 'home'. This is necessary, of course, because my interpretations of others' accounts of 'home' will necessarily be mediated by my own understandings of the word. Pachirat (2009) writes that it is important to pay explicit attention to how relationships of perspective, power, and the ethnographic voice "shape not only *what* is seen (a question of access), but also *how* it is seen (a question of the production of ethnographic knowledge" (pg. 147). This attention to the conceptual category's understandings with

which the research questions operate is what social science methodologists call 'reflexivity.' This reflexive retention to my own understandings of 'home' was thus a necessary and key dimension of my broader ethnography of 'home.'

MY 'HOME' AND HOW I MAKE SENSE OF THE WORD

"Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition." - James Baldwin

At the age of three while living in my birth town of Fort Polk, Louisiana, my mother was incarcerated for writing fraudulent checks. My father had recently abandoned us, and so my four sisters and I were sent to live in Kentucky where we were split up between various aunts and uncles across cities. At such a young age, it is difficult to remember so many details about our first house, but I remember what it looked like empty after everything had been removed. The hollow, echoing sound our voices made as we said goodbye to what remained of our 'home'; the brightness of the bare, white walls as the sun beamed through curtainless windows; the slow movements of my sisters as they lingered in the hall, reluctant to leave the only 'home' we had ever known; to leave our mother in Louisiana and move to an unknown place. I vividly remember a sister leaving one of those cheap, plastic yard pinwheels in the living room. I never asked her why, but maybe this way her way of leaving a piece of us there; a small token from my mother's garden to remind the next 'home' owners or renters that, *yes, we were here, and this was 'our home'.*

While my mother was incarcerated in Louisiana, I lived with an uncle and aunt in Upton Kentucky, along with my sister, Olivia, and two cousins. We are the youngest of the five sisters, and I guess they wanted us to stay together. I have fond memories of life in Upton, but I was also a troubled child. I always felt out of place, and my actions conveyed that. I was strange and shy and silent, but also mischievous. It's a wonder my uncle allowed me to stay for so long. I remember always feeling out of place in their 'home', always competing for attention with my cousins and sister. So, instead of competing, I would hide away in my room with books and my imagination. I never remember feeling unwanted or unloved, but the love from an uncle and an aunt could not fill the longing for my mother's embrace, or her voice lulling me to sleep at bedtime with "you are my sunshine." They drove my sister and I down to Louisiana one year to see my mother at "the hospital." That's where they told me she had been all this time: in a hospital. I was young and never questioned it. I remember sitting next to my mother in a large, white room with metal tables and chairs meticulously placed to keep the women and families apart. *When will you come home?* I remember asking. *Soon, I promise.* And she did complete her stay soon after. But she didn't come home; we didn't go 'home'. Home was somewhere in the past where my mother, father, sisters, and I lived in a small, brick house in Louisiana with an above ground pool with one those vacuum turtles floating along the top, and a playhouse out back with navy shutters that matched its navy trim where I spent countless hours "playing house." Home was a meticulously clean house where my mother babysat neighborhood kids, where she baked beans and cornbread while listening to Celine Dion, where I never had to compete for anyone's attention because I was "the baby."

The first time I saw my mother as a free woman again was at my grandmother's house in Upton. The whole family was there. Aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters. Cornbread and beans baking in the kitchen, everyone walking through my grandmother's house chatting about sports and work and gossiping about this cousin and that cousin and *Can you believe our president did that?* A large white cake with strawberries sat in the middle of the dining room table; all it needed were a few candles, a couple balloons, and this would be a birthday party! All the while I sit in the living room alone playing Super Mario, avoiding the adults and the younger cousins; knowing something significant was about to happen, but trying my best to escape the thought that my mother would be there soon, and my life would be uprooted once again. When she walked in the door, everyone cheered and yelled "*Welcome home!*" They hugged and kissed and cried. And I never took my eyes off of Mario riding his dinosaur, leaping over mushrooms in his fantasy land. I could feel my mother's eyes on my back, but I never turned around until my grandmother ushered me away from the console and into the kitchen with the rest of the family. How was I to feel? I had lost one 'home' and now I was going to lose another. "Welcome home," they said to her. What home? When my mother was convicted of writing fraudulent checks, we lost our home. When my father abandoned us, we lost our 'home'. When we walked away from that house in Louisiana, we said goodbye to 'home'.

When my mother left prison, she also left Louisiana for good. My uncle, the one who helped raise my sister and me, divorced his wife shortly after, and we all moved into a very small house in Elizabethtown; my mom, my uncle, three of my sisters, and I. It was very difficult for my young mind to comprehend this kind of change, and I continued

to bottle up my emotions and rarely spoke without feeling a sense of shame. Was this my fault? Why is my family so broken? When are we going home? Over the next ten years, we moved often. My mother never owned her own house but rented for a few years and then moved on to the next house. My two oldest sisters never lived with us again. My sister Ashley stayed with my mother, my sister Olivia, and I here and there, but lived mostly with her father about an hour away by car. Throughout her life, my mother was married four times, three fathers between the five sisters. Her last marriage, my stepdad, finally brought some sort of stability into our lives, and she was married to him until the day she died. The last house we all lived in together became our 'home', finally. A house just big enough for all of us to live comfortably in, albeit just one bathroom (the horror!), but a house of love and comfort and stability; "a home."

When I was 16 years old, my mother found out that she had inoperable, stage four ovarian cancer. On the first day of my senior year in high school, my mother passed away.

My stepfather held it together for us until I graduated but moved from our 'home' shortly after. My sister Olivia (who I call Livy) and I stayed in my mother's rented house, and eventually, Livy bought the house where she remains to this day. The loss of my mother was a dreadfully painful thing to experience. And it tore our family, "our home," to pieces. Literally, we all scattered physically and emotionally. I lived with my sister Livy, moved in with my sister Heather, moved in with the Uncle who had raised me and his new wife and child. I battled depression and anxiety and a few other disorders. I passed over two scholarships to college, and for a few years wandered aimlessly through my life not giving a damn about the future because I could not see past the past. When I finally

realized the life I was wasting, I enrolled in college and here I am now, writing a dissertation to complete my doctorate.

On death, Hélène Cixous (1993) writes:

“So it gives us everything, it gives us the end of the world; to be human we need to experience the end of the world. We need to lose the world, to lose a world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn’t what we think it is”
(pg. 10).

See, I had lost my mother once before when she was imprisoned, and I am not sure if I ever got her or that original sense of ‘home’ back; not the way it was when we lived in Louisiana. Losing my mother, I realized that one can infinitely lose *a* sense of home. But over time, I have learned that there can be more than one ‘home’, and ‘home’ can be many things. It can be one place or many places: one person or many persons. It can be a feeling, a swirling, warm sensation in the pit of your stomach when you miss a place or a person so much, and you know you will see them again soon. Or a sharp pain in your chest when you will never see someone you have loved again. ‘Home’ can be destroyed and crumble like an old brick building, some of the remains lost or scattered in the wreckage; but it can also be rebuilt from the same bricks that fell or rebuilt with completely new material! When my mother passed away, the damage was catastrophic, and my fundamental idea of ‘home’ was lost and scattered, the wreckage visible. But the pain of losing my mother created a path for my sisters and I to metaphorically construct a new space for ‘home’. On the broken foundation of my mother’s death, my sister’s and I

created a new ‘home’ together, forged by heartache and grief, but also by love and jokes and the stories we carry of our mother. Death is an unfortunate thing to unite people. But the irrevocable memories of our mother forged a bond between us that created this completely new *way* of home. ‘Home’ became a way for us to struggle and overcome our grief together, a way forward through the pain.

PUZZLING OUT ‘HOME’ ON A SIDEWALK:

WHAT LED ME TO OUTREACH

In 2016, I completed my master’s degree in English and took my second job as a proofreader for an accounting company right in the middle of downtown Louisville. I have always loved cities; I have always loved Louisville. Having been raised in small towns all my life, Louisville has always been an exciting getaway city, full of an abundance of cultures, enchanting neighborhoods, an alluring local music scene, and food from every country I’ve wished to travel to but have yet to visit. When I was first offered the position at the accounting firm, my heart skipped a little jig at the opportunity to work in a city bustling with life and new experiences. I could walk the waterfront on my lunch breaks, meet friends for coffee across the street in the picturesque little park surrounded by oaks and fountains and other city workers enjoying food truck cuisine and sandwiches from the cute little café that changes the quotes on its sign each morning. I could visit the museums I have driven by so often on my way to concerts that I have always wished to explore but never took the time to stop by. I could people watch and write about the

characters I would see each day. I could be one of those people, wearing smart dresses and looking so busy speed walking and carrying their coffees while making important phone calls, casually brushing their hair from their faces as the wind from the river blows little gusts down the sidewalks.

Every day on my lunch break, I walked the city, experiencing all the sights and smells, the sounds of the pavement under my feet, the cars honking, the streetlights chiming “walk now” as dozens of city employees rushed to the other side in their suits and ties with their to-go lunches from Jimmy Johns and Subway. With all the locally owned cafes and restaurants, I wondered why they would choose generic, fast food when they could venture down 4th street and grab a pastrami on rye from Brian and his dad or try some of the best pita and falafel I’ve had the pleasure of eating a few blocks down. And why did everyone walk so fast with their heads down, missing entirely the subtle charms of the sidewalks; the owner of the vintage gift store setting out new goods for sale, the penguins on the roof of 21c, the dog chasing pigeons in front of the Science Center, graffiti that tells you to “Shine Bright” or Muhammad Ali reminding you that he could “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee,” and a Galt House employee watering and fluffing flowers (did he just stop and smell those impatiens?).

While others on the streets were missing the subtle charms, I noticed one thing that they literally went out of their way to avoid, making large arcs in the sidewalks to evade a sight in their peripherals that could slow them down, or worse, prompt unwanted conversation. The first time I saw a man sleeping on the stairs of an empty building downtown Louisville, it piqued my curiosity, and I couldn’t look away. He lay under the protruding roof on a flattened cardboard box, arms wrapped around his body clutching a

bag I assumed were his possessions, hair matted to his forehead in the early morning summer heat, head resting on a bundled-up jacket, shoes off and nestled between his knees. Of course, I have seen ‘homeless’ people before, in this same city. But something about the way no one even glanced in his direction, actively avoided his presence, made me feel something I hadn’t felt before. I felt angry, a new kind of angry that I had never taken the time to really *feel*. I have been passionate about activism, mostly in my youth as a vegetarian or an underage “politician” disgusted at a president I couldn’t vote out. But this was a more mature, anger; an anger I knew I could do something with, I could do something about. I slowed my steps on the sidewalk so I could sit with this anger and so I could think about what I could do. Still, no one noticed the man, heads down, feet quickly moving along the pavement, shopping bags swooshing against their overpriced boutique mock-neck dresses. “Why don’t you see him?!” I wanted to scream at Mr. Striped-Tie-Too-Tight-Pants. Are they afraid of him, I wondered? Are they embarrassed? For whom? Him? Themselves? The city? I walked back to my building, avoiding eye contact with other pedestrians, frustrated at their lack of compassion, frustrated at the city for refusing to care and discouraged that ‘the city’ I had envisioned working in was not what I had imagined.

That evening at ‘home’, I pulled out my laptop and began searching for homeless outreach programs in Louisville. One of the first ones I came across was Hip Hop Cares. There was no website listed, only a Facebook page, a logo with a graffiti-inspired heart with the name overlain on top. I searched through the page to find out more about their mission and to figure out where to start to be a part of it. At first, I began donating \$20 here and there to their Amazon Wishlist for items like socks and razors and deodorant. I

discovered that every Sunday, the organizer, Jeff, and several others meet under the overpass at the corner of Broadway and 1st Street to hand out meals, toiletries, and clothes to anyone in need. In the fall of 2016, I volunteered for the first time with HHC.

FIRST AND BROADWAY: VOLUNTEER OUTREACH

On a sticky, muggy morning with a steady rain pounding against my car windows, I park my car and walk a block over, carrying trays of food I cooked at my house for the gathering. I had messaged Jeff earlier in the week to see what I should bring and where I should park. As I walked closer to the meeting spot under the bypass, I immediately recognized Jeff from his Facebook profile. A tall, slender man, late 30s, with a scruffy beard, always wearing a UK shirt or hat or jacket (or all the above), white, scuffed shoes, he moved around the sidewalk quickly and with purpose. Directing clothes to go here, set up the tables there, answering questions from patrons, retrieving specially requested items from the trunk of his rusted, pickup truck that was overloaded with sleeping bags, tents, jackets and socks, batteries, and cases of water. Water dripping from my hair and clothes, I nervously walked up to him holding the aluminum trays of baked mac and cheese and spaghetti and waited patiently for him to finish speaking with a woman in a wheelchair wearing a tiara and holding a plastic magic wand in her hand. “Abby, right?” He asks, noticing me with the trays, his smile peeking through his frazzled mustache. Balancing the trays in one hand, I reach out the other to shake his. He thanks me for making it out and guides me to the tables where the food is dispersed. “We serve over

300 people a day, in about an hour. The event goes until the food runs out,” he tells me as a line begins to form from the tables down the sidewalk. “This is Ms. Carolyn. She will help you out. Thanks again!” He smiles and heads out into the crowd. I notice that without the University of Kentucky attire, I probably wouldn’t be able to pick him out of the pack of customers with their similarly scuffed shoes and scruffy beards. Ms. Carolyn, a woman in her 60s or 70s, quickly explains my job and continues setting up the tables with napkins, silverware, and plastic to go containers, and at promptly 11 am, the line begins to move. I stand in one spot with a spoon in hand ready to serve. The food lines move continuously. We ask, “You want spaghetti? You want corn? You want chicken? You want bread?” We ask these questions every 15 seconds or so for an hour. Most people say thank you. There are not many children, but today there is a woman (mid-20s) with a toddler on her hip and a younger child in a stroller. One woman tells me she just left church and is heading back to her apartment after her meal. Not everyone is “homeless”. Some are just hungry. Some people make small talk (“I like your shirt), others eat the food as it is handed to them and keep their eyes down. One younger man, maybe under 20, tells me he just moved into his first apartment. “St. John got me into one, finally. I been on the streets for two years now. I finally got a place.”

When the food runs out, not everyone leaves right away, but volunteers immediately start packing up. We don’t talk personally much, but we let each other know if we will be back next week, what we’re taking home for storage. Some people come back to the line as we are packing up to see if we might have anything left over. We do today, but most of what is leftover is delivered by Jeff in his pickup to homeless camps across the city. We do have packaged cookies, and we hand these out. Two men help us

carry boxes of plates and silverware back to our cars. Some patrons eat their meals and head straight to the corner under the streetlight with signs (“homeless, anything helps, god bless”).

Jeff gives a little motivational speech at the beginning and end of each meeting. The beginning speech is for the patrons coming for food and donations (never monetary), and the end speech is for volunteers, but they mimic each other closely. Before food begins to be served, Jeff tells everyone on this day that he is glad everyone could make it out, and everyone is more than welcome to food/clothing/toiletries. All he asks is that everyone be respectful, be kind. At the end of the gathering, he thanks everyone for coming out. “Most of us are one paycheck away from living on the streets. You could be homeless next month.” Jeff hurries to his truck, waves goodbye to everyone left on the sidewalk, and drives off to deliver the leftovers.

As I am walking back to my car, the steady rain still falling, a few of the patrons I just served smile and wave at me, one thank you. I pass a few men holding cardboard signs, and one particularly catches my attention. “Lost my job, lost my home, no family, ALONE, anything helps.” I quicken my pace as the rain continues to fall, thinking about that sign, the carefully chosen words written in black marker, wet and splotchy.

VISITING THEIR ‘HOMES’

Over the next few weeks, I spent my downtime at work researching homelessness in Louisville and reaching out to different outreach volunteers to see how I could help. I continued volunteering on Sundays with HHC, but also began volunteering at events for

My Dog Eats First, a grassroots organization that serves the homeless with pets in Louisville. I also discovered the Forgotten Louisville, a street outreach group that prides themselves on building relationships with “the hurting, the addicted, the lost, the lonely, and homeless,” offering them food, clothes, and helping making connections with various homeless and housing organizations in the city. I began communicating with one of the volunteers, Donna, and she invited me to “hit the streets” with her on a Wednesday evening to deliver food and other necessities to various homeless camps. Donna and I hit it off immediately. In her late 50s, you would never know she suffers from various health conditions with her bubbly, compassionate, and optimistic attitude that can also turn fearsome when she feels her friends are threatened or in danger. Motherly and protective, Donna treats every person she meets on the streets as if they are a friend she has known for years, and most of them she has. One evening, late in the night standing on a sidewalk downtown listening to a woman tell us a story about a run-in with the police, Donna proclaims, “This is my city, this is my community, these are my friends, and these are their homes, and I will do what I can to protect them.” When we visit camps, Donna says we are “visiting their homes,” not a camp, not a sidewalk, not a patch of trees on private property or a tent next to train tracks: their homes.

Volunteering with Donna, doing outreach, and visiting ‘homeless people’ in their ‘homes’ led me to various puzzles about homelessness to which policy report of homelessness I had read had answers to. For instance, why are people considered ‘homeless’ when they claim to have ‘homes’? I wanted to learn more about this and why policymakers and ‘homeless’ “experts,” those writing official reports on issues of homelessness, are so consumed with finding housing for the “home”-less that they fail to

take into consideration that some of them already have ‘homes.’ ‘Homeless’ is often defined in policy as being without a permanent, fixed nighttime residence and/or living in a public or private space not designed for human habitation, which includes cars, parks, and campgrounds (Cornell Law School). But there is a huge wave of people trading brick and mortar houses for life in RVs and vans, and people camp in tents recreationally all the time. What is the difference between recreational camping and van-life to a ‘homeless’ person living in a tent? While tents are not permanent structures in the sense that they are not made of brick and mortar, some of the ‘homeless’ tents I have visited are not easily moved; some of these people do not consider their ‘houses’ to be temporary residences, which is made physically *and* metaphorically visible by the hinge-door-lock mechanisms and the large piles of gravel and rock holding their tent flaps down.

Taking this into consideration, what makes a “homeless” person different from someone living in poverty inside an apartment complex? Material poverty affects both the “homeless” person and the poor person living in an apartment; both can lack sufficient material needs such as food, water, and electricity. Lacking access to electricity can make the poor person living in an apartment vulnerable to the cold and heat just as the “homeless” person is vulnerable on the streets in a tent. With the constant threat of eviction, apartment dwellers living in poverty lack tenure security and fear displacement by their landlord like the way the “homeless” person lives in constant fear of being displaced by city mayors and ‘clean-up’ crews. Does legality of tenure, a written and signed lease contract between apartment tenant and landlord, make an apartment a ‘home’? What about the van-life and RV dwellers who travel from place to place without permanency, campground-hopping in their renovated, often pricey vehicles, to live

minimalist lifestyles and avoid paying rent and mortgages? Why are van life individuals called “nomads” but a person living in a tent under a bypass in the city of Louisville is called ‘homeless’?

I knew I wanted to find answers to these puzzles, and I was not going to be able to find those answers in a policy report. Being on the streets each week, delivering meals, talking to people, hearing their stories of injustice and suffering, the difficulties of acquiring housing or simply acquiring an ID to apply for jobs or collect Social Security and disability checks, their struggles in finding ‘homes’, led me to begin searching for a doctorate program that would offer tools and knowledge to assist Louisville’s “homeless” population. If I could study these issues, the roots, what other cities are doing, what Louisville is doing and not doing, the resources available and what is missing, learn the language of planners and policymakers, maybe this academic knowledge could produce systemic change. Maybe I could help change the way the city talks about homelessness. By the middle of fall 2017, I was offered a scholarship to join the Urban and Public Affairs department at the University of Louisville. And there, a research journey towards understanding ‘home’ began.

CONCLUSION

I present my experiences of ‘home’ and loss in this first chapter not only to position myself reflexively as a researcher in the field of homelessness, but also to examine why I feel a personal connection to the ‘homeless’ people I have encountered, to homelessness in general. The consistent loss I have encountered in my own life, the death of loved

ones, the physical displacement I experienced when my mother was incarcerated and the emotional displacement I felt when she and my sisters passed away, have created within myself a longing for consistency, permanency, security, hope, and love; words that I connect to and use to understand the word 'home'. As this ethnographic research shows and examines, the 'homeless' people I encounter, interview, and observe have their own ideas and understandings of the word 'home', and their understandings often include the same desires for consistency, security, and hope.

The day I encountered the 'homeless' man asleep on the sidewalk during my lunch break, bunched up on the ground clinging to his belongings, I felt compassion for a man alone, vulnerable and unnoticed, but I also felt what I *assumed* he would be feeling as a person without a 'home'. I was empathetic to his situation, not because I have slept on a sidewalk before (I have not), but because I have known what it means to feel so utterly alone, to feel invisible, displaced, to be without hope and security and any sense of permanency. Has this man struggled to find a sense of 'home' throughout his life, I wondered, and has this struggle led him to the situation he is now in? Perez (2019) writes that displaced persons often feel "trapped in a liminal space" between losing and remaking sense of 'home' (pg. 1516). Did the sleeping man on the sidewalk, like myself, feel trapped in this liminal space where he remembers 'home' from the past but is still trying to recreate or remake a new sense of 'home' in the present? Does this man consider himself 'homeless' at all, in the sense that he is without 'home'? I was never able to ask the sleeping man on the sidewalk any of these questions, but the experience of noticing him and the emotions his presence on the city sidewalk evoked within myself led me to this research on 'home' and homelessness.

In the following chapter, I present ethnographic vignettes, tiny glimpses into the lives of several 'homeless' persons I encountered during my fieldwork. Finally, I was able to explore the questions that arose during that lunchbreak walk and brief, surprise encounter with the sleeping man on the sidewalk. The next chapter examines how the 'homeless' make sense of the word 'home' and how this sensemaking is bound up with particular experiences of 'home.'

CHAPTER 5: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE 'HOMELESS'
AND THEIR 'HOMES'

"Home is a shelter from storms — all sorts of storms." — William J. Bennett



INTRODUCTION

Ethnography is about being open to surprises in the field and being observant to smaller “revelatory moments” that produce “unplanned moments of insight” (Fujii, 2015, pg. 527; see also Trigger, Forsey, and Meurk, 2012). Fujii (2105) refers to these moments as “accidental” in which insight arises by chance, “those instances when the researcher is not engaged in an interview or archive, but in the mundane tasks not often specified in the research design, such as standing in line, drinking coffee, buying food, or talking to hotel staff” (pg. 526). Before discovering ethnography as a research method, while volunteering, I paid little attention to the mundane things occurring around me, like the hinge-door-lock mechanism presented in the introduction of this research. Before I began researching, outreach was a time to listen to those we met on the streets; not a time for questioning about their histories or what home means to them. I listened to them ask for socks and underwear, cell phone chargers, directions to a shelter or program; I listened to them complain about the police presence on the street, the city ‘cleanups’ and the loss of valuable possessions after a camp was demolished. Sure, I was able to catch tiny glimpses into their pasts during some of these conversations, and I learned a bit about their families or lack thereof. Once outreach became a site for research, however, I was able to slow things down a bit and really understand the people I met with each Wednesday evening. Rather than going from camp to camp as quickly as possible, handing out food and necessities, I sat down with the people we met, I asked them if they would share pieces of their past, and I listened *and* I observed. I began to get a better understanding of why they are in the situations they are in, what it means to them to be

homeless, what it means to be without a home. Slowing down time and being patient allowed for accidental moments of insight. As you will read, those moments for me started with a dog's bandaged leg, crawling through wire fencing, walking through broken glass, and a pair of glasses.

This chapter presents ethnographic accounts of my research with 'homeless' persons in 'homeless' camps. Some of the conversations in the accounts were directed by me, insofar as I guided the participant toward the subject of 'home'; others were spontaneous conversations initiated and driven by the participant. In both cases, the conversations presented here offer an understanding of how people identified by outreach workers as 'street homeless' make sense of the word 'home,' how they use the word home, and what the word home can do. In this chapter, I show how the 'homeless' conceptualize the word 'home' which, in turn, shows how personal experiences of 'home' are bound up with a person's particular experience of 'home.' As the stories presented demonstrate, 'home' does not have to be a structured, brick and mortar building with a roof made of tile, metal, or wood. 'Home' has many meanings and is bound to concepts and notions like property; security, safety, and comfort; family and identity and affective attachments to people, things, and places; and control (or lack thereof). Further, one might be "homeless," as the word is officially defined, but the relationship between that policy/policing category and people's affective experiences of "home" is not given by institutionalized meanings and values ascribed to the word.

While this chapter examines various meanings and experiences of 'home', it also examines the politics surrounding public and private spaces as they relate to the homeless and shows how the 'street homeless' negotiate their ways through various obstacles to

their livelihood. The research for this chapter was ethnographically conducted within several homeless camps throughout the city of Louisville and two prominent shelters. Before I present the stories of ‘home’, it is important to examine the concept of camp as it is used in urban studies literature to understand the framing and context of the word in this chapter. Next, I present brief descriptions of the shelters where I volunteered and met some of the subjects whose stories I document. One shelter is for women only, while the other is for men; a brief overview of the literature on gender and homelessness is presented here. Then, I examine several themes that developed during my research that show how ‘homeless’ peoples’ understandings of the words ‘home’ and ‘homeless’ often contradict institutionalized meanings and values of these words.

HOMELESS CAMPS: SPACES OF COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, RESISTANCE, AND AGENCY

The word ‘camp’ is used often throughout this dissertation, both by myself and from the people I study. But what is meant by the word ‘camp’? What does ‘camp’ mean for the homeless? Scholarly conversations on urban camps (encampments) and homeless people often suggest concepts of resistance, community, autonomy, identity, and spaces of agency (Wright, 1997; Snow and Mulcahy, 2001; Hunter et. al., 2014; Carter-White and Minca, 2020).

Tent cities and encampments have increasingly emerged in cities in the U.S. as a response to anti-homeless policing and inadequate and/or overly disciplinary shelter

systems (Herring & Lutz, 2015). As a result of anti-homeless policing and urban renewal programs, the homeless are forced from the few marginal urban spaces in cities they normally occupy, like sidewalks and parks, to outlier spaces where encampments are less visible, therefore, less policed (Speer, 2018). Camps and camp-life is often preferred over shelter living for various reasons: shelters are viewed as being a disciplinary system that attempts to manage behavior through religion, surveillance, and treatment programs (Feldman, 2004; Speer, 2018); shelters can be overcrowded and unsafe (Culhane, 2010; Gwendolyn, 1996; Wagner, 1993; Kryda and Compton, 2009); and due to issues of trust in authority and lack of confidence in the system (Kryda and Compton, 2009).

Wasserman and Clair (2010) argue that the treatment model that many shelters and homeless service providers follow seeks to “assimilate the person who is homeless into normal society,” which means that the individual seeking assistance must adhere to “the social order” of the service providers (pg. 176). Feldman (2004) writes that shelters, both emergency and transitional, approach residents and potential residents as “damaged subjects” who must be “stripped of human personhood and individual identity” in order to reserve a place in their facilities (pg. 96). Those who obey the rules and follow the treatment programs are often allowed more space and privacy within the shelters, more “homelike” arrangements; however, constant surveillance and strict rules continue to highlight the resident as a “damaged” individual who needs to “be reformed through appropriate monitoring and therapeutic intervention” (Feldman, pg. 96, 2004). Speer (2018) argues that camps enable homeless people “establish a modicum of autonomy from the disciplinary aspects of homelessness management systems,” a chance for freedom from authoritarian mechanisms that many homeless people strive to avoid in

their life on the streets (pg. 162). Camps offer a sense of community, security, and privacy that shelters are unable to provide.

According to Duncan (1983), homeless persons must navigate their way through a landscape of “prime” and “marginal” spaces (pg. 92). Prime spaces are spaces in the community that are “being used by domiciled citizens for residential, recreational or navigational purposes; by entrepreneurs for commercial, financial reasons; and/or by politicians for political purposes” (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001, pg. 157). Marginal spaces, on the other hand, are spaces that are “valueless from the standpoint of recognized residential residents, entrepreneurs, and political agents,” spaces that are abandoned and “powerless” and run-down. Homeless persons use marginal spaces, or what Goffman (1974) refers to as “back regions” as spaces of “cover for the activities, as a strategy for survival, to negotiate the differences between how spaces should be used according to authorities and how they are actually used by people who are homeless” (wright, pg. 49). Homeless persons use these spaces for privacy but also, as Giddens (1984) argues, as a space where they can engage in “regressive behaviors,” behaviors that would be discouraged in “prime” or “front” spaces, such as drinking, cursing, or using drugs (pg. 129). Homeless persons often avoid shelters because they lack privacy and the security that marginal spaces offer. In camps, homeless people can avoid disciplinary actions and authoritarian figures who constrict their identities and their social behaviors; they are able to form communities with likeminded people who give them the freedom they desire and to do so in less visible, marginal urban spaces (Giddens, 1984).

Lefebvre and Harvey (1991) argues that space is both physical and mental and that neither the physical nor social realm of space can be separated which results in a

concept of social space. For Lefebvre, space is a social construct in which humans create and live their lives. Wright (1997) writes that for Lefebvre, social space is a “liberatory” space in which “active human agents strategically maneuver” to create particular landscapes that are “essential to the formation of social identities” (pg. 46). In marginal spaces, homeless people form communities and social identities that would be restricted in shelters and in other prime spaces like sidewalks and parks. Snow and Mulcahy (2001) argue that in prime spaces, the identities and communities of homeless people are “routinely contested,” and there they must constantly “negotiate and survive” in spaces that “were neither designed nor intended for residence or basic subsistence practices, such as foraging for food, elimination, and sleeping” (pg. 154). In camps, homeless people become “active agents” in the survival of their identities and communities (Wright, 1997). In camps, they organize and defy city authority, challenging normative ideas of the “social order” and one’s “proper place” in it (Wright, 1997; Wasserman and Clair, 2010). Further, camps provide homeless people with a sense of citizenship in urban spaces, a sense citizenship that is not “domiciled” or “illegitimate” as decentralization and urban revitalization programs often describe the homeless (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001; Sparks, 2012). In camps, homeless people legitimize their citizenship by “participating” in public and private spaces that they are normally excluded from by property-owning citizens (Mitchell, 1997).

The stories in this chapter show that camp-life is often preferred over institutionalized shelter life; however, many of the homeless people in this study, as well as others I have spoken to, do take advantage of the resources that shelters provide. Some even find a sense of community and family in the shelters, a sense of ‘home’, and their

time in the shelters prove valuable for their emotional well-being. In the next section, I introduce the two shelters I spent much of my research time volunteering at to better understand the lives of Louisville's homeless community and how 'home' factors into these lives.

THE SHELTERS

UP FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, WOMEN'S DAY SHELTER

On a sunny Friday in August, downtown Louisville around lunch time, I head in for my first volunteer shift at UP (Uniting Partners) for Women and Children, a women's day shelter. UP is located in a large, old church. Following COVID-19 protocols, I put my mask on and head inside. After signing in, I make my way downstairs to start some laundry. During my first tour of the building, another volunteer, Debra, shows me the laundry room and explained how things worked. They can only do one set of clothes for each resident at a time because the machines are small. Debra, a 50ish retired woman with a passion for helping "lost women," proudly tells me that "*here at UP, we always use fabric softener. Most shelters do not use fabric softener. This is one luxury the mission provides the residents. One tiny thing that can make them feel at home.*" Home is being able to use fabric softener; the ability to have soft, fresh smelling clothes, a small luxury that evokes feelings of comfort and cleanliness. One 'homeless' guest told me that the fabric softener is "*such a treat,*" and "*it's makes me feel good, relaxed like I'm at home layin' in a warm bed on clean sheets.*" 'Home' is a warm bed with clean sheets.

The smell of the fabric softener reminded me of “home” as well - recalling to my mind the smell of the laundry detergent (or maybe it was softener?) that my mother used when I was growing up. Sometimes I catch that same smell when passing a stranger on the street, and it takes me back to a time when my life was simpler, safer, stable, and carefree. Reflecting on my own experience, it occurs to me that offering of fabric softener at the shelter is more than a small luxury that the ‘homeless’ women otherwise would not be able to afford or use; it is an act of kindness and care that might conjure a physical feeling of ‘home’. Fabric softener is symbolic of a *place* to relax and feel safe, a *feeling* of comfort and care. ‘Home’ can be what makes a person, like this particular guest, “feel good” and warm.

Today, I check in guests. I stand at an old, timeworn podium near the locked front entrance that is stocked with plastic gloves, disposable face masks, and hand sanitizer. Behind me is the large, main room where all guests are sent after check-in to sit in chairs methodically placed ten feet apart for social distancing. Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Starbucks used to bring coffee and pastries every Wednesday morning to the shelter; not anymore. Before the pandemic, a group of women from a church used to come to the shelter twice a week to feed the residents. They would make “*big meals, warm food that the residents really looked forward to*”; Debra tells me that they always had more residents in the building on those days. Pre-pandemic, residents could go to a downstairs dayroom furnished with various old couches, overstuffed chairs, TVs, a card table, and a community fridge stocked with snacks and drinks. Now, they sit ten feet apart in metal folding chairs in a great room that was once the nave of the church that peculiarly smells of both dust and pine-sol, no TV, no card table, no social interaction

with others. Some sit in the chairs waiting for a case worker; some wait for food, laundry, or shower time. Others just need a warm, dry, safe place to rest for a bit before heading back out to the streets.

Residents must immediately wash their hands upon entering the building, and then, masked, they see me at that podium to get their temperatures taken and to answer a daily assessment questionnaire on an electronic tablet. Name, age? Have you been feeling ill, have you had a temperature recently? What brings you in? Are you homeless or are you staying with someone? Where did you sleep last night? Debra explains to me that not everyone who comes here is 'homeless'; some women just need food, or maybe toothpaste or shampoo or socks. They still must go through all the questions on the tablet, wash hands, and have their temperatures taken before they can get any food or supplies. I check in 23 people this day; of the 23, 14 women stayed in shelters the previous night.

Homeless women are often overlooked in research on homelessness because homelessness is often associated with single male individuals sleeping on the streets or in shelters (Mayock et. al., 2015). However, as Anderson and Rayens (2004) write, "the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in the United States is families, with women heading 90% of these families" (pg. 12). Homeless women are overlooked because they are more likely to stay with friends of family rather than stay in an emergency shelter like homeless men (Savage, 2016). Homeless women are more likely than men to attempt to resolve their situation on their own rather than seek assistance from shelters (Mayock et. al., 2015). Research suggests that many women become homeless due to domestic violence in relationships (Williams, 1998; Hamilton et. al., 2011; Savage, 2016). Other studies show that a large number of homeless women have

experienced some kind of abuse during their childhoods which can lead to “the inability to form and maintain relationships,” a predictor of homelessness (Anderson and Rayens, 2004, pg. 12). Homeless women often lack financial and emotional support systems (Bassuk and Rosenberg, 1990; Wood et. al., 1990) and studies show that when they do have support, they are resistant to asking for assistance (Shinn et. al., 1991; Goodman et. al., 1991). Homeless women are more vulnerable (Batty et. al., 2010), they are marginalized and alienated from society (Savage, 2016), and they are often separated from their children causing more emotional distress (Culhane et. al. 2003).

Recent studies argue for the importance of creating “gender-sensitive policy responses” to homeless woman, responses that must “recognize the diverse and complex needs of all homeless women” (Savage, 2016, pg. 43; See also Mayock et. al., 2015). For instance, Savage (2016) argues that policy responses must take into consideration “the needs and circumstances of homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children” in order to provide homeless mothers access to resources that can “enhance their nurturing capital” thereby providing them with the ability to give their children the love and care they need (pg. 60). Studies show that homeless women and homeless men, while sharing some characteristics like a lack of formal education and some kind of childhood trauma, differ greatly in other areas of life (Arce et. al., 1983; Crystal, 1984; Swick et. al., 2014). For instance, homeless women are more likely to have histories of psychiatric treatment but are less likely to have been involved with the correctional system (Crystal, 1984). Further, homeless women are also less likely to have previously been employed.

These differences between homeless men and women are part of the reason for separating shelters by gender. Homeless women have needs that require different

responses than those for homeless men. UP for Women and Children is a response to such a need by homeless women and mothers. The shelter provides a safe space for women, mothers or not, to escape from domestic abuse situations. It also provides material and financial assistance to women and their children if they have any. Women are able to receive feminine products that would not be found in a men's shelter, they can feel free from harassment, they have private showers and laundry services, and the resources the shelter offers are tailored to women.

ST. JOHN CENTER, MEN'S DAY SHELTER

St. John Center is a day shelter for men experiencing homelessness located downtown Louisville. While the shelter serves as a source for showers, breakfast, and essentials like socks and underwear, their main mission is to provide housing and "self-sufficiency" to guests so that they no longer "experience homelessness" (St. John Center). The shelter is in a former Catholic church that was built in the 1850s as a safe, haven for immigrants. Now, the shelter provides a "safe haven" for the homeless men in the city.

While the shelter does not push religious-based treatment programs and/or activities, nor does their website, staff, or volunteers, religious symbols permeate the building. Original stained glass images depicting Jesus on the windows and traditional Catholic church architecture from the ornate balusters, arched recesses, and the chancel are prominent reminders of the building's history. The pews have been removed to make space for a common area with picnic style tables, folding chairs, and a tv; a space for building a sense of community the way Mass created a sense of belonging for the immigrants over one hundred years ago. The ceiling is as tall as two houses stacked atop

of each other; a dramatic height purposely built to resemble a moment of transcendence to the heavens. Sitting at the check-in desk in the mornings, I often find myself gazing upwards, feeling the smallness of my presence in this great hall, wondering if any others in the building ever feel the same.

There is a large bathroom towards the back of the building where guests can shower, wash clothes, and shave. During the height of the pandemic and for many months after, the showers were closed. There was also a coffee station that provided coffee as well as snacks to guests, but that, too, closed for health concerns. For many months, guests were only allowed to sit in the folding chairs, six feet apart for an hour at a time, waiting for mail or making phone calls or waiting for an appointment with a housing coordinator. The showers are available now, but the coffee station is still shut down.

Guests wait in line outside to sign in for an hour of reprieve. Some men come for the showers, housing and/or employment opportunities, to wait for mail or make phone calls, or to receive needed supplies such as socks, underwear, reading glasses, or bottled water. Some come to escape the heat or the cold, if only for an hour, while others come to socialize with friends, staff, and volunteers. Working check-in during the week, I have been able to meet some very interesting men who, over time and with great patience, I have learned their stories. Most of the men who visit the shelter are from Louisville or the surrounding areas, but there are some that are just passing through and need a place to help them transition to the next. The shelter is often busy with little downtime, but I have been able to get to know several men very well.

The men's shelter provides a space of familiarity, comfort, and security for the guests who visit the building. Although none of the men I spoke to consider the shelter their 'home,' the shelter provides essential qualities (comfort, security, stability) that notions of 'home' reflect, giving the guests a familiar space to interact with acquaintances who share their similar hardships and stories. Some of the men I interacted with note a feeling of comfortability and relaxation in the shelter that they are unable to find elsewhere.

THEIR STORIES

What follows are the ethnographic stories and analyses of the individuals I studied and who made this research possible. The stories are grouped by theme, although most of the stories had much in common. The first section presents the theme of security (safety, comfort, and rest) and the second of home and identity. Various subcategories of 'home' are entangled in these two themes, and I discuss these as well.

SECURITY, SAFETY, AND COMFORT

SARAH AND HER 'HOME'

Sometimes, outreach means going places I don't want to go to. Sometimes, a person's 'home' can be difficult to find. Sometimes, I had to crawl through snipped wire fences, for instance, and to hope the broken glass bottles I was stepping over did not get lodged

in my sandals; that's where Sarah lives. The place she calls 'home' is a true urban fortress, tucked away from public view with one way in and one way out. To visit Sarah, I need not only an invitation but a hastily drawn map showing which part of the fence to climb through. Oh, and having someone to hold the fence back while I climb through is a good idea unless I want a ripped shirt and possibly a few scratches when I leave.

Why do I call Sarah's camp a 'home'? Well, because she says it is. The first time Donna invited me to meet Sarah, she told me, "*Sarah has invited you to visit her home.*" I was expecting a camp hidden away, possibly under a bridge or bypass, maybe tucked between a few trees on a private lot. I expected a tent, maybe a dog, some trash scattered around the campsite, and perhaps a neighbor or two. It's not often we visit homeless people living alone at a site. After carefully squeezing our way through the one hole in the fence that encloses the area under a bypass in the west end of Louisville and cautiously traversing through a hilly path of broken glass and jagged rocks, I began to wonder if these dangerous conditions were merely a product of littering, or a strategically designed security system to deter intruders and alert the homeowner. There is no way to approach Sarah's home quietly or swiftly without her knowing you are coming.

As we make our way up the hill, I am greeted with a sight totally unexpected. A large tent, 8-person at least, sits surrounded by sheets hanging from metal poles that resembles a makeshift privacy fence to, what I assume, block the view from the street below. In front of the tent sits a small firepit like the one I have at home I bought from Target. Around the firepit, a few upturned buckets and two, unlit tiki torches, reminiscent of a late summer night with friends toasting marshmallows and sharing a few beers. There is a clothesline with shirts and pants hanging, a blanket and some washcloths,

reminding me of days I spent at my grandmother's home as a child while my mother was at work. A small, red portable grill sits a few feet from the tent, clay-colored rust lining the bottom and a bag of opened charcoal to its side. Most surprising, I see not one speck of trash surrounding the tent's perimeter; no broken glass bottle pieces, no fast-food wrappers, not even a crushed soda can or empty cigarette pack. Donna calls out, "*Hello, Sarah! It's Donna and Abby,*" as I silently marvel at a 'homeless' camp I have not yet experienced. Sarah's tent is the only one here, and I wonder if she gets lonely in her fortress, or does she prefer solitude?

Sarah emerges from the tent, and my sense of wonder peaks even greater. A woman, probably in her late 30s with long, blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, a form-fitting spaghetti strap dress, barefoot greets us with a smile and a wave. Donna greets her, asks her how she is doing, and introduces me. As I shake her hand, I am unable to take my eyes off her protruding belly. She must be at least seven, eight months pregnant! I am truly bewildered! How does a woman in her state get through that jagged, wire fence unscathed? How does she manage to climb that hill and avoid the broken bottle pieces that litter the path? Does she go to doctor's appointments? How does she safely get down that hill and back to the sidewalk below without any mishaps? I manage a hello and thank you for the invitation as my mind continues to race, wondering how a pregnant woman could live in these conditions. But as my mind races, a man appears from the tent and places an arm around Sarah's waist. Around the same age, he nods at us as he takes a puff from a cigarette. "*I asked you to quit smoking in our house,*" Sarah turns to reprimand him with a severe expression. Donna chuckles, raises her eyebrows at the man and wags a finger. "*This is Mitchell,*" Donna tells me. "*Sarah's husband.*" Well, at least she has

some help here, I think. Donna, Sarah, and Mitchell take seats on the upturned buckets around the firepit, and I reach in my canvas bags for a few sack lunches and some waters that we bring to all the sites. *“Abby is a student at UofL. She studies homelessness and would like to get to know you all better if you’re willing to chat some,”* Donna tells the two as I hand them some brown bags. Mitchell brings a canvas chair over for Sarah, and she sits, props her feet up on a bucket and looks tenderly at her belly while caressing it. *“Well, we know a little somethin’ about that, don’t we?”* Mitchell responds to Donna, smudging his cigarette in the ground next to him. *“You better put that in the trash,”* Sarah tells him with raised eyebrows, still rubbing her belly.

For being under a bypass, the noise from above is not as distracting as I would assume, and it does not seem to affect Sarah or Mitchell at all. Donna asks how the baby is doing and if she is having any difficulties keeping up with appointments.

“I’m going to my appointments, and UP [a women’s shelter in Louisville] is trying to help find me housing. But I don’t wanna go to no halfway house or someplace where there are drug addicts and they preaching Jesus and stuff. I would stay here if winter wasn’t coming soon. I can’t let my baby sleep here. And I can’t live in a car either. Don’t have one anyway.”

I ask how long she has been here.

“Two months in this spot. We’ve made it cozy. I think it’s safe here. Nobody bothers us. Don’t know we’re here. We got everything we need right here. But baby can’t live here.”

Mitchell lights another cigarette and opens one of the sack lunches. I can hear shouting on the street below, and I smell fried chicken coming from the restaurant a block

away. A siren screams from above on the highway, and I wipe a little sweat from my temple. Sarah's words echo in my mind: a baby can't live here.

"Has your momma been any help lately," Donna asks Sarah.

"Nope. And she got my kids and won't let me see them." She turns to me. "That's why I'm here. Momma has custody, and I'm not allowed around the kids. I was living with my momma, but law got called, and I had to leave. Didn't have nowhere to go. No job. Met Mitchell over at [Camp] Mercer. Got pregnant. Moved outta Mercer cause too many drugs and fighting. Stayed at a shelter some, but its loud and more drugs and people steal from you. Finally found this spot. So, this is our home for now."

This is home for now. I am intrigued that Sarah uses the word home to describe her current living situation, knowing that she will have to move soon when the baby is due. I ask her about this.

"I've noticed you use the word home often. What does that word mean to you?" I ask.

"Have I used that word a lot? I hadn't even noticed really. I mean, this place is my home right now. It's where I live, and I feel safe. And I have Mitchell here. And he's my family. Wish I could be with my kids. But they have a different home, I guess. I guess when we're finally all together that will be real home, you know what I mean. This is just temporary right now. But it's still my home. I don't have another one."

I prod her a little further. "But what about the word; what does the word mean to you?"

"Well, I guess it means where you live. Like, where you have your stuff. Well, I guess it's more than that, huh? I guess it's where you feel safe and have your family and

love and stuff. I guess it's more of a feeling cause I been homeless, like, without a home or a house. But I don't feel homeless now like I used to...like before I met Mitchell. If it was just me and Mitchell, I wouldn't care about getting into an apartment so fast. Like, we could just stay here, and I'd be fine. Him, too, I think." She says this and glances over at him for a reaction. He nods his head a little, his eyes searching the ground as he listens. *"It's just not as lonely now as it was before we was together. That's one of the hardest parts of being out on the streets. You get so damn lonely. I'm lucky I found him cause it's not so lonely anymore, and I feel safer. I have someone to talk to when I can't sleep, or when the day is just crawling by. So, maybe that's part of home, too. Having someone. Like, to share life with and all."*

Donna stands up and stretches and says we have got to run. We still have a long night ahead of us. I thank Sarah and Mitchell for inviting us into their home and for the chat. Donna asks if she knows where she will have the baby.

"UofL [University of Louisville hospital]. We got appointments there already. And I've been going to them. I have a connection there." She rubs her belly and smiles a little to herself. *"Her names gonna be Asha. I looked up names on google for 'hope'. I like that one best."*

As Donna and I make our way back down the hill through the broken bottles and squeeze ourselves delicately through the hole in the wire fence, I feel pity for Sarah and for her baby; I worry about their future, and I hope she can find a place to make a new home for her and her other children. I empathize with her other children living with their grandmother, not having their mother around to get them ready for school in the morning, to pack their lunches and hug them goodbye; to help with homework, to read them

bedtime stories and tuck them in with a goodnight kiss. I empathize, recalling the loss of my own mother at such a young age, I feel sadness knowing Sarah is not the only pregnant woman on the streets, nor the only woman on the streets living without their children.

ANALYSIS OF SARAH AND 'HOME'

'Home' for Sarah is being with her loved ones, and wherever her loved ones are, that is where she finds 'home.' Her 'home' is not permanent but can move from place to place; it is not a building, or even one campsite. She says that when she left Mercer and found her current residence, that spot became her 'home' because she had Mitchel there. 'Home' is not always a particular place, a set locale she can go back to; it travels with her. Sarah relates 'home' with companionship and says she does not "feel homeless" like she used to because she has Mitchel.

Sarah says she 'feels safe' at her current 'home,' contradicting scholarly research on security *and* my own perception of safety. While Sarah's 'home' is not a private space, "free from external surveillance" (Mallett, 2004, pg. 71) and public scrutiny, Sarah still feels that her 'home' makes her 'feel safe.' Security for Sarah does not look like a gated community, surveillance cameras, privacy fences, and locked doors; security for Sarah and her 'home' comes in the form of a rusted, snipped-wire, public fence, broken glass, and the obscured placement of her 'home' from pedestrians on the street below. I would never describe Sarah's 'home' as safe and secure because it appears lacking according to my own understandings of 'privacy' and 'security' and 'safety' – which to my mind would require walls, a door, and a lock, however, she asserts that her 'home'

feels safe because she has Mitchel with her. Her idea of security differs from those found in literature on ‘home’ that correlates safety and refuge with being *inside* a place, where ‘home’ is “clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance” (Mallett, 2004, pg. 70). Dovey (1985) argues that home space means privacy and security and a place to be with kin, concepts that public spaces are unable to provide. Sarah’s ‘home’ challenges these scholarly definitions of home; she *does* feel safe in her environment, her hidden location from the sidewalk below provides privacy, and she is with her loved one in what she views as a secured space.

Sarah’s story also challenges notions of pregnant homeless women as having to endure living in unsafe, uninhabitable spaces where they feel a lack of security and safety for their wellbeing (Watson, 2016; Murray et. al., 2018). From what I see, Sarah’s ‘home’ does not appear to be uninhabitable; she has a grill to cook her food, a place to wash her clothes, chairs to relax in, and a yard free of debris and, as mentioned, she feels safe and secure with Mitchell. Studies on pregnant homeless women also describe these women as being out of control of their surroundings and how only secure, stable housing can provide them with the autonomy that would protect their health and wellbeing (Stonehouse et. al., 2015; Murray et. al., 2018). But Sarah has autonomy; she has appointments with the University of Louisville that she adheres to, and she is working with the women’s shelter to obtain housing. While she understands the importance of finding adequate shelter for her baby before winter arrives, she appears to be taking care of herself, being responsible, and does not appear to be unhappy with her current living arrangements.

AMBER: "I GOT A HOME ALREADY"

I meet Amber for the first time during my first shift at UP. Amber is a younger woman, born in 1983, the same year as my sister. Short, spiky white, blonde hair, baggy jeans, and ripped black tank top, she comes in, very hesitantly, with a friend. She lingers near the door, letting her friend talk for her. Her friend motions her closer inside, and Amber, reluctantly, takes small steps towards me. Her friend says, "*just tell her what you need, it's okay.*" She has a cat in a stroller outside and asks if she can bring it in. I motion her to come to the sign-in podium, but she walks past it, out of view of everyone in the dayroom. "*I have crazy anxiety,*" she tells me. She tells me she has been kicked out of all the shelters and says, "*I really don't have an excuse,*" and I don't ask why. I coax her over to the podium with reassurances that the questionnaire will not take long, and she tells me she can't stay inside, but she does so long enough to answer the questions. When I ask where she stayed last night, her friend who has been standing to the side on her phone says, "*She has her own posh hotel*"; a tent in a private camp that supposedly is one of the best, built with plywood for a roof. "Plywood?" I ask, surprised. "*Yeah, I've had all kinds of setups, but this one is the best. I don't want no housing; I got a home already, and I like it there. No one bothers me, I can live in peace. Don't have to do treatment programs, no one checking up on me all the time. I got everything I need and my kitty. I just need a little bare necessities here and there. Don't wanna stay in nasty shelters. Don't need that help. Only reason I'm here is for my kitty.*" After questions, Amber tells me she is only here to see if we have any kitten food (kitten is 12 weeks old she tells me), and that Tiny (worker from St. Johns) said she would bring a tarp here for her. She tells

me she is going to wait outside in the courtyard with her kitten (*“its leashed trained”*), and I go get a case worker to meet her outside.

ANALYSIS OF AMBER’S STORY

For Amber, ‘home’ is independence, self-reliance, and a place she can be with her pet. Like many other ‘homeless’ people, Amber is shelter resistant and refuses or avoids engagement with housing services. She already has a ‘home’, and she doesn’t want to submit to treatment programs; she dislikes the shelter environment. Scholarly research on homelessness, as outlined in the literature review, refers to people like Amber as the service-resistant (Padgett et. al., 2001; Wasserman and Claire, 2010; Padgett et. al., 2006; Kim et. al., 2010). There are many reasons why a person may resist traditional outreach services. Drug and/or alcohol addictions often deter individuals from shelter stays and treatment. Some of these individuals are “not ready” for treatment (i.e., not ready to commit to a program, give up lifestyles, to become clean) and continue to stay on the streets, refusing to engage with or accept assistance from outreach workers and authority figures (Padgett et. al., 2001).

Other scholars write that the service -resistant avoid engagement because they refuse to stay in shelters. Shelters can be dangerous and unsanitary; there’s stealing, fighting, the risk of bed lice and other diseases, the risk of rape, and they are often overcrowded, forcing people to sleep on the floor or cramped in chairs (Culhane, 2010; Gwendolyn, 1996; Wagner, 1993; Kryda and Compton, 2009). Others resist engagement because they have trust issues with authority figures, often due to childhood traumatic experiences. Often, bad experiences with authority figures in the, and “officialdom in

general,” hinder trust-building with the service resistant (Murray and Johnsen, 2011, pg. 327). Furthermore, enforcement by authority figures can intensify “feelings of alienation and stigmatization, fueling further resistance to supportive interventions” (Teixeira, 2010, pg. 31). Sometimes, this lack of trust is because they have been victims of ‘empty promises’ by outreach workers who, while genuinely trying to help, have promised services that they are unable to deliver (Kryda and Compton, 2009). Others resist due to a lack of confidence in services available or refuse to seek shelter or treatment to avoid enrolling in the various programs and, if religious-based institutions, having to attend church services to be eligible for housing and other social services (Sparks, 2012).

Ambers’ insistence that she already has a ‘home’ and thus does not need shelter contradicts policy on homelessness that argues for stable and physically structured housing for the ‘homeless’ (Merokee, 2001; Pearson et. al., 2009; Fitzpatrick et. al., 2014). Her ‘home’ is structured in this sense; her friend tells me it has a plywood roof. The plywood roof, like the hinge-door-lock mechanism in the introduction of this dissertation, again challenges my own notions that a structure’s material form serves straightforwardly functional purposes (security, stability, and permanence). Like the tent with the hinge-door-lock, Ambers’ shelter is still a tent that can be easily breached by lifting a flap and entering underneath; the roof is still attached to a flimsy tent that provides little protection from harsh weather conditions. Perhaps, the roof signifies more than common preconceptions of the purpose of a roof, i.e., to shelter from outside elements. The roof could signify Ambers’ insistence that she is self-sufficient, sheltered, and that she has a ‘home.’

MARTHA: "I JUST WANT A PLACE TO REST"

Early one morning while volunteering at UP, an older woman knocks on the door in total distress. She is crying, big tears, and I want to hug her and fix all her problems. She wears a disheveled blonde wig that is much too big for her head, and when she shows me her ID, I see that she is bald. She walks inside dragging a weathered red bike and a small backpack that appears to have years of patchwork holding the straps and pockets together.

We work our way through the temperature taking and the assessment as she continues to cry those big tears, wringing her hands and bobbing her head from side to side. Her ID says her name is Martha Jackson. *"I need some shoes; mine are wet from three nights ago,"* she tells me in tears. *"I need a social security card."* She keeps wiping her tears, looking from me to the ground, to the ceiling, crying. *"I don't have anything. I don't even have toilet paper to wipe my butt."* But when I ask if she wants to shower, she says no. *"I ain't got nothin' and nobody and no home no more. I just wanna rest. I just want a place to rest where nobody will be botherin' me all the time."* I ask where she stayed last night and she tells me a friend's house, *"but I burnt that bridge last night."* Still crying. I pat her on the back. I don't know what else to do. I want to help her. I tell her we will help her, and I usher her into the day room where she will wait to talk to R about housing if she wants to. In the day room, guests sit in chairs spaced out, and a volunteer comes around with a clipboard to write down and address each woman's needs. I watch Martha slowly make her way into the day room, feet dragging, still wringing her hands, head down and shoulders slumped.

ANALYSIS OF MARTHA AND HOME

Martha breaks my heart. She has no one, and she has no safe place to rest. She does not have family or friends she can turn to, and she has burned her bridges where she did.

Horwitz & Tognoli (1982) argue that concepts of home “fit differently at different times” in a person’s life (pg. 335). At this time in Martha’s life, ‘home’ is a place where she can rest, where no one can bother her. ‘Home’ at this time in her life is a place of refuge, a safe and private place where she can rest her mind and her body.

Martha tells me that she no longer has a ‘home’, a place where she can be safe and relax; she also describes feelings of loneliness and being without ‘nothing.’ Concepts of comfort, rest, and the possession (or lack thereof) of material objects in research on ‘home’ are often associated with belonging and identity-making (Tuan, 1977; Sixsmith, 1986; Annison, 2000). Annison (2000) writes that ‘the home’ is a central site for meaning making of the self where people ‘possess’ feelings of security, happiness, and belonging, all of which are not physical ‘things,’ nonetheless, ‘things’ that are essential to the well-being of a person (pg. 290). Martha is in distress because she lacks not only physical possessions (things) such as shoes, toilet paper, and her ID card, but also a place she can return to, a place of privacy where she can enjoy comforts and relax. Without these physical and ‘essential’ qualities of life such as security, comfort, and happiness, she lacks a sense of belonging and a sense of self. She declares herself without a ‘home’ because she lacks these essentials, but also because she lacks any substantial support system of family and friends.

Tuan (1977) writes that people feel ‘at home’ in ‘particular localities’ where they have feelings of comfort and relaxation and where they feel secure and a sense of

belonging. Martha is unable to feel 'at home' or a sense of 'home' at all because she has nowhere to relax. The women's shelter offers Martha a place to sit away from the elements outside with clean laundry and a shower, toilet paper, and possibly some shoes if there are any available in her size; however, the shelter space does not 'belong' to her. She may feel a sense of comfort and relaxation at this 'particular locale' momentarily, but soon enough she will be forced to return to the streets, without any means of privacy, without the physical possessions she desires and the 'essential' qualities of life she lacks.

Martha appears to insinuate that 'home' means rest, privacy, and comfort, a feeling of being at ease. In many cities, it is illegal for homeless people to sleep in public spaces, including parks and on the sidewalks. Some cities, like Denver, have even declared "the right to rest" illegal for homeless individuals and have increased police response and resources to enforce this law (Langegger and Koester, 2016). In a bylaw passed by the city of Denver in 2012, no person can "dwell" in any open public space, including camping in marginal spaces, and it defines dwelling as "sleeping, resting, preparing food, eating or storing personal belongings in any publicly or privately owned open space with the aid of shelter" (Langegger and Koester, 2016, pg. 1030). This ban on "dwelling" and camps signifies a rupture in the everyday lives of homeless people, including their hygiene routines, which perpetuates a stigma of homeless people as dirty and unkempt (Kusmer, 2002). In cities like Denver that are banning resting in public, simply being a 'homeless' person marks them as "potential lawbreakers" (Langegger and Koester, 2016, pg. 1031). By banning all encampments, cities with anti-homeless laws strip homeless people not only of their right to rest but of their sense of security. In

camps, homeless people are able to perform private activities such as bathing and elimination, but anti-policing laws deprive them of this security and privacy.

‘Home’ for Martha means privacy, a place where no one “bothers her.” Unlike Sarah, Martha has not been able to make a ‘home’ on the streets. She does not have a clothesline like Sarah to hang her clothes (her shoes are “wet from three nights ago”) and she is, by her account, alone with “nothin’ and nobody” whereas Sarah has Mitchell. While Martha does not verbally tell me she desires a house in the physical sense of a structured building, I assume this is so because she is elderly, tired, and desperate for privacy that life on the streets may not be able to offer her. Lipmann (2009) writes that sleeping in shelters “requires coping skills that many frail-aged people either do not possess or are unwilling to risk”, for instance, shelters can be dangerous with drugs being used, thievery, and violence (pg. 273). Sleeping on the streets or in camps involves providing self-security or forming relationships with other homeless persons to ensure safety. Elderly homeless people like Martha often have trouble forming new relationships of trust with both providers and other homeless people and also have few social support systems than younger homeless adults (Davis-Berman, 2011). Further, elderly homeless people often have physical disabilities that make resting even more difficult (Shinn et. al., 2007). Due to these issues particular to the elderly homeless population, making ‘home’ on the streets for people like Martha is a challenge and finding rest and security prove to be difficult.

FAMILY AND IDENTITY

TONY: 'HOME' WITHOUT WALLS

One warm day towards the end of summer when the Kentucky humidity was so thick in the air it clung to my skin with a stickiness and the heat seemed to slow time down, I visit Camp Mercer with Donna from the Forgotten Louisville to pass out much needed water, food, and other essentials. Arriving around 6 pm after the shelters have closed for the day, the camp is in full animation with most everyone hanging around outside of their tents, catching up on the day's news and adventures. The Forgotten Louisville does evening/night outreach because this is the time when the shelters and food kitchens are closed and most of the residents of so-called 'camps' have left the libraries and given up "flying signs," aka, panhandling. The heat today is oppressive and irritating, as shown on the weary, sweaty faces of the camp residents. I pass red faces covered in moisture and several men using the bottoms of their shirts to wipe sweat away, some women fanning themselves with paper plates. Under the bypass and away from the river, the camp full of tents offers little space for a cool breeze to pass through, so the air is thick with and stagnant. Several people are bickering about how crowded the camp has become lately and one man vows he will leave for a more private location as soon as his new tent arrives from Jeff (HHC).

After handing out some bottles of water and a few lunch sacks, I grab a bottle of water for myself, wipe the sweat from my neck and head towards the much more private backside of the camp so I can check on Anthony, aka Tony. Donna introduced me to Tony a few months ago, and after a couple of visits, I discovered how Tony found

himself in the camp. Tony is a tall, slim man in his 50s with thick, greying hair, and he always has a cigarette hanging from his mouth. The second time I met Tony, we chatted while Donna checked in on a few other campers and, cigarette after cigarette, Tony told me of his dreams and the tragedies that left him broken and without a 'home.' Tony had dreams of being a professor of history and completed a couple of classes at the University of Louisville. However, tragedy after tragedy forced him out of his house in Jeffersontown, a major suburb of Louisville, and onto the streets downtown. Shortly after enrolling at the college, Tony lost his wife to cancer. With two kids, he made the decision to put his dreams of teaching on hold and took a job as a truck driver instead; *"teachers don't make shit anyway,"* he told me. Shortly after losing his wife, he lost himself to drugs and alcohol and put his children in the care of his wife's parents. *"I was at the lowest point in my life. But I would do anything to not think about it [his wife's death]. I would do anything to not think about anything."* While living in an apartment, Tony was robbed and beaten during *"a drug deal gone bad"*; so badly that it left him with a traumatic brain injury resulting in severe short-term memory loss. Someone had overdosed in his apartment, and the assailants' thought Tony was responsible for it. When I first met Tony, I watched Donna hand him a few bottles of pills and, intrigued, inquired why she was handing out prescription medication. *"Tony can't get to the pharmacy to pick up his meds, so I pick up and deliver to him every week,"* she tells me. *"I call him daily to remind him which pills to take and when."* After the robbery and the brain injury, Tony lost his trucking job and his apartment and found himself living on the streets for the first time in his life.

I find Tony sitting outside of his large tent smoking a cigarette with his beagle-mix, Lily, sitting by his side. I smell meat cooking on the grill behind him and my mouth waters. Lily has a cast on her leg, and her ear looks misshapen. Tony waves me over, and I take a seat across from him in one of his woven, foldout lawn chairs. We both wipe a bit of sweat from our faces, and he shakes his head as if to say, “can you believe this heat?”

“What’s up with Lily? What happened? Is she okay?” I ask.

“Ah. *She got into a fight with one of those dopers’ dogs a few days back.*” He tells me. “*I had Kathy [an outreach volunteer] take her to the vet for me. She’s a feisty shit though. She will be alright.*”

Tony lights another cigarette and reaches to scratch Lily behind the ears while I take in his environment a bit more. I watch smoke roll out of the grill and ask what he is cooking. “*I got my disability check today, so I bought a few pork chops. Gonna share them with Kenny and Sarah,*” Tony tells me, referring to his neighbors. Tony receives around \$700 a month in disability for his brain injury. A large chunk of his money is spent on his medication which includes medicine for anxiety, depression, seizures, muscle relaxers, and anticoagulants.

Tony knows that I am a doctoral student at the university, and he doesn’t seem to mind when I prod him about his past. Tony lights another cigarette and walks toward the grill to check on the burgers, Lily limping close behind. When he opens the grill, the smell of the smoke encompasses all the residents on the backside (and probably the front, too), and we all smile as we take in the mouth-watering aroma. Sarah and Kenny drag their chairs over to Tony’s plot and continue talking with Donna. Tony shuts the grill and sits back down with Lily at his heels. I ask if he will tell me a little bit about his family.

“My wife and kids were everything to me. My kids still are. But they can’t see me this way. I need to do something, man. I need to clean up. I don’t do drugs no more. But I need some housing. They can’t come visit me out here. I can’t go visit them like this. When I had a house, when Sheila was alive, life was good. We had a home. I mowed the yard after work. She cooked dinner. I was in school. I wanted to be a teacher, you know. And she supported that. After she passed, I had to file bankruptcy because the bills, the hospital bills were too much. How you supposed to ever pay all that?”

I ask him to elaborate a little more on what he means by we had a home.’ Does he still aspire to have a ‘home’ in a house somewhere? Does he want one? Or has he made his ‘home’ here? Where is ‘home’ now, I ask him.

“Home was years ago. With Shelia and the kids. I don’t think I’ll ever truly be home again. Even if I get my shit together and get the kids back. Without Sheila...” He takes a long drag on his cigarette and looks down at Lily who looks up at him with a little wag of her tail; the smell of the burgers still permeating the air, the sound of Donna, Kenny, and Sarah chitchatting about this and that. *“I don’t think of home as a place. Not anymore. I don’t really think of home in a way that inspires anything really. I have been on the streets for four years and nothing really resonates with me when ‘home’ is said. Not anymore.”*

Tony’s words resonate with me deeply. I feel his words in my soul. After losing my own mother, I felt a sense of loss that Tony’s words captured well. Although my sister and I still lived in my mother’s house, it no longer felt like home to me. It felt more like a place; a place to eat and shower and sleep. A vessel to keep our bodies and our belongings. We wandered through the halls of what we once called our home, searching

for a way to bring that feeling back. Over the years, the feeling was rekindled from the love and resiliency my sisters and I shared, and my sense of “home” became not a place but rather a bond, a shared grief, shared trauma. After losing my sisters, that bond that we created after my mother’s death, that feeling of home that once was restored, departed once more. I empathize with Tony when he says he doesn’t think he will ever truly be home again after losing Sheila. For me, after losing those I love, it again became difficult to see through the sorrow that clouds the mind, like a heavy, opaque veil that obstructs any hope for recovery of those lost feelings of home.

ANALYSIS OF TONY AND HOME

Researchers on ‘home’ often relate the word and concept with a physical structure, a ‘place’ one can return to. Porteous (1976) argues that ‘home’ is a *physical* space where people create defenses against the outside world, where, in bedrooms and studies, people form identities through personalization of physical objects. Other researchers on ‘home’ also describe ‘home’ as a physical structure with “enduring characteristics” and services such as “lighting, heating, telephone, and garden” as physical dimensions of the ‘home’ (Smith, 1994, pg. 33; see also Sixsmith, 1986; Lawrence, 1987; Hayward, 1977).

Saunders and Williams (1988) argue that ‘home’ is a ‘socio-spatial entity’ consisting of the “physical unit of the house” and the “social unit of the household” (pg. 83)

However, Tony’s story and his conceptualizations of ‘home’ contradict these notions of ‘home’ as they relate to physical structures and place. Tony says that ‘home’ is *not* a place for him; ‘home’ was “years ago” with his family. Even if he were able to gain custody of his children again, he says he would never have a ‘home’ again because his

wife is deceased, and he cannot bring her back. For Tony, 'home' is family, his wife and his children. 'Home' for Tony is not a place where defenses are created in bedrooms, where personal items create identity; 'home' is not four walls and a roof or a permanent nighttime residence in a brick-and-mortar structure.

Contrary to what I believed when I first began critically thinking about the concepts of 'home' and homelessness, a 'home' is not the same thing as a structure (a 'house'). In Tony's understanding, 'home' does not even have to refer to a place. Someone might be houseless, but not 'homeless.' And conversely, just because a person has a 'house,' does not mean they feel at 'home' in it. Others I met while volunteering and doing outreach expressed similar emotions when they spoke of 'home' as this chapter shows. However, some people I spoke to on the streets and in shelters know exactly where their 'homes' are, and often, they take their 'homes' with them wherever they go, as the next story reveals.

JAMAR: "WE HAD CROSSWORD PUZZLES"

The first morning I notice Jamar, I instantly want to talk to him. A young black man, barely 18 years old, if that, with short dreadlocks always tucked under a baseball cap with the tag still attached, Jamar always has a smile on his face. Most of the time he is smiling at something he has said to himself; Jamar talks to himself often. He sits in a folding chair next to the guest check-in desk having entire conversations with himself, laughing, nodding his head, just having a great time! He rarely talks to other guests, and on occasion, talks to staff or volunteers. What really intrigues me about Jamar, aside from the private soliloquies, is that he makes and completes his own crossword puzzles. Every

day, he comes up to the check-in desk and asks for a piece of paper and pencil. He then sits in his chair and writes and designs his own crossword puzzles. Sometimes, he spends his entire hour writing and filling out those puzzles. I can tell when he has come up with a really great word because he will nod to himself and chuckle with pride, tapping his pencil to his hat and then placing it in his mouth as he gazes at his creation.

The few words Jamar shares with me are mostly “thank you,” or “yes, ma’am,” or “no ma’am,” or “can I have a pencil paper, please?” We eventually get to the point where he no longer needs to ask me for the pencil and paper; he walks up to the counter, head tilted slightly downward, avoiding eye contact, and I hand him his crossword puzzle designing kit and say, “Here you go, Jamar.” In return, I get a mumbled thank you, and off he goes to enjoy his hour of creativity. At last, one morning about a month after I first meet him, Jamar walks up to the counter, and before I can hand him his pencil and paper, he starts talking. Honestly, I had no idea what he says to me that first day of communication. He seems very nervous, fumbling words, mumbling so quietly I am unable to understand a word he says. But he keeps talking, so I keep pretending I can hear and understand. This goes on for a few minutes, he mumbles while I nod. Then, he asks for his pencil and paper, says “thank you,” and walks back to his seat. I am totally confused by the conversation, or what appears to be a conversation, but I am also elated that Jamar had spoken to me.

The next week, Jamar approaches the counter, head slightly titled down, eyes avoiding contact, and asks if I have some scissors; he needed a piece of hair cut from his head. I cut one piece, and then he would show me another and another. “Jamar, I’m going to end up cutting all of your hair off,” I joke. He grins a little (I got a smile!), then props

his elbows on the counter and hangs his head for a second. He raises his eyes towards mine, smiles, and says, *“thank you for being nice to me. No one’s nice to me a lot.”* I smile back and say, *“Who on earth would not be nice to you, Jamar?”* His eyes glance sideways for a moment as if thinking who, then raise back up, he touches the brim of his cap, and walks to his chair.

This is how I slowly and patiently can hear Jamar’s story. Two months of these strangely amusing, tiny conversations, often mumbled and incoherent, led to a few moments of completely *coherent* glimpses into where he came from and how he ended up on the streets. One morning when I had Jamar’s attention, briefly, I grab my pad and pen and ask him where he is from and if he has any family nearby.

“From Indiana. Indiana. Somewhere. I remember that place. I was born there. In Indiana. That’s where I’m from. My grandma, she passed, and that was that. Not from there anymore. My parents, pssshh, drugs.”

“So, did you grow you in Louisville,” I ask.

“I guess, Louisville. Fosters. This one and that one. Never stayed too long. This one and that one. I’m smart though. They didn’t know that. I am smart. If they knew that.. I could’ve stayed, I bet. But I aged out. That’s what they call it. When you get to 18. You age out. So, they don’t try to find you a home anymore after that. On your own. I’m on my own now, huh.”

“So, where do you stay now? Where is your home?” I ask.

“Me? A home? No. No. I don’t have that. With grandma. You have a home? Grandma. She taught me all kinds of things. We read all the time. And she had crossword

puzzles. All the time. Where I lived with Grandma, we had crossword puzzles at dinner, at lunch, on the weekends.”

“Is that why you make crossword puzzles? You remember Grandma?” I ask.

He is looking over at his chair, his bag sitting on the floor, and I can see the wheels turning in his head as he gazes, trancelike (what I would give to get inside there, just a peek). But I sense from his silence that I should stop poking and let him enjoy the remainder of his hour with his puzzles. I tap my fingernails on the counter to get his attention, smile, and hand him his pencil and paper. He touches the brim of his cap like something out of an old-fashioned movie, the way “a gentleman” might take leave from “a lady”, grabs pencil and paper, and makes his way back to his chair.

Before leaving that day, one of the housing coordinators approaches me and says, *“I saw you talking to Jamar. Congratulations! Very rare for him to speak with anyone.”* From this housing coordinator, I find out that Jamar’s parents were drug addicts, and he was placed in the care of his grandparents at a very early age. After his grandparents passed, he was placed in the foster care system where he bounced from family to family until he turned 18 and was forced out of the system. With no other family, no siblings, no aunts or uncles, Jamar became street ‘homeless.’ Because of his mental health issues, it took a while to find the help he needed so badly; he did not know where to look or that he should be looking. He started coming to the St. John Center about a year ago, and due to his mental health, he was shortly thereafter placed in supportive housing through Wellspring, a crisis center who works with those experiencing acute mental illness and depression. Although he is housed now in a supportive housing program, Jamar still visits the homeless shelter daily. “It’s something familiar,” Michael, one of the housing

coordinators tells me. “We are familiar to him, kind of like family. And he feels comfortable here.”

ANALYSIS OF JAMAR AND HOME

It is commonly known that many homeless people suffer from mental health disorders (Gelberg, et. al., 1988; Martens, 2001; Pearson et. al., 2009; Edidin et. al., 2012), and literature on homeless people with mental health issues consistently report high levels of mental health issues amongst homeless youth (Cochran et. al., 2002). According to the 2020 Office of Resilience and Community Services Homeless Initiative Report, of the 1,920 homeless persons served in the community, almost 27% of them had mental health issues, and over one third people served had three or more mental/physical conditions at once. This data is obtained through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a national shared database where homeless sponsors record services provided to homeless individuals. But to be in the system, one must have utilized the system at some point. Not all ‘homeless’ persons utilize homeless services, and some refuse services if an ID is required. Consequentially, the number of ‘homeless’ persons with mental health issues could be greater. It took Jamar a year of being ‘homeless’ to discover that there are services available to help not only with his mental health issues, but also to assist with obtaining supportive housing.

While having conversations with Jamar is difficult due to his mental health issues, he offers glimpses into his past and how he makes sense of the word home. Jamar remembers his grandma when he thinks of ‘home’, the woman who raised him when his parents were unable to do so. Crossword puzzles remind him of his grandma, of ‘home’.

The housing coordinator told me that Jamar keeps coming back to the shelter because he feels familiar there, comfortable. The men's shelter is a place where Jamar can feel the way he felt with his grandmother before she passed; he can remember a time when he had a stable place to live, where he was not being moved from foster family to foster family, where he was cared for and could enjoy his hobbies without fear of being pushed out. Jamar's hour at the shelter is like going 'home'.

Jamar's notions of 'home' are positive ones: the remembrance of family, crossword puzzles, familiarity, and comfort. The shelter provides Jamar with familiar faces and a space to feel 'at home' but also provides him a safe, social space to obtain psychological needs that a family provides, like love. Annison (2000) writes that the 'home' can "enable individuals to achieve psychological well-being through providing for their physiological and safety needs, as well as a suitable environment enabling the fulfillment of security and love needs and a medium of expression for self-esteem and social respect needs" (pg. 256). The shelter provides Jamar with "essential elements" people require to feel 'at home' in the sense that they are both cared for and that they belong (Annison, 2000).

CONTROL (OR LACK THEREOF)

JAMES: "THAT'S MY PLACE"

There is a commercial I have seen several times that says socks are the most asked for items in homeless shelters; I don't believe it. It must be underwear. Almost everyone who walks up to the front desk asks for underwear. Sadly, we are either always out, or we only

have size 2x or 3x. And they are always white briefs; not boxer briefs, but those tight, white underwear that no one seems to want, even when they need them. One winter afternoon when the cold is so sharp it feels like it is biting my skin, a short, very thin older man walks up to the desk and asks for underwear. "Well, we only have 3x right now," I tell him. "*Lord no!*" He replies, laughing and grabbing his waist to show that a 3x would quite literally fall off his frame. "*What about some reading glasses?*" He asks. I search the drawers for reading glasses, but we are unfortunately out of those as well. "*I can't see a damn thing anymore,*" he tells me, throwing his hands in the air. "*I just need to be able to read the paper or my mail.*" As he walks away, the program director tells me, "*That's James. He asks me for reading glasses every day.*"

I always wear glasses unless I am asleep. I couldn't imagine how I would survive one day without them. How is this man surviving? If he "can't see a damn thing," how did he even make his way to the shelter that morning? Before my next shift, I stopped by Goodwill and purchased a few, slightly used reading glasses for \$1 a piece and took them to the shelter with me. I didn't see James that day, but I placed them in the drawer that held paper clips, safety pins, and other items guests may need.

When I finally meet James again, he does not ask for reading glasses. Someone at the shelter had given him some glasses from the drawer. "How do the glasses work?" I asked him when he comes up to check for his mail. "*Oh, my lord! I can read my mail without having to ask for help.*" He chuckles and shows me the glasses, waving a letter in his other hand. "*It's a damn miracle. I ain't had glasses in months.*" I am just totally dumbfounded; for months this man went without glasses. "How in the world have you been getting around without glasses?" I ask him. "*Oh, young lady, I have lived around*

here my entire life. I know where I'm going and where I need to go. But sometimes I go to where I don't need to go. But that ain't because I don't have my glasses." Not entirely sure what he means by that, we both laugh, and he heads to the phones to call the Social Security office about the letter he just received.

There are two guest phones in the building, and they are both located directly in front of where I sit at the desk. The phones are sometimes used to call family or friends, but mostly they are used to call some service provider or branch of government that assists with housing, ID cards, disability, or employment. And quite often, the guests get very impatient with those on the other line. I learn quite a bit from James' conversation with the Social Security office.

James is from Middletown and recently, in his words, "*relocated downtown.*" He is 56 and recently divorced. He has two kids who will not speak to him. Oh, and James is angry. While he had hoped that after months of waiting for a Social Security Card it had finally arrived, the Social Security office sent him a letter saying his card will be arriving shortly. "*Why the hell did y'all send me a letter, got my hopes up, saying the dang card is coming? Why even send this dang letter at all? Just send me my card!*" The security guard at the door comes over and calm James down. James tells him he's fine and slams the phone down on the receiver. "*I'm sorry,*" he tells the guard.

"*I'm sorry,*" he looks at me with his eyebrows raised. "*It's just bullshit. I haven't had a social security card for years. Never needed one till now. Probably in my house somewhere.*"

I ask, "Well, if it's in your house, why don't you try to find it?"

“Can’t. Not my house anymore. Wife kicked me out a few months ago. Won’t even talk to me, so I can’t get in there.”

“But if it’s your house, isn’t there some legal ground there?” I ask.

“Nope. She owns the house. To be honest, we were never really married. Just been together for 20 years. Got two kids, too. They won’t talk to me either. Don’t really wanna talk to her. I’ll get my card soon. Just frustrating. Can’t apply for benefits without the damn card.”

“So, where are you living now?” I ask.

“[Camp] Mercer. Been there for a bit. It’s loud and crowded, but I got friends there that look out for me. I’m more comfortable there than the sidewalk. That’s my place.”

“Well, that’s a shame you can’t go back to your house to get your stuff,” I tell him.”

“That ain’t even my place anymore. That ain’t my home, and I guess that ain’t my family anymore either. Addiction can change everything in your life. Take your whole world away.”

James shrugs his shoulders and walks away toward one of the picnic tables.

ANALYSIS OF JAMES AND HOME

Like others I have spoken with on the street, addiction has driven James to the streets. He has lost touch with his children, his wife, and his ‘home’. He has lost his “whole world.” But he has found a semblance of ‘place’ at Camp Mercer where he says he has friends who care for and watch out for him. That’s *his* ‘place.’ While he doesn’t use the word

'home' to describe where he currently lives, the words he uses to describe his current living site are like the words people and scholarly research use to describe 'home'. Camp Mercer is a 'place' where he feels comfortable, a 'place' where people care for him, and he is accepted. It seems he is possessive of the camp, claiming it as "his place." Lloyd and Vasta (2017) write that the sense of 'home' is something "practiced as a process rather than a stable thing," and that people are constantly rethinking and remaking homes rather than ever "being at home" (pg. 4-5). 'Home' as a process is about being in control of spaces, of having rhythms and routines, something regular; every day sets of practices makes home a process.

However, James' story contradicts this notion that the word 'home' refers to experiences of routine and spatial control. James insists 'home' is not safe but rather out of control. Further, he does not have positive associations with the word 'home' and uses 'place' instead to describe his residence. At Camp Mercer, at 'his place,' he can feel some sense of control and comfort. James' negatively correlates 'home' with his family which is also out of his control and whom he insists is not his family anymore. His notions of 'home' challenge not only the positive associations the other stories I present reveal, but also scholarly research on 'home' and homelessness. 'Home' for James is not safe place, a haven, or a refuge (Altman and Werner, 1985; Hochschild, 1997; Wardhaugh, 1999); it is not a place of freedom, security, and safety (Dovey, 1985); it is not a positive relationship to a particular locale or to certain people (Hayward, 1977); and it is not a place of nostalgic longing for something in the past (Mallett, 2004). For James, 'home' is the exact opposite; he does not appear to long for 'home' and his memories of 'home' make him angry, not sentimental or hopeful. His apparently deliberate usage of

the word 'place' rather than 'home' seems to signify a departure from positive associations with notions of 'home' which is significant to this research because it shows that not everyone is actively searching for 'home' as I once imagined. 'Home' is not always a romanticized idea of the past, present, or future; it can also be a concept that we actively avoid because of its negative connotations.

CONCLUSION

The stories presented in this chapter show how the word 'home' is interpreted through multiple categories of meaning: security, comfort, stability, safety, familiarity, family, a place of rest, a place of control or lack thereof, positive, and negative. Words, like 'home' and 'homeless' are really just categories for other 'things', things tangible, like a roof and a door with a lock, and things intangible, like love and belonging. The word 'home' has many positive associations, as told through some of the stories in this chapter, but 'home' also elicits negative feelings often related to past experiences with the notion of 'home.'

Most of the stories presented here associate 'home' with positive sentiments, like Sarah and the sense of comfort and security she feels with her boyfriend in her tent, or Jamar and his recollections of his grandmother and the crossword puzzles. But for people like Tony who lost his wife to cancer and custody of his children, and James whose addiction to drugs resulted in his removal from the house where his family lives, the idea of 'home' can elicit negative thoughts of a painful past. Both Tony and James insist that they had 'homes' before, but any sense of 'home' has disappeared from their present lives. James is so insistent that 'home' is gone that he has replaced that concept with the

word 'place' instead. 'Place' is a concept that he feels a sense of control over, where he feels safe and taken care of by his friends. Rose (1985) writes that a sense of place forms from feelings of belonging to particular places where a person feels comfortable "because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place" (pg. 89). Further, Rose notes, a sense of place is "shaped in large part by the social, cultural, and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves." This interpretation of sense of place is very familiar to interpretations of the word 'home' in that both concepts are demonstrative of the way words are bound to multiple meanings that are experience-specific, and how people use words to pursue specific goals both personal and political, moral and material.

Some of the people in these stories use the word 'home' to show that they are, in fact, not 'homeless' or 'placeless' or without a sense of belonging, self-identity, or control. Some of them insist that they do have 'homes,' and homeless intervention policies and shelters are, under this acknowledgement, unnecessary. Their insistence that they, in fact, do have 'homes' challenges the idea that people living in a tent on the streets, in a camp, or under a bypass are 'homeless.'

CHAPTER 6: EVICTION AND DISPLACEMENT
IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19:
AN ACCESS ANALYSIS OF PANDEMIC STORIES



Figure 1 reliefsdue.com

“I don’t know what the hell we’re supposed to do. I am late on rent; I can’t get my old job back because I have no one to watch my kids and daycares are closed. My landlord said he needs money, and he’s gonna kick me out. What am I supposed to do? I thought

this [eviction] ban was supposed to help keep us in our homes. Well, clearly that ain't working, so what do we do? I gotta take my kids out to the streets?"

INTRODUCTION

The dialogue above is spoken to me by Maggie, a young, single mother without familial support; one person I spoke to during my research who, like many affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, has struggled to remain in her “home” due to lack of access to labor, capital, and daycares. On January 1, 2020, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first case of the 2019 novel coronavirus in Washington State. On March 6, Governor Andy Beshear confirmed the first case in Kentucky and declared an official state of emergency. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has brought new challenges to our lives, including reconfiguring how politicians, researchers, and advocates address evictions and homelessness. On March 27, 2020, the CDC imposed a nationwide federal moratorium on residential evictions for nonpayment of rent. An unprecedented measure, the ban’s purpose was to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to prevent homelessness and overcrowded housing conditions resultant from evictions. Fearing “catastrophic consequences” that would result from mass evictions during the pandemic led to new means of political and advocate actions pertaining to evictions and homelessness (Casey and Finley, 2021). Individual states began implementing their own eviction bans and community leaders and organizers came together to tackle never-ending challenges presented daily pertaining to tenant rights, evictions, landlord disputes, and homelessness. A growing national movement to provide more protections to renters

and low-income families has shown potential for lasting change; to reshape a system that has historically favored landlords resulting in approximately 3.7 million evictions a year, or seven every minute (Casey and Finley, 2021). Speaking at a White House conference on evictions, eviction researcher Matthew Desmond stated:

This is an opportunity not to go back to normal, because for so many renters around the country, normal is broken. This is a chance to reinvent how we adjudicate and address the eviction crisis in a way ... that works for tenants and property owners better than the status quo, in a way that clearly invests in homes and families and communities, with the recognition that without stable shelter, everything else falls apart (Casey and Finley, 2021).

The pandemic created new means of access to rental and utility assistance for renters and low-income families that would allow them to avoid eviction and remain in their residences. Housing advocates and legal aid societies have formed collaborative partnerships to create websites dedicated to increasing public awareness on housing insecurity and evictions; participants canvassed low-income neighborhoods handing out flyers with information on the eviction process and about who to contact for help with rental, utility, and eviction assistance. Knowledge that was once either inaccessible to tenants or with which they may have been unacquainted with became accessible, giving tenants access to more benefits than before the pandemic. \$2.6 billion from the CARE's Act (Coronavirus Relief Fund Act) was set aside to assist struggling renters nationwide, and Kentucky has paid more than \$65 million in rent and utility relief to aid Kentuckians since the start of the pandemic (Latek, 2021). Federal and state eviction bans allowed

tenants the right to remain in their homes with legal protections that were nonexistent pre-pandemic. However, although rights were legally validated under the federal eviction moratorium, the ability to access these benefits proved challenging for renters and low-income families.

THEORY OF ACCESS ANALYSIS

This chapter examines three COVID-19 pandemic stories using Ribot and Peluso's (2003) "theory of access" approach to studying mechanisms by means of access to housing is either enabled or occluded that are not legible to an analysis that takes "property right" as its point of analytical departure. Access analytics allows me to explore the multiple mechanisms at play within pandemic politics and to attend to the myriad means and mechanisms by means of which homeless persons and people facing eviction attempted to attain benefits – whether or not those efforts were successful. Ribot and Peluso's "theory of access" challenges classical property-centric approaches to understanding disparities in access to resources (in their case forest resources trees, fruit, and water) arguing instead that property is "one set of mechanisms amongst many" within processes of access that include "a large array of institutions, social and political-economic relations, and discursive strategies that shape benefit flows" (pg. 157). They define access as:

"The ability to benefit from things—including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols. By focusing on *ability*, rather than *rights* as in property theory, this formulation brings attention to a wider range of social relationships

that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone” (pg. 154-154).

Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) access analysis challenges the common notion that resource access is decided primarily by the “bundles of rights” known as property (Tawney, 1978; Bell, 1998; Bromley and Cernia, 1989), arguing instead for a “bundles of power” approach to access which locates these powers “within the social and political-economic contexts that shape people’s abilities to benefit from resources” (pg. 172). They borrow the term “bundles of power” from Ghani (1995) who suggests that property is one category in a “bundle of power,” in which various mechanisms of resource access forms “strands” of means, processes, and relations from these bundles that determine who is able to gain, control, and maintain access to resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2004, pg. 159-160). Through these “mechanisms of access,” individuals and institutions are able to gain, control, and maintain access to a resource (pg. 155). This theory calls for research that focuses on the ability to access and benefit from a resource(s) rather than focusing on given rights to a resource, exploring the “range of powers embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes, and social relations—that affect people’s ability to benefit from resources” (pg. 154).

Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest two subcategories of access mechanisms: (1) rights-based mechanisms; and (2) structural and relational mechanisms (pg. 165). Rights-based mechanisms refers to the ability to benefit from something attributed by law, custom, and conventions whether enforced by the community, state, or government. The ability to benefit from resources is mediated by structural and relational constraints that are “established by the specific political-economic and cultural frames within which

access to resources is sought (pg. 165). These structural and relational constraints include mechanisms of access to technology, capital, markets, labor, knowledge, authority, (social) identity, and social relations.

Ribot and Peluso (2003) write, “the analysis of resource access first requires identifying the object of inquiry—a particular benefit coming from a particular resource” and once these benefits are identified, then an analysis of the multiple mechanisms “by which individuals, groups, or institutions gain, control, or maintain access within particular political and cultural circumstances” can be investigated (pg. 161). For the purpose of this research, the object of inquiry is the eviction moratorium, as well as the numerous new programs offered to prevent evictions. The benefits, of course, include the renter/tenant’s right to remain in their residence(s) and not face displacement. Mechanisms of access that I found to affect the ability to access these benefits include access to technology, capital, labor and labor opportunities, knowledge, and social identity and relations.

For Ribot and Peluso (2003), *access to technology* “mediates resource access in many ways,” and “many resources cannot be extracted without the use of tools and technology” (pg. 165). For instance, a fence can serve as a technology of access control, restricting some people from access to a resource. There are technologies that physically keep people from obtaining access to a resource; for instance, in the case of many low-income renters, access (or lack thereof) to the internet or vehicles to drive to appointments can inhibit their abilities to connect to financial resources. *Access to capital*, or access to wealth, “can be used for resource access *control* through the purchase of rights” and also as a means to “*maintain* resource access when used to pay

rents, formal access fees, or to buy influence over people who control resources” (pg. 165). Access to credit is also a means of maintaining access to resources. Those with access to capital/wealth also may have access to other empowered mechanisms of access, such as knowledge, opportunities, and authority. *Access to labor and labor opportunities* shapes who controls access to and who benefits from resources. Those who control access to labor control who is allowed access to the resource. Even though a person may not have access to a resource through property rights, they can obtain access to labor opportunities and maintain that access by “entering into a working relationship with the resource access controller” and they can access benefits from a resource “through cash payments from their labor” (pg. 167). *Access to knowledge* also shapes who benefits from resources. Ribot and Peluso (2003) write that, “beliefs, ideological controls and discursive practices, as well as negotiated systems of meaning shape all forms of access”; access to resources can be driven by more than just economics or moral claims (pg. 168). Access can also be driven by social, political, and ritual purposes. Access is also affected by “expert status” that is acquired through “access to privileged information, higher education, and specialized training or apprenticeships” which can allow “privileged access to labor opportunities” (pg. 169). Who controls the knowledge has direct benefits for the holders of information as they are able to “use this information to maintain their access to labor opportunities or income when they have skills or specialized knowledge that is in demand.” *Access through social identity* “profoundly affects the distribution of benefits” as access is negotiated by “social identity or membership in a community or group,” for instance, by age, gender, ethnicity, religion, status, profession, place of birth, education (pg. 170-171). Access through *social relations* such as friendships and trust

also have an overwhelming effect on the ability to resource access because identity-based relationships can serve as a means of who is “included or excluded from certain kinds of benefits” (pg. 172). Investing in social relations, building relationships and trust politically and economically, can provide access to resources that otherwise would be inaccessible.

People may have the *rights* to benefit from a resource but still may not be able to secure access; for instance, a person may have the right to benefit from property but may lack the capital or labor access to do so. Relations of access, like property, are constantly changing, contingent upon who exercises power in social relationships; some people exercise more power than others in these relationships (i.e., landlord and tenant).

Historically, access has been out of reach for many renters due to structurally uneven power relations and lack of relational access mechanisms. For instance, in eviction courts throughout the country, 90% of tenants do not have legal counsel, while the landlord does (Desmond, 2016, pg. 303). Legal counsel is available with a fee for tenants, but often, they lack legal knowledge, or they are unable to afford the counsel. When a tenant is provided legal counsel, their chances of keeping their homes is greatly improved. Studies on the efficiency of providing legal counsel to tenants at risk of eviction show that tenants who obtain legal advice and counsel receive significantly less eviction warrants than tenants who do not obtain legal counseling (Desmond, 2016; Seron et. al, 2001; Holl et. al, 2015). However, in almost all jurisdictions, tenants being evicted are not afforded legal counseling, constraining access to any rights that could have been afforded to them (Desmond, 2016).

The lack of access to legal knowledge can result in situations of discrimination and illegal termination of leases or evictions, as well as shifts in configurations of access. Garboden and Rosen (2019) argue that once a tenant falls behind on rent, tenant access is further unattainable through a process of power-shifting in which the landlord-tenant relationship shifts from owner-renter to creditor-debtor (pg. 639). While landlords try to avoid evictions due to costs related to property turnover, vacancy, and court fees, landlords will use threat of eviction and illegitimate eviction notices as leverage so tenants will pay their rent (Garboden and Rosen, 2019). In the state of Kentucky, when a tenant falls behind on rent, a landlord must present the tenant with a written 7-day notice informing the tenant that if they do not pay within the 7 days, the lease or rental agreement will be terminated. If the tenant does not pay within 7 days, the landlord can file for an eviction (Legal Aid Society). The landlord does not have to accept partial payment, however, if he does, he cannot file for an eviction.

Before the pandemic, obtaining rental or utility bill assistance was difficult for renters, particularly those without children. TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), a federal program that provides financial assistance to families including rental assistance, is available but only accessible to people with children and only available for a limited time. Federal housing vouchers (Section 8) are available but due to low funding, applicants must typically wait years before receiving a voucher (Desmond and Perkins, 2016). Further, agencies often prioritize certain groups of people, such as families, veterans, the mentally ill, and victims of domestic abuse; agencies “function like a lottery, with the minority of poor families receiving a large subsidy and the majority left out in the cold” (pg. 154).

While vouchers have proven to be the most efficient way of providing rental assistance to needy families as well as offering access to better neighborhoods, obtaining a voucher, *and* successfully finding a place to rent is very difficult (Freeman, 2012). The assistance is available for low-income renters, but the access to the benefits is inaccessible. Before COVID-19, landlords were allowed to deny housing to potential tenants with housing vouchers and/or other rental assistance; Louisville's new, fair housing anti-discriminatory law has made it illegal for any landlord to deny housing to anyone receiving Section 8 or other rental assistance (Elahi, 2020).

In the three stories that follow, I demonstrate how mechanisms of access were reconfigured during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly mechanisms relating to labor and capital, but also technology, knowledge, and social identity relations. While the pandemic offered new means of access to renters and low-income families and established new rights in the form of an eviction moratorium were established, people still struggled to access these resource benefits due to power relations infusing the mechanisms of access involved (Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

JENNY'S STORY

I lost my sister Ashley to cancer two months after the pandemic caused mandatory shutdowns across the state. On Mother's Day 2020, hospice was called for my sister. "There is nothing more we can do for her but to make her last days comfortable," Ashley's doctor told my sister's and me. My sisters Heather, Livy, and I met with Ashley's children on Mother's Day, also Ashley's youngest child's birthday, to tell them we were losing their mom. We met at Heather's house. This was the first time since the

beginning of the pandemic that I had seen my sisters in person or had been inside any other house besides my own. The entire drive from my house in Shepherdsville to Heather's home in Elizabethtown, I was overwhelmed with anxiety about being around people, but also anxiety about having to tell my nieces and nephews that their mother was dying. Fear and anxiety of pandemic uncertainty had ravaged my emotions for two months. But the fear of losing my sister and the pain I knew her children would experience overcame any pandemic anxieties the moment I saw my nieces and nephews huddled together on Heather's couch, desolate faces, eyes buried in the white shag rug covering the hardwood floor. Their shoulders hung heavy on their young, slender frames, their legs restless, and their silence was tremendous. These kids never stop talking! Three girls between the ages of 17 and 20 and a boy, 16. They are normally a rambunctious group, cracking jokes at one another and singing songs together. Their silence broke my heart. They knew.

The next day, hospice arrived at Ashley's house for the first time. She had refused to be admitted to any facility, so we spent her remaining days with her at her 'home.' For the next nine days, we only left Ashley's home to shower and sleep. So many family members and friends came to share stories, to visit with Ashley, to tell us how sorry they were, and to remind us how wonderful she has always been to them. Pandemic times called for pandemic measures, so we set up canopies in her front yard to social distance, but also to escape the dreadful heat inside her house. We had the police called on us one day; someone thought we were having a party during the pandemic; little did they know. Under those canopies, we met so many of Ashley's friends, and they were all eager to share stories of Ashley's humorous antics. We laughed, we cried, and we made new

friends, people we would be able to share a connection with; a connection to Ashley and a part of her that we never knew.

A few days after hospice was called, I met Jenny. Jenny's presence is known before she even enters a room. Sitting in my sister's living room, watching her sleeping restlessly, the heat encompassing our sadness (she was constantly cold), we heard someone outside talking so loudly we all raised our eyebrows with surprise. "Who the hell is that?" my sister Heather asked. With closed eyes, Ashley responded with a tiny smile, "That's Jenny." "Knock, knock!" Jenny said boisterously. I wondered if she knew Ashley wasn't well. She was so loud! Ashley immediately perked up in her La-Z-Boy recliner and put on one of the few smiles we would see over those nine days. Jenny is loud not only with her voice, but in appearance as well, and flaunts it proudly. Fiery red hair, obviously dyed, tattoos across a chest bursting out of her tank top, facial piercings, and fake fingernails the length of mini pencils, all eyes were on Jenny. Both my sister and Jenny talk with southern slang accents, peppered with curse words in every sentence. It was beautiful to see the way Ashley perked up during Jenny's visit. The two of them shared work stories from years ago, about dating misadventures, and tales of wild nights out in Louisville. Jenny gave Ashley a burst of life during her final days, and I was infinitely grateful.

Shortly after Ashley passed, Jenny reached out to me through Facebook messenger. We shared stories over the next few days, we laughed and cried, and she told me how much she will miss her "BFF." Jenny started following me on social media, and I was able to keep up with her life and learn a bit more about her. She was frequently posting about looking for affordable houses/apartments to rent, complaining about her

landlord and the property she was renting for her and her children, so I reached out to her to see if she would meet to chat about her situation and experiences. We decided to meet at her place of employment during her lunch break. Jenny is a waitress at restaurant in Elizabethtown. A mother of three young children, a waitressing job was the only job she could find that would work around her kids' schedule considering, at the time, schools were not allowing in-person learning and daycares had daily limits of children allowed. Some days, she had to bring her children to work with her.

On a cloudy, cold day in March, I pull into the parking lot of the restaurant where Jenny is employed, shortly after the lunch rush, and there are a few cars in the parking lot. I feel wary walking inside the restaurant, even with my mask and hand sanitizer; I had only been inside one restaurant since the beginning of the pandemic, and that was only to meet family after my sister passed. Aside from a few patrons at the bar, the only other people inside the restaurant appear to be employees which eases my anxiety a bit. The floor is still littered with what appears to be lunch leftovers, scraps of napkins and straw papers. As I am pulling my phone out to send Jenny a message, I look up and see her walking towards me, and she greets me as a long, lost friend. We both wear masks, and she leans in towards me for a hug. With health safety concerns due to the virus, I cautiously welcome her hug. After an exchange of "how are you" and "nice to finally meet you," she motions me to follow her to a table in the back of the restaurant. We sit down, and I begin to explain a little about my research. I ask her if it is okay if I record our conversation, and she giggles, "*Yeah, yeah that's totally fine.*"

"So, you saw I've been studying housing during the pandemic. People who have moved or been affected by the pandemic with rent and whatnot," I say.

“Girl, it’s been a hot mess,” she responds.

“How do you mean? You recently moved, right?”

“Yes! Girl, I moved two times actually since January. Once in January and again in March. You know, me and Ashley was good friends. We lived together when I was younger and worked together at Pizza Hut. That was my girl! I was with her the first time I found out I was pregnant.” She looks down at her hands and smiles. I can see by her silence and smile that she is remembering, thinking of good times with my sister. *“But don’t wanna get ya in ya feelings cause I know that’s rough as hell. But yeah, I lost my job because of COVID cause it made my daycare shut down. And got super behind. Moved to Radcliff and hated that place. It was so dirty, but I was in a rush cause I was getting evicted. The landlord was awful even though he was my neighbor. And then I moved again almost two weeks ago.”*

“Were you able to get on unemployment after you lost your job?”³

“No. Well I was approved. But never received it.

“Were you evicted?”

“He tried to scare me by saying he was going take me to small claims court for the back pay but didn’t actually get to evict me cause of the ban. But as soon as I found a place I moved. Took me about two and half months to find something; I’ve been evicted before, so it’s not easy. And I found another crappy job and received very small amount of child support. But I try and be smart as possible at tax time and pay my rent for the year. I didn’t in 2020 cause of school loans took it. So, that’s what kinda killed my situation. I moved outta the place that was trying to evict me in January and moved to

³ Obtain unemployment benefits

Radcliff [from Elizabethtown]. Then stayed there until I received my taxes and moved back into a bigger, nicer place back in Etown. Sorry if I confused you. My life is a hot ass mess.”

Jenny tells me that when day cares were mandated to close by the Governor of Kentucky, “it really messed up a lot.” She lost her job because she was unable to find childcare, which led to her loss of income and the eviction notice. She tells me that the landlord did not take her to court for the late rent nor the late fees that had accumulated.

“They knew they couldn't charge late fees cause of COVID,” she tells me. “They wasn't allowed to. So, instead, they came by every day and left notes on anyone that was behinds door saying we were mooching off COVID ban basically. Also, I know he didn't like my kids cause they could get loud outside sometimes.”

When I ask her if day care has reopened, she lets out an exhaustive sigh and shakes her head.

“They are sorta. They hours have been cut back. They was open 5 am to 7 pm pre COVID. Now its 6 am to 5 pm. And they are super short staffed and wasn't able to have any more kids the other day is why I had to take em with me [to work]. Very frustrating cause they are indeed small so they don't know how to sit still for 5 to 7 hours at a restaurant. They close at least 1 day a week cause they can't keep people working. My job is about fed up with it. But what am I supposed to do? I'm tryin.

Jenny also tells me that her son has been disruptive at daycare which has been a mental strain on herself and her children.

“I guess a mother complained to staff that my son hit another kid. So, now I am probably going to have to find a new daycare for the kids. Cause I already talked to them, and I don’t think they want him back.”

She must get back to work, so we finish up our chat talking a little bit about Ashley. She tells me she goes to text or call her often, not remembering that she is gone. I tell her I do the same. We say our goodbyes, and I thank her for her time. I ask if I can follow up, check in on her every now and then, and she happily consents (*“Girl, of course!”*). I thank her for the chat, we hug, and I head back outside to my car.

ANALYSIS OF JENNY’S STORY

Jenny’s story demonstrates how property is only “one set of mechanisms amongst many” within processes of access, and while rights to benefit from the eviction moratorium were legally sanctioned, mechanisms of access and power relations affected the means to access these benefits (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Jenny’s story is telling of many pandemic stories: eviction, lost employment, lack of childcare, and difficulties trying to obtain unemployment. The pandemic created new means of access for people like Jenny facing eviction with the eviction moratorium, giving renters more leverage when confronted with displacement. However, while the relations of access changed during the pandemic, Jenny was unable to benefit from the moratorium due to structural and relational constraints to mechanisms of access, including access to capital, labor opportunities, and social identity. Jenny’s identity as a single mother, lacking a social support system to help with her children resulted in her being terminated from her job one month after our first meeting. Her inability to access capital resources and labor opportunities resulted in her

inability to pay rent and, although the moratorium was in place to prevent evictions, the threat of eviction by her landlord forced Jenny to relocate to a new residence. Renters' ability to benefit from the federal sanctions regarding evictions and utility service cut-offs remained limited during the eviction moratorium, even while housing advocate organizations and volunteers tirelessly worked to assist those in danger of displacement. Property rights, in this case, were not enough to provide full access to the benefits of the eviction moratorium. Further, although the moratorium banned landlords from evicting tenants during the pandemic, landlords still exercise power and control over their tenants through harassment and threats of court, as Jenny's story shows. Low-income renters constantly live under the threat of being evicted, and the *threat* of eviction can produce residential instability and involuntary displacement which can lead to homelessness. Tenants who fall behind on one month's rent often find themselves in a constant state of rental indebtedness in which they are unable to recover (Stone, 1993). Researchers (Aurand et. al, 2017; Garboden and Rosen, 2019; Stone, 1993) argue that processes of eviction, particularly *threats* of eviction, "shifts the landlord-tenant relationship from owner-renter to creditor-debtor," which not only causes a direct increase in rental profits for the landlord through late fees and fines, but it is amplifies "the imbalance of power" between landlord and tenant by putting the tenant in a "continual state of arrearage" (Garboden and Rosen, 2019, pg. 639). This imbalance of power social relations directly resulted in Jenny fleeing from her 'home' with her children in search of a new place to live.

Jenny's story, as well as the others I examine, show the inefficiencies in our failing housing system for low-income renters. Single parents, like Jenny, are at high risk

of being evicted; they often lack efficient social support systems, savings accounts to rely on in case of emergencies, and often work low-paying jobs that put them at risk of falling behind on rental payments (Desmond, 2016). Structural constraints (work, welfare, and housing costs) cause women, particularly single mothers, to be the renters most at-risk of facing evictions (Desmond, 2012). Once a person is formally evicted, finding new housing is a struggle because landlords often will not accept an applicant who has been previously evicted, and a systemic lack of affordable housing makes finding a new place to live extremely difficult. Further, if an applicant is unemployed or unable to provide a sufficient source of income, a landlord most likely will not accept the application.

Low-income, single mothers like Jenny are at a proportionately high risk of eviction, and with previous evictions on her record, accessing decent, affordable housing can be very difficult. Desmond (2013) writes that eviction records often prevent individuals and families from qualifying from housing programs because “past evictions and unpaid rental debt count against those who have applied for assistance” (pg. 303). Eviction records can also cause material hardships, like trauma and depression that can affect the livelihoods of mothers and their families. Further, families with children are often discriminated against by landlords because children can act as an “aggravating factor” in a landlord’s decision to rent or not. Desmond (2013) writes that “children can cause landlord problems” because they can cause noise complaints, deface property, and also bring a rental unit, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods, under state scrutiny for overcrowding apartments.

Jenny told me that her son had been disruptive at daycare and, as a result, she will have to find somewhere else to take her children while she is at work. Like mothers,

evictions and poverty have significant effects on children's physical health and emotional wellbeing. Children at risk of homelessness and who have experienced numerous displacements from their homes often exhibit emotional disturbances such as withdrawal, temper tantrums, regression, and aggression (Martin, 1991). Desmond and Kimbro (2013) find that single mothers who have been evicted are twice as likely than non-evicted mothers to report that their child is in poor health, either physically or mentally. The trauma of evictions for families is more than just displacement; it is the loss of home, stability, a cause of parenting stress, material hardship, and depression and psychological distress to both parents and their children (Desmond and Kimbro, 2013; Manzo, Kleit, and Couch, 2008; Kessler, 1997).

The next story I present is like Jenny's; a single mother who lost her job due to the pandemic. However, Maggie received her eviction notice and attended eviction court. Even while the eviction bans were federally in place, tenants were struggling to remain in their residences.

MAGGIE'S STORY

I met Maggie one morning during outreach with Hip Hop Cares a few years ago. She was a volunteer like me, and she mostly organized the clothing and toiletries tables on Sundays on the corner of 1st and Broadway. I spoke to Maggie a few times, but we never had any in-depth conversations; there is not much downtime for small talk on those busy Sunday mornings, passing out food and essentials, for small talk. She added me as a

friend on Facebook, and reading her posts was the closest I came to getting to know her until the pandemic hit. In October 2020, she posted on her page that she was worried about being evicted and becoming homeless again; she was particularly stressed out about her kids being on the streets or bouncing from house to house for the first time. I had no idea that she had been homeless before, and I was curious to learn more about her past and present story. I composed a message on Facebook messenger asking if she would be willing to chat about her experience being homeless and her current situation with her landlord. Shortly after sending the message, she replied that she would be glad to share her story, and we decided to set a time to chat through Facebook video. However, our meeting time changed a few times throughout that week; she had to “work a double” three days in a row, was late picking her kids up from their grandparents one day, and she forgot about the meeting another day. I messaged her one evening and asked if texting would be easier for her, and she said, “Let’s meet right now if you are available.” And so, we did.

When I hear my phone ringing, my throat tightens, and my heart races. I take a deep breath, put on a smile, and answer the phone. “Helloooooo!” I hear, as the phone signal struggles to present a clear image. Facebook video is often troublesome compared to other video platforms, but it was difficult for Maggie to find time to chat, and I would have accepted any form of meeting at that point. “Hi,” I respond back as her the connection becomes much clearer. Maggie looks to be around my age, early 30s, with long brown hair and plastic, black rimmed glasses. Her hair is in a disheveled ponytail, but she has a full face of makeup on, and she is wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt.

“I am sooooo sorry it took so long to connect! It’s been such a mess,” she tells me as she lets out a giant sigh and shakes her head. “I got my eviction notice today.”

“Oh, I am so sorry to hear that,” I tell her.

“Yeah, it sucks. I am late on rent again. I can’t help it. I lost my job in July, and I can’t find anywhere that’s willing to work around my kids. He [the landlord] knows I’m behind because of COVID, and I’ve already submitted the CDC declaration form. He’s a real peach,” she says sarcastically. “I am a single mom of two small kids, and I have no one to watch them most days.”

“Is he giving you time to vacate, or do you have a court date?”

“Yep, court date is at the end of the month. No way I can pay what is due by then. Hoping that CDC form will come through, and I can stay here for a little longer. But he’s being a real jerk about all of it. I am on the list for CARES money, and I have already called Legal Aid.”

“Well, it seems like you are doing all you can right now,” I tell her. “Did he give you any kind of notice before handing out the eviction notice,” I ask.

“Nope. And that’s what’s really frustrating about the whole situation. Because he knows my situation. I gave him \$500 from my stimulus money I had saved up a few weeks ago and told him what’s going on. So, it’s not like I’m not trying. I am. This [the eviction notice] says he gave me written notice to leave September 21. And his text says he wants me out by September 31, which was last week. But there has been no written notice prior to the eviction notice on my door today. He’s lying. I gave him that \$500 and then he sent me that text message about I need to be out by the 31st. He says that I breached my lease by not paying rent. So, now I’m worried that even if or when I get caught up on rent, he’s

going to make my time here fun. But when you're out of work and have no money saved up, it's hard to leave. I literally have no place to go."

"So, he took your money, but isn't working with you on staying? If he accepted money, I don't think he can legally evict you. You said you contacted Legal Aid?"

"Yep, left a message with Legal Aid this morning. I can't afford daycare. Hell, I can't pay my rent! And one of my kids is in elementary school doing all the NTI [non-traditional instruction program] stuff on top of me just needing to work." She laughs nervously and looks away from the camera for a moment in silence. She sighs. *"I'm trying not to worry too bad cause I am doing all I can and what I'm supposed to be doing to stay in place and whatever. Like, we're in the middle of a pandemic. Can he really just kick me out on the streets? That is what worries me. I've been homeless before. Been evicted twice. I've lived on the streets, like in a tent. But I also had to couch surf⁴, and that's embarrassing, man. And I can't let my kids sleep on the streets. I guess, maybe, I could find a friend that might let them stay there. On top of all of this, my mom has dementia and is staying in a home. So, I can't go home to her. She doesn't have one. And my dad abandoned me when I was little, just like my kids' dad did them."*

"My father did the same to me when I was young," I tell her. "I definitely know how that feels."

"Yeah, it's bullshit. Kids need their dads. Like, not just the money. I don't just want his money to help with things. He needs to be there in their lives. Like watch them grow and take them to school and get to know them. Cause they are awesome kids. And they've been dealt such a shitty hand. I am honestly trying to do all I can. I cannot let

⁴ staying in various friends' houses on their couches

them be homeless. They need this structure and a safe place, and like, a space of their own. And not to be moving around all the time. They have their own rooms here with their stuff. I can't let someone take that away from them just cause I can't find a job right now. My mom was the only one helping with the kids, but they put her in a home two months ago. So, I have no one. I am an only child.” Again, she nervously laughs, and her eyes gaze down, shoulders slumped forward with a look of defeat spread across her face.

A few weeks after my conversation with Maggie, I met with her again via Facetime Video to follow up on her eviction experience.

“Hi!” She almost shouts as the video becomes clearer. She is in full makeup again and wearing a Breonna Taylor shirt. I can hear her children arguing in the background and a tv playing loudly.

“How are you?” I ask. “You are still in your home!” I exclaim once I realize her background is the same as before.

“Yes! I am still here!” She raises her arms in the air victoriously. *“That bastard. He lied to me and tried to kick me out, but he had no footing. No legal ground to do so. I finally got ahold of Legal Aid, and they told me he could not kick me out right now and especially because he accepted a form of payment. They walked me through everything I needed to do, told me what forms I needed for eviction court. Cause I still had to attend. It was virtual, but I still had to show up, log on and everything. I was approved for the newer program available that gave me three more months in my place. So, I am good on rent for three more months. Legal Aid told me to contact Neighborhood Place⁵ about back rent.”*

⁵ A city initiative to provide families and individuals with better access to community-based services by bringing multiple agencies together (Louisville.org)

“Maggie! That is wonderful news!”

“Yep! It’s wild though. All the hoops you have to jump through to get this stuff situated. Like all the paperwork. And, oh my god (eye rolling), trying to get ahold of these people! I get it, though. I’m sure they are all slammed with people trying to get help. But filling out the forms for Neighborhood Place, like, it was a lot. And I guess I didn’t check some of the right boxes the first time, so I had to redo it all and send it all over again. But thankfully, it all worked out, and we can stay in our home. For now.” She closes her eyes and smiles, but the moment is short-lived because she turns around fast to tell her son to stop jumping on the furniture.

“Sorry,” she chuckles. “But I am trying to find work. And someone to watch the kids. I’m glad my mom has a place to take care of her, but man, I need help. Daycares are still closed. I just don’t know what they expect us to do. Single moms. And with no support system. It’s really tough for us right now.”

ANALYSIS OF MAGGIE’S STORY

At the time of my first meeting with Maggie, the CDC had extended the eviction ban until January 2021, but evictions were still happening; people were still being displaced from their residences. Landlords were still finding ways to evict tenants, regardless of public health warnings from the CDC and other researchers. They discovered loopholes in the moratorium that only banned evictions based on non-payment of rent; evictions for lease violations or lease term endings and landlords deciding not to renew were still

occurring. People have still been receiving eviction notices, even though they have been “doing all they can”; reaching out to Legal Aid, applying for rent extensions and utility assistance, and actively looking for work. Before the pandemic, Legal Aid did not see many lease termination evictions, but they have been seeing more since the pandemic began and the CDC protections against evictions went into place (Carter, Legal Aid). A lease termination is different than an eviction; a lease termination is when the landlord ends a rental agreement and asks the tenant to vacate the property and an eviction is the court process to have the tenant removed from the property if they refuse or fail to vacate (Legal Aid). A lease termination eviction involves the termination of a lease agreement with an eviction.

Maggie says her landlord told her she breached her lease when she did not pay rent. When a lease is breached, a seven-day notice explaining how the lease was breached (non-payment of rent, noise violations, etc.) must be delivered to the tenant from the landlord. During this seven-day period, the home-renter can still pay the rent, and the landlord must accept the payment, but the landlord does not have to accept partial payment. However, if the landlord does accept partial payment, they can no longer file for an eviction. In Maggie’s case, she paid her landlord \$500, he accepted the money, but still proceeded with the eviction.

Like Jenny, Maggie has struggled due to a lack of support system and sufficient income. However, she took full advantage of the information available on emergency rental and eviction assistance provided by the CARES Act (the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) and Legal Aid and was able to remain in her ‘home.’ Yet, initially, mechanisms of access to capital, labor opportunities, and social identity

prevented her from gaining access to the legal benefits provided through the federal relief programs; property rights alone did not translate into full access to resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Maggie lost her job and access to capital and labor opportunities which resulted in her inability to pay her rent, putting her in a creditor-debtor relationship with her landlord who took advantage of her lack of knowledge on eviction processes. Her social identity as a single mother was cause for distress as she tried to navigate finding a job and daycare for her children. While the pandemic created new avenues for rental and utility assistance for low-income renters, the processes to obtain aid proved to be challenging as renters were left to navigate the numerous new websites created to assist.

Maggie's story also shows the systemic failures in the nation's housing crisis.

This story represents an endless cycle of poverty often driven by evictions and homelessness; once evicted, breaking this cycle of poverty is much more difficult (Crane and Warnes, 2000; Burt, 2001). Finding affordable housing is difficult for anyone in this country, but for a single woman with children, the costs and burdens make finding a place to rent near impossible, especially with an eviction on record. As mentioned with Jenny's story, some landlords do not like to rent to families with young children, creating an even more challenging search for affordable housing for mothers. Parents in disadvantaged neighborhoods often make their children stay inside for fear of violence on the streets; bored children result in a quick deterioration of rental units and noise complaints (Desmond, 2013; Desmond and Valdez, 2013). Further, studies find that low-income neighborhoods with a large percentage of children experience more evictions than neighborhoods with less children (Desmond, 2013). Often, single mothers must live in unsuitable housing conditions due to lack of affordability which can result in physical

illness and depression (Vásquez-Vera et. al., 2017). While eviction is an effect of insufficient financial resources, information, and social networks, research demonstrates that eviction not only reproduces these patterns of inaccessibility but also deepens them in devastating and intergenerational ways.

Like Maggie and her children, I also grew up without a father, and know firsthand the effects, emotionally and financially, of growing up fatherless. Maggie tells me that she is not only seeking financial assistance from her children's father; she also wants him to be emotionally available. Research shows that children who grow up in single-parent families are much more likely to experience poverty and material hardships than children living with both biological parents (Lerman, 2002; DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith, 2008). Consequentially, children growing up with single-parents endure a number of hardships, including those related to education, health, and social development (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Magnuson and Votruba-Drzal, 2009). For children with nonresident fathers who contribute financially through child support, the likelihood of experiencing poverty and displacement for the single mother and her child greatly diminishes and the well-being of the child's social and behavioral skills increases (Meyer and Hu, 1999). However, research also finds that only a small number of poor, nonresident fathers contribute child support payments and, when they do, the payments are "either too small or inconsistent to improve financial well-being in the mothers' household" (Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkle, 2011, pg. 4).

Maggie was able to successfully navigate the new configurations of access to financial programs created to prevent eviction and displacement during the pandemic. However, not all were able to avoid displacement during the pandemic, and some became homeless

due to loss of income and inability to pay rent. The next story presents a case of first-time homelessness as a direct result of the pandemic politics.

TERRY'S AND SAMMY'S STORIES

“I was left with no other choice but to leave my home. He made it so uninhabitable that I just had to leave.”

When I first met Terry, he was physically and emotionally exhausted with our current housing crisis. He had completely given up all hope that anyone or place would help him get back into an apartment. *“I felt cheated and lied to,”* he told me one evening outside of a Marathon gas station. *“My landlord took what little I had left...pride, shelter, a place to relax...he took that all from me because I had lost everything else.”*

Wednesday night outreach does not always involve traveling from campsite to campsite to visit and aid the ‘homeless.’ Each night, we also stop by several gas stations downtown where the ‘homeless’ congregate, despite anti-trespassing signs, angry shouting from managers to move along, as well as a police presence that mostly remains unresponsive unless violence or harassment occurs. We try our best to come and go quickly at the gas stations; scout the area, drop off bagged lunches and waters, and leave before our presence is known, but that is not always the case. *“You all come out here with freebies and handouts,”* one manager furiously shouts at us late one evening. *“They’re never gonna leave, and you all are part of the problem.”*

I can tell by the angry look in Donna's eyes and the sly smirk on her face that she wants to argue with the manager, but she just looks at me with an exhausted grin and says, "*We are the problem, Abby.*" She rolls her eyes, gives the manager one last glare, and we walk back to our cars.

I have met some interesting people at these quick gas station stops. Often, Donna has previously met some of the people in the camps, on the sidewalks downtown, or at one these quick stops. Around midnight one evening when our outreach coming to an end, we pull into a Marathon parking lot to scout for those possibly in need of a meal. I vividly remember this night because the cold air is bone-chilling and, underestimating how cold it would get, I had left my thick coat at home. Our stops between sites are so frequent, my toes have yet to fully warm from the last stop and my fingers are still tingling with numbness. We always try to park as far away from the store as possible, so I pull my car next to Donna's in the front of the lot and rub my hands together for warmth. A middle-aged man dressed in insulated overalls and a wool cap approaches Donna's Jeep almost before I have the chance to put my car into park. Donna, speaking to the man from her seat with the window rolled down, appears to be familiar enough with him to laugh at something he says to her. She looks over towards me, and with a jovial wave and a smile, invites me to join the conversation.

I will be honest; some of the gas station stops have me uneasy. Maybe it's a combination of things: the angry managers yelling at us, the police cars patrolling the thinly lit parking lot, the dullness of the light posts reminiscent of a serial killer lurking in a horror film. Or maybe it's the blatant disregard for humanity present in the way patrons filling gas and leaving the store with coffees and cigarettes quickly walk past a man

sitting huddled, chest to knees on the sidewalk, not asking for anything but silently crying into his backpack. Outreach nights are always emotionally difficult for me, but when the ‘homeless’ make themselves more visible and vulnerable, and I see firsthand the lack of public empathy for their plight, the ache in my stomach gets a little tighter.

I nervously and cautiously exit my car and walk over to Donna’s driver side door as she is exiting her vehicle. I am assuming Donna knows the man at her window, but I have yet to achieve her casual sense of confidence that nothing will go wrong. “*Abby, this is Terry, Terry, Abby. Abby helps me with outreach.*” Donna introduces us casually, hands in the pockets of her hoody as she searches the lot for others she may know. “*I met Terry a few months ago at Mercer. He is a victim of the coronavirus.*”

“A victim,” I curiously ask. “Did you catch the virus?”

“*Nope. I lost my home cause of it,*” he nonchalantly tells me while looking through a lunch bag Donna had handed to him.

“*Abby studies homelessness and evictions,*” Donna says to him, giving my shoulder a slight nudge.

“*Well, unfortunately, I know about both now.*” He pulls out a sandwich and unwraps the plastic. “*Never been in this way in my life. But here I am.*” He takes a bite and looks past me towards the empty street.

“*I gotta meet someone over at Wayside, but I really appreciate the bite, Donna. And nice to meet you,*” he says to me, never making eye contact as I say the same.

We watch as he shuffles off towards the street, dragging his feet a bit (is that a limp?) and throwing his backpack over one shoulder. “Donna, I need to know more about him!” I exclaim, waving my hands slightly. “What’s his story?”

“Well, I know he was evicted because he lost his job. He sleeps in his car at Mercer now. But I see him hanging near Wayside often. We will catch up with him again.”

And we did. A few weeks later, we find ourselves on a sidewalk near Wayside at around 1 AM. We had just finished our night, and Donna calls me as I am driving down highway 65 headed back to Elizabethtown. *“Someone is having a crisis near Wayside,”* she tells me. *“Confrontation with a police officer. I am going to head over there if you want to join. If you’re not too far away.”*

“Of course,” I tell her and find the nearest exit to head back downtown. That “of course” response is not as confident as it may have seemed to Donna. I get a nervous feeling in my stomach as I make my way downtown towards the shelter. It is late and very dark and my fear of what may happen outweighs my confidence that nothing will.

It’s 1 AM downtown Louisville on a Wednesday night. Thankfully there is not much traffic, and I find Donna’s Jeep parked behind a police car under the tunnel near the shelter. I pull in behind her, put my car into park, and hesitate. Should I get out? Should I even be here right now? I can see a police officer speaking to a woman flailing her arms in the air, a piece of paper waving in one hand, the officer facing her with hands on his hips. A man is sitting next to a pile of clothes a few feet away from them, head in hands, and he lifts his head to look up and down the sidewalk every few moments. Donna is standing next to the man sitting down. Two men across the street appear to be in some sort of argument, one shaking his fist, the other pointing his finger and shouting. “What in the world is going on right now,” I say aloud to myself as I sit in my car trying to decide if I want to exit my vehicle. Donna waves me over, so I take a deep breath, exit

the car, and slowly walk towards her. The bright fluorescent streetlights are painfully illuminating in the tunnel, and I lower my eyes as I make my way past the officer. *“They said she’s impeding the flow of traffic,”* Donna tells me, gesturing with her hand, her head searching around the sidewalk as if to say, *“See all of this traffic?”*

“I have nowhere to go! I got evicted last week, but I am working. I am doing what I can. I sleep here cause it’s lit, and I feel safer,” she tells the officer. *“What do you want me to do?”*

“There’s a shelter right there,” he tells her.

“Yeah, and you have to check in at 3 PM. I’m at work then. So, what’s my other option? Anyway, I ain’t staying in that place.”

“You need to make arrangements with the shelter. You can’t sleep here.”

“Okay, so you’re going to give me a citation cause I work and can’t get in to the shelter? You think I have money to pay this?” She swats the paper in her hand against her thigh, which I can see now is an issued citation.

“I’m sorry. You can’t sleep here.”

Donna walks over to the woman and gently grabs her arm. *“Sammy, we will get this taken care of. Calm down, and we will see what we can do.”*

The officer stands for a moment in silence, looks at the pile of clothes and the man still sitting next to them, then walks back to his car where he sits for a few moments before driving off.

As Donna tries to calm Sammy down, one of the men who was arguing across the street makes his way over to us. It’s Terry, the man we met at the gas station a few weeks

back. Wearing his insulated overalls and wool cap again, he approaches us with hands in his pockets, and ask Donna, *“What’s the trouble?”*

“Oh, just a bunch of B.S.” She guides Sammy over to the man and pile of clothes.

I ask Terry if he would like a sack lunch and/or some waters, and I go grab the last few lunch sacks left in my car.

“It’s always a bunch of bullshit out here,” he says to me while looking through one of the brown bags. *“Man, once you’ve become homeless, it can’t get much worse than that. It’s just always bullshit. One thing after another.”*

Donna is still trying to console Sammy who appears to have calmed down a bit. She is sitting next to the man on the sidewalk taking small bites from a granola bar.

“Donna said you are a victim of the pandemic. What does she mean?” I ask Terry.

“Oh, well. Yeah, a victim. I’ve never been in this situation in my entire life.”

I pull my phone out of my pocket and ask him if it’s okay to record our conversation.

“Oh. Sure. That’s weird. I’m not that important,” he chuckles as he crumbles a bag of chips and wipes Cheeto dust from his hands on his overalls.

“So, what does that mean? A victim of the pandemic?” I ask.

“Ugh.” He sighs disgustedly. “So, I worked my whole life. I got my first job when I was 14 working construction with my dad, and I never stopped. Still was working construction until March when I got laid off cause of COVID. I never had no other job than construction. I mean, I would do odd jobs and stuff. Handyman stuff here and there. When I got laid off, I filed for unemployment. But that shit still hasn’t come through. I

even gave them St. John's address to send it to. And I check my email when I can. I don't even know how many times I've called them. But still don't haven't a cent of it."

We are both looking over at Donna, Sammy, and the man on the sidewalk; the woman and man sharing a cigarette, huddled together in the frigid air. Donna has her hands in her pockets, shuffling back and forth on her feet, probably to stay warm.

"Anyway. I couldn't pay rent. My friend's daughter recommended working for one of those meal delivery places. Like Uber or something. But my car insurance wasn't up to date, so I couldn't do it anyway. I paid my landlord rent when I could. But eventually, I couldn't pay anything. He was pissed, I know. My air went out over the summer, and a pipe burst in my bathroom. He wouldn't even come fix it. He said cause I wasn't paying rent, why would he come fix my apartment? I was having to go to the gas station down the street just to use the bathroom."

He shakes his head and pulls out a cigarette, offers me one to which I politely refuse. I had read about stories like his; landlords refusing to provide maintenance to rental units once tenants were unable to pay rent, leaving the tenant few choices but to vacate the property. Desmond (2016) writes that evicting tenants is cheaper than making repairs to their properties. With access to legal knowledge, Terry would know that tenants have the right to a habitable residence, meaning his apartment must be safe to live in with usable heat, utilities and water, and he could withhold rent if the landlord neglects repairs (Legal Aid Network of KY).

"I don't have any family left. I called friends to see if I could stay for a little bit. One let me stay a few nights but said his wife didn't feel safe with me there because of the virus. I got all kinds of excuses from other people, too. So, I just started sleeping in my

car. At Walmart for a while. But I started sleeping near here [Wayside] and Mercer cause I can get free food and stuff when I need it. Don't have to beg on the street. God, I hope I never have to do that."

Terry pauses for a moment and checks his phone. I look down at my own phone to check the time and make sure it is still recording. It's so late; almost 2 AM, and I am beginning to worry about my long drive back to Elizabethtown. I am physically and mentally exhausted from the night, cold and a little hungry and hoping Donna tells me it's time to go soon.

Terry types a message on his phone, then places it back in his overalls pocket. *"Anyway. That's how I am a victim I guess. Cause this never happened to me before. Nothing ever happened where I couldn't pay rent. And I for damn sure ain't ever been homeless. How low can you get? That landlord did me wrong. I get it, I wasn't paying rent. But it was like he was retaliating against me cause I couldn't give him any money and he couldn't kick me out [because of the ban]. I was trying to get rental assistance, but it was taking too long I guess. He left me no other option but to leave. And here I am."*

ANALYSIS OF TERRY'S AND SAMMY'S STORIES

Like many "victims" of COVID-19, Terry had never experienced eviction or being homeless. He paid what he could, when he could, but eventually his savings was depleted, and he was displaced from his apartment. Like other pandemic "victims," Terry applied for unemployment, but never received any checks in the mail, leaving him feeling hopeless that he would ever be able to escape homelessness. Again, like many others struggling with pandemic challenges, financial assistance was provided but with no

accessibility to benefit from it; he had the right, by law, to benefit from federal aid, but lacked the ability to benefit (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Due to various mechanisms of resource access, Terry was unable to maintain control over his apartment. He was laid-off from his job, and without access to new labor opportunities, he became jobless for the first time in his life. While he qualified for unemployment, having held a construction job most of his life, access to these resource benefits were limited as a result of an overburdened state unemployment system that failed to provide the legal rights-based assistance that it offers.

Without access to capital/work wages and without a job, Terry was unable to pay his landlord the rent that was due. Although he was not formally evicted from his residence, his landlord's refusal to make repairs to the air conditioner and leaking pipes in his apartment made his residence uninhabitable, and Terry abandoned his apartment and became "homeless". Like Jenny, Terry became subject to the power imbalance of the landlord-tenant, creditor-debtor relationship which placed him in a situation of continuous debt that he was unable to escape. While Terry and Jenny were not formally evicted from their residences, their experiences with their landlords show how some landlords use informal, extrajudicial tactics to force or intimidate their tenants to vacate properties. One of these informal tactics is the threat of eviction, as seen in Jenny's case; another is the refusal to make repairs on a property and maintain a habitable space for tenants that the landlord wants to remove but is legally unable to or who wishes to avoid a costly eviction (Desmond, 2016). A national study in 2017 found that 4.5% of renters faced an informal eviction during that year, and that for every one formal eviction, there was an estimated 5.5 informal evictions (Gromis and Desmond, 2021). Renters often lack

knowledge of tenant rights and, knowing this, landlords use intimidation, fear tactics, and the refusal to make repairs to force tenants from their residences. Tenants' fears of having to attend court, having an eviction record, and being suddenly displaced can motivate a tenant to vacate a property before a formal eviction is filed (Zainulbhai and Daly, 2022). Terry voluntarily vacated his residence and became "homeless" as a result of informal tactics to evict.

The tiny vignette inside the life of Sammy, the homeless woman ticketed by the police for impeding the flow of traffic on the sidewalk, is not a pandemic story; the homeless are ticketed every day in Louisville for various reasons (loitering, panhandling, camping on private property). In 2018, Louisville Metro Police officers ticketed 21 homeless people in one day for sleeping on sidewalks (McAlister, 2018). While the shelter, only steps away from Sammy, offers the "homeless" a place to rest at night, Sammy's ability to benefit from the resources provided were constrained by access through social identity, in her case, being "homeless." She has access to capital and labor with her day job; however, she does not make enough money to afford an apartment or house. She prefers to sleep in the lighted tunnel on the sidewalk for safety purposes, but the criminalization of the homeless prevents her from doing so without harassment from the police. Wayside, feet away from her place on the sidewalk, offers nighttime shelter for the homeless, however, her job hours prevent her from signing into the shelter on time to hold a bed for the night. The power relations between the individual '(Sammy) and the institution (the shelter) prevents access to this free, public service; she has the right to benefit from the resource but lacks the ability to do so.

Sammy's story shows how insufficient social support infrastructures are for the homeless in cities, even during a global pandemic where everyone is told the best way to avoid the virus is to be sheltered. The criminalization of the poor leads to a continuous cycle of houselessness and poverty; the homeless are burdened with criminal records and legal fines that push them further into this cycle of poverty (Herring et. al., 2020). Sammy admits she is unable to pay the fine for the ticket she received, yet she is criminalized for sleeping on the sidewalk and reprimanded for not taking advantage of the shelter nearby. Sammy, like many others, is trapped in an endless cycle of poverty that is a result of the nation's insufficient social support infrastructure for the poor.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have presented three pandemic stories that show how flawed our social support infrastructure is for low-income families and those at risk of eviction and homelessness. Mechanisms of access and power relations during the pandemic, which should have provided safety nets and financial assistance have, instead, intensified these flaws in some cases, preventing many low-income renters and newly unemployed persons the ability to benefit from federal and state assistance programs provided through the CARES Act. While the CARES Act and various newly formed and current outreach organizations provided new means of access to financial support for those at risk of eviction and homelessness, various mechanisms of access such as capital, labor,

knowledge, social identity, and social relations directly inhibited people's ability to benefit from these resources.

An access analysis that focuses on all of the mechanisms of access (not only property) that constitute the ways in which people do or do not gain, control, and maintain access to resources and their benefits demonstrates how some actors in webs of social relations control and maintain access to resources while others are prevented due to structural and relational mechanisms of access (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). These stories show that factors beyond property relations conflict with and/or complement other access mechanisms which results in "complex social patterns of benefit distribution" in which some actors benefit while others' access is inhibited by these same mechanisms (Ribot and Peluso, pg. 173).

This access analysis also shows how imbalanced power relationships determine who gains access to benefits from resources and, how these benefits are controlled, and who controls the most. The power imbalance that exists between landlord and tenant exists due to the landlord's control over the property (Desmond, 2016) and because the tenant's "greater dependence on or attachment to" their home than the landlord has to one particular tenant's rental income (Chisholm et. al, 2020, pg. 142). Eviction, or the threat of eviction, by the landlord will have a larger effect on the tenant's life than the other way around (Keller, 1987). The same can be said for the employees at the homeless shelters; while they know that not everyone is able to check in at 3 PM each day to hold a bed for the night, this rule still remains, leaving people like Sammy to face criminalization by the police for sleeping on a sidewalk. Others, like Terry and Jenny, who were terminated from their jobs and lost access to capital and labor, were at the mercy of federal and state

unemployment systems that were ill-equipped to manage such an influx of unemployment claims during the height of the pandemic.

The purpose of this analysis is not to show that the pandemic created specific challenges for low-income renters and those facing the threat of displacement from their 'homes' leading to possible homelessness; it shows that systemic failures in our affordable housing infrastructure pre-pandemic exacerbated issues during the pandemic. Evictions and threats of eviction were hugely present pre-pandemic, as was the lack of financial resources for low-income renters and the ability to access and benefit from the resources that were available. The criminalization of the poor and the 'homeless' are common occurrences in cities globally; the harassment Sammy received from the police officer for sleeping on the sidewalk was not a result of pandemic politics, it was a result of lack of access to resources.

This access analysis reveals how various mechanism of access (capital, labor and labor opportunities, knowledge, social identity, and social relations) contributed to the strained ability, or complete inability of tenants to access resources that were created to prevent eviction and displacement during the pandemic. Without access to capital (wealth) and labor (jobs), renters were left in debt to landlords who took advantage of their lack of knowledge on eviction processes and tenant rights to displace them. Although no one in the stories I have presented were formally evicted (legally through court) from their residences, landlords used informal, extrajudicial tactics like the threat of eviction, intimidation, fear, and the refusal to maintain habitable properties to force renters from their residences; in Terry's case, this informal process of displacement resulted in his homelessness.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

*“Home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke,
or spirit ever answered to, in the strongest conjuration.” – Charles Dickens*



⁶ A photo of my sisters and myself
From left to right: Me, Olivia (Livy), Ashley, Whitney, and Heather

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to use ethnographic methods and methodologies to research discourses and practices of “home” in Louisville, Kentucky to understand how the word ‘home’ is used by ‘homeless’ and other displaced persons, and by the researcher of the study (i.e., by me), to negotiate boundaries and relations of power and to pursue goals, both personal and political, moral and material. In this chapter, I will first discuss the overall findings in relations to the research aims. Then, I discuss how the study contributes to the field. Next, I examine limitations to this study. Finally, I offer recommendations for future research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explores the following research questions: (1) What is the significance of the word ‘home’? What does the word do? (2) How does being identified or categorized (for policy and policing purposes) as “homeless” interact with other ways in which people identify? (3) What new insights into the processes by which people “become homeless” (whether through eviction or other forms of displacement) were brought into view by the changes to housing and eviction policy during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Using ethnographic methods of participant observation, writing fieldnotes with analysis, and informal interviews, I studied several homeless people and those

experiencing or confronted with evictions and displacement. In the following sections, I present the findings of each chapter which provides the answers to my research questions.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In chapter four, I draw on the tools and techniques of autoethnography to write analytically about memories from my past, memories of “home”, and methodologically to connect that analysis to my own experiences of ‘home’ and how I negotiate the meaning of the word ‘home.’ I explore how the word ‘home’ is not merely a concrete word or concept that can be clearly defined and/or understood and how each person in this research uses the word ‘home’ to their own advantages or disadvantages, to achieve certain goals, to express emotions, both positive and negative. While this dissertation is a study of how ‘homeless’ people or people facing eviction use the word ‘home’, I felt it necessary to examine my own interpretations of the word because my interpretations of others’ accounts are influenced by my own understandings of the word. As a person who identifies with people who also seemed to me to be without a ‘home,’ writing about my own life experiences with ‘home’ can produce new questions and offer new insights about broader social and cultural phenomena.

This chapter examines my own experiences without a ‘home’ and my own remaking sense of the word ‘home.’ This chapter also examines how various puzzles of homelessness led me to consider a doctorate education and to the research this study presents. The year 2020 presented many new challenges to my research. The COVID-19 pandemic forced me to find new ways of interviewing subjects safely and to explore virtual avenues of ethnography which eventually led to a reconfiguration of my original

dissertation proposal and research questions. The deaths of my two sisters delayed my research as I attempted to cope with their losses but led me to rethinking concepts of 'home' and homelessness and displacement. I turned the research inward and began to think of what 'home' means to me which led to this autoethnographic chapter. Thinking inwardly and researching myself brought forth new questions of 'home' and homelessness, for instance, how can my experience with losing 'home' offer new insights to scholarship on homelessness and 'home'?

What this chapter show is that, like some of the stories I present in this dissertation, for me, 'home' means security, stability, comfort, rest, and identity; but most of all, 'home' for me means family. One theme that seems prevalent throughout my conversations with the subjects presented in this research is that being at 'home' means being with family, and with the loss of family there is a lost sense of 'home.' Being at 'home' does not necessarily mean being in one particular place under one particular roof; 'home' is where my loved ones are and without them, I feel displaced, "trapped in a liminal space" between losing and remaking sense of 'home' (Perez, 2019, pg. 1516). For me, 'home' can be lost and found, time and time again. I lost 'home' when I lost my mother and again when I lost my sisters. But these deaths opened an opportunity to remake 'home,' and I found 'home' once more through the struggle and grief that brought my remaining family closer together.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In chapter five, I show how the ‘homeless’ conceptualize the word ‘home’ which, in turn, shows how personal experiences of ‘home’ are bound up with a person’s particular experience of ‘home.’ This chapter also examines the politics surrounding public and private spaces as they relate to the homeless and shows how the ‘street homeless’ negotiate their ways through various obstacles to their livelihood. The research for this chapter was ethnographically conducted within several homeless camps throughout the city of Louisville and two prominent shelters. Much of this research was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and after mandated closures. This chapter is about the power of words and what people do with them when they use these words. Within these stories, several themes developed that show how ‘homeless’ peoples’ understandings of the words ‘home’ and ‘homeless’ often contradict institutionalized meanings and values of these words.

This chapter also shows how the word ‘camp’ signifies concepts of community, identity, resistance, and agency. Homeless people often prefer camp-life over shelter-life as camps provide a stronger sense of community, places for identity making, and places where human agency is enacted to resist urban methods of anti-policing of the homeless (Speer, 2018). Camps and camp-life are often preferred to over-disciplinary, behavior managing shelters that restrict the homeless from fully being themselves (Feldman, 2004; Wasserman and Clair, 2010; Speer, 2018). Camps provide homeless people with a sense freedom and autonomy that they are unable to realize in shelters due to the disciplinary aspects of homelessness management systems (Speer, 2018). While shelters attempt to

“assimilate” homeless people into “normal society,” camps provide spaces without institutionalized rules where senses of community, security, and privacy are formed that shelters are unable to provide. In marginal, urban spaces like camps, homeless people can avoid disciplinary actions and authoritarian figures who constrict their identities and their social behaviors, allowing them spaces to be themselves with fear of reprimand (Giddens, 1984). Further, in camps, homeless people become “active agents” in the survival of their identities and communities (Wright, 1997) as they organize and defy city authority, challenging normative ideas of the “social order” and one’s “proper place” in it (Wright, 1997; Wasserman and Clair, 2010).

The ethnographic stories presented in this chapter presents the theme of security (safety, comfort, and rest) and the second section presents themes of home and identity. Various subcategories of ‘home’ are entangled in these two themes.

Sarah’s story depicts the theme of security as it relates to the word ‘home,’ and her ‘home’ contradicts scholarly research on security as well as my own perception of safety. Scholarly literature on ‘home’ often correlates ‘home’ and security with being *inside* a place, where ‘home’ is “clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance” (Mallett, 2004, pg. 70). Further, scholarly literature on ‘home’ argues that home space means privacy and security with kin, something that cannot be captured in public spaces (Dovey, 1985). Sarah’s ‘home’ challenges these scholarly definitions of home because she *does* feel safe in her environment, she has privacy in her hidden location, and being with her boyfriend makes her feel secure and loved.

Sarah's story also challenges notions of pregnant homeless women as having to endure living in unsafe, uninhabitable spaces where they feel a lack of security and safety for their wellbeing (Watson, 2016; Murray et. al., 2018). Sarah's space does not appear to be inhabitable, although she does admit she will need to find more stable and secure shelter before the arrival of her baby. Contrary to research on homeless women that argue only stable and secure housing can provide the autonomy and well-being required to protect the health and well-being of pregnant women (Stonehouse et. al., 2015; Murray et. al., 2018), Sarah shows autonomy in that she is responsible in setting and making appointments with doctors and hospitals to protect her child. She appears to be in control and taking steps to ensure the safety and well-being of her child.

Amber's story also depicts the theme of security as it relates to the word 'home' and also contradicts scholarly literature on 'home' as it relates to safety and shelter (Merokee, 2001; Pearson et. al., 2009; Fitzpatrick et. al., 2014). Amber insists that she has a secure and stable 'home' in her private camp with her plywood-roofed tent. She feels independent, self-reliant, and safe with her kitten. The plywood roof appears to signify a permanence that homelessness scholars often argue is nonexistent for homeless people (Allen, 1994) and scholars on 'home' argue cannot be obtained without a fixed, structured building (Sixsmith, 1986).

Amber is an example of what homeless scholars refer to as "the service-resistant" (Padgett et. al., 2001; Wasserman and Claire, 2010; Padgett et. al., 2006; Kim et. al., 2010). Amber insists that she has a 'home' and does not want to engage in traditional housing services and shelters. Amber does not tell me why she avoids traditional homeless services, but homeless people resist these services for a number of reasons, for

instance, unsafe, unsanitary shelters (Culhane, 2010; Gwendolyn, 1996; Wagner, 1993; Kryda and Compton, 2009), refusal to engage in mandatory drug and alcohol treatment programs to obtain traditional housing (Padgett et. al., 2001), lack of trust for authority and/or the institutions that provide homeless care ((Teixeira, 2010; Murray and Johnsen, 2011; (Kryda and Compton, 2009), and lack of confidence in the services available (Sparks, 2012).

Martha's story presents themes of security, comfort, and rest as they relate to the word 'home.' Concepts of comfort, rest, and the possession (or lack thereof) of material objects in research on 'home' are often associated with belonging and identity-making (Tuan, 1977; Sixsmith, 1986; Annison, 2000). Without these physical and 'essential' qualities of life such as security, comfort, and happiness, she lacks a sense of belonging and a sense of self. Martha is unable to feel 'at home' on the streets or in the shelters because she cannot relax in these spaces without privacy and permanence. Although the women's shelter provides her with a space of relaxation it is only momentarily. For Martha, 'home' appears to also mean the possession of material things, such as toilet paper and dry shoes. Without these things, she is uncomfortable and feels out of place.

For elderly homeless women like Martha, living on the streets is particularly difficult and finding the privacy and stability she desires is extra challenging. Homelessness scholars note that for elderly homeless people, finding social networks of support and gaining trust is exceptionally more difficult than it is for younger homeless adults (Davis-Berman, 2011), and the elderly homeless are at a higher risk for their belongings to be stolen and to experience violence against them (Lipmann, 2009). Elderly homeless people also have physical disabilities that make life on the streets particularly

challenging. For these reasons, it is exceptionally difficult for the elderly homeless to find a sense of 'home' on the streets.

Tony's story contradicts notions of 'home' as it relates to physical structures and place. Tony tells me that 'home' is in the past with his family that he has lost, and that 'home' is not a place or a building as scholars on 'home' argue (Porteous, 1976; Saunders and Williams, 1988). For Tony, 'home' meant love and family and without those things he describes having lost his sense of identity. Tony describes feeling as though he will never gain a sense of 'home' again, even if he were allowed custody of his children because his wife is deceased. For Tony, 'home' is out of reach and lost forever.

'Home' for Jamar also involve family and identity. He recalls memories of his grandmother and crossword puzzles when he speaks of 'home,' and stability and familiarity. At the men's shelter, Jamar is able to find some value of stability and familiarity with the staff who allow him the time to create the puzzles that remind him of his grandmother, of 'home.' Because the shelter provides Jamar with "essential elements" people require to feel 'at home' in the sense that they are both cared for and that they belong (Annison, 2000), Jamar feels a sense of 'home' that he felt many years ago with this family.

Like many homeless people, Jamar has mental health issues that make living on the streets particularly challenging. Often, homeless people with mental health issues either avoid services or are overlooked by the system because they are not actively seeking treatment (Edidin et. al., 2012). It took Jamar a year of being 'homeless' to discover that there are services available to help not only with his mental health issues, but also to assist with obtaining supportive housing.

James' story is about 'home' being out of control which contradicts scholarly literature on 'home' that relates the word with being in control of spaces, of having rhythms and routines, something regular (Lloyd and Vasta, 2017). James insists 'home' is not safe but rather associated with lack of control. Further, he does not have positive associations with the word 'home' and instead uses 'place' instead to describe his residence. For James, 'home' is the opposite of what scholarly literature on 'home' says it is: he does not appear to long for 'home' and his memories of 'home' make him angry, not sentimental or hopeful. Further, his apparently deliberate usage of the word 'place' rather than 'home' seems to signify a departure from positive associations with notions of 'home.' 'Home' is not always a romanticized idea of the past, present, or future; it can also be something that is actively avoided because of its negative connotations.

The stories in this chapter challenge traditional concepts of 'home' as it relates to security, safety, comfort, family, and identity. Further, as Tony and James' stories shows, 'home' is not always a concept with positive associations. 'Home' can be something out of control, unstable, something in the past that cannot be established once more. These stories also challenge the idea that people living on the streets are without 'home'. For homeless people like Sarah and Amber, they *do* have 'home'; they have security and safety, belonging with family/pets, and they *are* in control of their lives and residences.

CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter six employs Ribot and Peluso's (2003) "theory of access" approach to studying mechanisms by means of which access to housing is achieved, in order to understand the multiple mechanisms at play during the pandemic. Ribot and Peluso's access analytics demonstrates how property right is only one among myriad of mechanisms and powers by means of which shelter (or 'home') is accessed or attained. Using an access approach, the chapter examines how other mechanisms of access, such as access to technology, capital, labor and labor opportunities, knowledge, and social identity and relations also affected the ability or inability for low-income renters facing eviction to remain in their residences during the pandemic. The stories presented in this chapter show how people facing eviction navigated their way through pandemic politics to secure their housing needs, or not.

The stories demonstrate how property is only "one set of mechanisms amongst many" within processes of access, and while rights to benefit from the eviction moratorium were legally sanctioned, mechanisms of access and power relations affected the means to access these benefits (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Jenny's story, like many other pandemic stories, presents a case of eviction threats, loss of employment, lack of daycare due to daycare closures, and difficulties obtaining employment. Although the pandemic created new means of access for low-income renters to secure stable housing, structural and relational mechanism of access denied Jenny the access to these benefits and resources. Jenny's identity as a single mother left her with little options for finding childcare for her children as most daycares were mandated to close during the pandemic.

As a result, she was unable to secure access to employment (labor) which, in turn, prevented her access to wages (capital), leaving her unable to pay her rent. The threat of eviction by her landlord left Jenny struggling to find a new residence and eventually her displacement from her current one. Property rights alone were not enough to provide full access to the benefits of the eviction moratorium.

For single, low-income parents like Jenny, eviction can be a constant threat (Desmond, 2016). With an eviction on record, finding stable, secure housing proves difficult, particularly for single mothers and their children who are often seen by landlords as an “aggravating factor” when renting out property as they can be destructive, cause noise ordinances, and caused overcrowding problems (Desmond, 2013). Jenny’s story also shows the impact of evictions and displacement on the health of both parent and child. Jenny’s son had been disruptive at daycare, causing extra stress for Jenny as she was forced to take her children to work with her and secure new childcare for her children.

Maggie’s story shares many similarities with Jenny’s: both are single mothers who lost employment and childcare due to the pandemic and both struggled to remain in their residences, even as the moratorium banned evictions from occurring. While Maggie took full advantage of the new means of access provided by pandemic politics such as utilizing Legal Aid resources and rental assistance from Neighborhood Place and was able to stay in her residence, initially, mechanisms of access to capital, labor opportunities, and social identity prevented her from gaining access to the legal benefits provided through the federal relief programs; again, property rights alone did not translate into full access to resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Maggie lost access to

capital and labor when she lost her job due to the pandemic, and her inability to pay rent put her in a creditor-debtor relationship with her landlord who took advantage of her lack of knowledge on eviction processes, and her social identity as a single mother was cause for distress as she tried to navigate finding a job and daycare for her children. While the pandemic created new means of access for low-income renters to remain in their residences, the processes to obtain aid proved to be challenging as renters were left to navigate the numerous new websites created to assist.

Maggie's story also demonstrates the impacts of single-parent households on the health and well-being of their children. Children growing up in single-parents households endure a number of hardships, including those related to education, health, and social development (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Magnuson and Votruba-Drzal, 2009). For children with nonresident fathers who contribute little to no assistance with child support, the likelihood of these children experiencing poverty, homelessness, and eviction are high, and this contributes to a decrease in both parent and child's health and well-being (Meyer and Hu, 1999).

Terry's story is also telling of many pandemic stories as he was confronted with eviction and homelessness for the first time in his life. With the loss of access to labor and capital and his savings depleted, Terry applied for unemployment but, like millions of other Americans, he never received his unemployment checks due to an overburdened and ill-equipped unemployment system. While he qualified for the state resources, he was unable to gain access to these resource benefits.

Like Maggie, Terry also became subject to the power imbalance of the landlord-tenant, creditor-debtor relationship as he was unable to pay rent due to his loss of access

to capital and labor. Although Terry was not formally evicted from his residence, his landlord made his housing conditions unlivable, refusing to fix leaking pipes in the bathroom and the air conditioning in the apartment. As a result, Terry left his apartment and became street homeless. The landlord's informal tactics to evict, threats and refusal to provide and maintain a habitable space for a tenant, resulted in Terry's displacement.

Sammy's story is not a pandemic story; her story demonstrates homeless anti-policing strategies in the city of Louisville. Homeless shelters in the city, like Wayside, provide nighttime shelter for those experiencing homelessness; however, due to the hours of her job, Sammy was unable to gain access to and benefit from this resource. As a result, Sammy was sleeping on the sidewalk near the shelter and was ticketed by police for loitering and impeding the flow of traffic. The power relations between Sammy and the shelter obstructed her access to this free, public service. Once again, while she had the right to benefit from the resource, she lacked the ability to do so. Sammy's story also shows how the criminalization of the homeless leads to an endless cycle of poverty and homelessness as the homeless are constantly ticketed by police for simply existing in public spaces. Unable to pay the ticket fines, the homeless are burdened with criminal records make securing stable housing even more difficult (Herring et. al., 2020).

The stories presented in this chapter show two things: (1) the pandemic created specific challenges for low-income renters and those facing the threat of displacement from their 'homes' leading to possible homelessness, and (2) how systemic failures in Louisville's affordable housing infrastructure and the pre-pandemic criminalization of the poor exacerbated issues during the pandemic. While new means of access to resources were made available to low-income renters during the pandemic, obtaining these

resources and remaining in their residences proved challenging due to various empowered mechanisms of access that limited their abilities to benefit from the resources available.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic restricted safe access to a more in-depth study with the participants in this research. However, the pandemic became a window into dynamics that would not have been visible otherwise. Many of the conversations were conducted virtually under time constraints. In-person conversations could have assisted in building closer relationships and provided more access into the everyday lives of the participants, which could provide a deeper understanding on how the participants makes sense of the word ‘home’ and how these understandings could offer deeper insights about broader social and cultural phenomena as it relates to eviction, displacement, and homelessness.

Participant observation is integral to an ethnography and requires the research to immerse themselves into situations directly so they can better understand particular cultural activities. While the pandemic hindered my ability to fully immersive myself in the lives of this study’s participants, I compensated for this loss through weekly, sometimes daily social media and phone text messages to better understand the participants lives. Due to pandemic safety issues, my time on the streets with the homeless was also limited; however, wearing a mask, I participated in nightly outreach as much as I felt was safe. As soon as the shelters opened up, I volunteered weekly to make up for lost time.

This study did not include homeless subjects who have been housed. Speaking with formerly homeless subjects who are currently housed could provide new meanings of the word home and how the word is negotiated as a formerly homeless person. This information could contribute greatly to the study of the word home as it relates to homelessness.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While concepts and discourses of the word ‘home’ have been extensively studied in scholarly literature, there are few research projects that have ethnographically studied the word ‘home’ as it relates to homelessness and, further, of how this type of study of the word ‘home’ could be applied to homeless policy.

In the future, I would like to ethnographically dive deeper into the lives of Louisville’s homeless population, to examine their everyday lives with an outcome of applying these findings to possible policy implications. How could homeless peoples’ understandings and negotiations of the word ‘home’ be applied to homeless housing services in the city? How could this information change conversations of homelessness in the city of Louisville?

This study consisted of several single mothers experiencing displacement and/or homelessness, but no single fathers experiencing the same issues. While there is extensive research on the role of noncustodial homeless fathers in the lives of their children (McArthur et. al., 2006; Schindler and Coley, 2007; Paquette and Bassuk, 2009; Pattnaik and Medeiros, 2013), I have been unable to find any ethnographic studies of

single homeless fathers raising their child without the presence of the mother. I would be very interested in finding these particular subjects to understand how their meanings and experiences of both 'home' and displacement differ from single homeless mothers and what this could mean for homeless policy. Research on homelessness often calls for situational specific programs for homeless people; for instance, elderly homeless people have very different needs than teenage homeless people. What kind of programs would benefit single homeless fathers with sole custody of their children? What would these programs look like in the city of Louisville?

As this public health crisis subsides, I am interested in performing more in-depth participant observation with the homeless population in the city of Louisville in order to better understand their needs and desires with the hopes of providing better, situation specific care for this population.

POST-SCRIPT

It's an early March evening, the 4th to be exact, and we are celebrating my sister's 39th birthday. Winter has decided to give us a bit of break with the bitter cold temperatures, and the weather outside is perfect; the kind of night where fires are burning and people sit in plastic chairs listening to the sound of the kindle crackling, sipping a cold drink and chatting about the latest movie or the price of gasoline or anything to avoid thinking of the next work week ahead. My house is alive with the smell of birthday cake and taco meat, wine and Sprite guzzling, six different conversations going on at once, babies crying, babies laughing, nieces and nephews playing Candy Land crying out "you have to

go back to the start!” My sister holds our newest great-niece, Ember, only weeks old, in her arms and is unable to hold back tears as she is reminded not only of new beginnings but great losses as well. I look on as my nephew, the father, proudly gazes at his daughter, a brand-new look on his face that exudes a happiness that, two years ago when he suddenly lost his mother (my sister Heather), he probably thought he would never be able to grasp again. As we all stand in this moment, the chaos of conversations and smells and children running and laughing and crying appears to pause instantaneously, and the only thing that matters is that we are here, together. Our losses, always weighing heavily, take a brief pause as we realize that life, in fact, does go on, and oh, what a life it can be. I smile at my sister holding our great-niece and, with tears in her eyes, she smiles back at me. We are home, and it’s not so bad.

Home can be many things: security, comfort, rest, and identity; dry shoes and a place to relax; two chairs, a portable grill, and a clothesline; a kitten to cuddle and ease the loneliness; a wife lost and two children out of reach; a place of community and identity where one feels secure and protected; a father’s presence in the lives of his children; a big back yard for children to run and play in; a crossword puzzle or a pair of glasses. Home can be a feeling, a sense of something in the past or something to come; overwhelming happiness or sadness; a sense of belonging, love, and care. Home does not have to be a particular place; it can be a feeling, a state of mind, or a person.

Pierce Brown writes, “Home isn't where you're from, it's where you find light when all grows dark.” For me, home is people, not a place. Home is family, and I take them with me wherever I go.

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