ESSAY REVIEW

Do We Have the Knowledge to Address Homelessness?

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ABSTRACT   Various forms of housing exclusion are a reality for millions of people across the globe. For people who are homeless in advanced industrialized economies, housing exclusion often co-exists with social service engagement. This essay reviews three books about how homelessness is conceptualized and caused, and how we, as social service providers and social scientists, respond to homelessness: *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*, by Deborah Padgett, Benjamin Henwood, and Sam Tsemberis; *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe: Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse*, by Kate Moss and Paramjit Singh; and *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States*, by Craig Willse. It concludes that Housing First achieves justice for deeply marginalized individuals but that the effectiveness of Housing First represents a disturbing reminder of our failed welfare states and public institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Massive advances in the economy, built infrastructure, legislation, and the welfare state have not enabled many millions of people across the globe to realize affordable, secure, and safe housing. Even if we can set aside as manifestly different the situation of people living in slums and informal settlements in developing nations, homelessness endures in advanced capitalist economies despite mounting evidence about the problem and its solutions. More than 20 years ago, David Snow, Leon Anderson, and Paul Koegel (1994) argued that no social problem in the United States had been studied more than homelessness. Driven by policy, program, and methodological innovations, the past 20 years have witnessed a proliferation of homelessness research alongside a continuation of the problem.

People continue to experience the social and material deprivation of homelessness, not because we lack the scientific knowledge but rather because of our values and the political decisions we make. Michael Katz

134

(1986) made a similar argument about the persistence of poverty more than 30 years ago. Our political decisions—where we invest money and where we do not—have recently been made clear by Matthew Desmond (2016). In a brilliant yet disturbing illustration of eviction and housing insecurity among people living in poverty, Desmond remarks on the share of the federal budget that goes to propping up homeowners and the share that goes to affordable housing. The political decision to support home ownership at the expense of affordable housing both contributes to homelessness and reflects a set of values about reward and deservingness.

It is not sufficient, however, to identify political and ideological barriers to explain why homelessness continues to exist today. As significant as these are, we need to apply pressure to our analysis by grappling with the complexities of what homelessness means. We need, for example, to consider how homelessness for many people is not about affordable housing, unemployment, and poverty. We cannot explain all of homelessness with meta-theories of the state and economy. For example, in advanced industrialized economies with diverse welfare states, homelessness is often caused and prolonged by the interaction of mental illness, addiction, and violence. All too often, homelessness is symptomatic of cultures where violence and alcohol and substance misuse is ubiquitous. Less immediately, it is addiction, mental illness, and violence within families that create the individual problems (trauma, alienation) that later manifest as homelessness.

Thus, in addition to questioning the inequitable share of resources and political decisions that sanction inequities, to understand why homelessness persists we also must confront challenging questions about the functioning of families and communities. Brian Head and John Alford (2015) explain that wicked policy problems are characterized by debate over the nature of the problem and debate about solutions, and, importantly, that wicked problems are interconnected and symptomatic of other problems. They argue that wicked problems are not present because we lack technical solutions, but rather that wicked problems are constructions and products of political and policy decisions. Homelessness fits this analytical construct. Homelessness is often caused by other, earlier, indirect problems, and because the problems involve violence, family functioning, mental illness, substance abuse, and dependence, and the provision of financial assets with varying degrees of state regulation, we lack agreement on the nature of the problem, who is responsible, who should fix it, and how we ought to respond. Although we can define housing with relative objec-

tivity, housing and home are not synonyms; the latter is personally and subjectively experienced (Mallett 2004). Defining homelessness will only ever be tentative and subject to caveats.

It is the complexity of addressing homelessness within our political, economic, policy, cultural, and practice systems, on the one hand, and the moral injustice of people excluded from affordable housing, on the other, that three recent books are located. The three books aim to conceptualize homelessness—how the problem is experienced, how we respond, and how we ought to respond—in ways to challenge theory and practice. Adopting different conceptual and methodological lenses, *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*, by Deborah Padgett, Benjamin Henwood, and Sam Tsemberis (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe: Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse*, by Kate Moss and Paramjit Singh (Policy Press, 2015); and *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States*, by Craig Willse (University of Minnesota Press, 2015) examine the problems and solutions within both the United States and internationally.

IS HOUSING FIRST THE SOLUTION?

The Housing First approach, which prioritizes providing people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing before providing other support services like addiction counseling, for example, has taken hold as the idealized response to addressing homelessness. In countries with diverse welfare states, housing markets, cultures, and levels of inequity, Housing First is widely endorsed and is celebrated as the solution to homelessness. In *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*, Deborah Padgett, Benjamin Henwood, and Sam Tsemberis outline a compelling and robust analysis of the influence of Housing First and why the approach is morally superior. Central to the book's argument is that Housing First has achieved the remarkable success of creating a paradigm shift: not merely a successful program, Housing First has shaped how service systems respond to people experiencing homelessness internationally.

In the United States, Housing First represents such a positive progression because it rejects and transcends the dominant homelessness service approach of a linear continuum of care, whereby people experiencing homelessness are required to demonstrate positive behavior change to fi-

nally graduate to independent housing, if they ever do. Sam Tsemberis originally developed the Housing First approach in the early 1990s in New York City's Pathways to Housing program. As it was originally conceived, Housing First in the Pathways to Housing program (the original approach is referred to as Pathways Housing First) was driven by three premises: "consumer choice; community based, mobile support services; and permanent scatter-site housing" (3). Pathways Housing First thus turned on its head the dominant approach of requiring people who were homeless to demonstrate that they were housing ready, which in practice meant proving abstinence, sobriety, and compliance with medication. This conditional and linear approach is challenged in Pathways Housing First by providing people who are homeless with immediate access to housing without first requiring them to demonstrate behavioral conditions. Moreover, although social and health services are closely tied to the provision of housing, tenants choose the nature and level of engagement with any services. The philosophy of tenant choice is consistent with another normative position that housing constitutes a human right. To facilitate the right to housing, housing is provided at affordable rates, with many programs charging rents at no more than 30 percent of a tenant's income.

Padgett and colleagues demonstrate that Pathways Housing First became so popular that it created a movement—a paradigm shift—that not only spread elsewhere within and outside of the United States but also evolved and adapted beyond the Pathways Housing First model. The adapted model is referred to as Housing First, reflecting the way in which proponents have used the idea of Housing First in ways that are fundamentally different from Tsemberis's Pathways Housing First. Indeed, the notion of Housing First is used to describe approaches and policies that differ markedly from the original Pathways Housing First approach. As Padgett and colleagues recognize, service providers identify with Housing First not only to gain credibility but also to gain funding. After Housing First became endorsed as the formal policy and program response of the federal government, programs have had clear financial and resource incentives to identify themselves as providing the Housing First approach.

The success of Housing First in creating a paradigm shift, or even a concept asserted to claim progressive and effective practice, can principally be attributed to a rigorous body of empirical research demonstrating its effect. Chapter 4 of Padgett and colleagues' book presents the quantitative evi-

dence. Compared to linear models to treating homelessness, which often do not provide housing, Housing First enables people to access housing quickly and to spend less time being homeless. Moreover, Housing First means that people are less likely to return to homelessness. The housing outcomes achieved by Housing First programs force us to critically evaluate why we persist with transitional housing. Under conditions of rapid re-housing and where emergency shelters are only used for emergencies, the need for transitional housing is redundant.

The stability and security of housing offered by Housing First programs means that, in addition to leading to clear and significant housing outcomes, Housing First programs are more likely and better able to assist people to work on nonhousing outcomes than linear models where people are transitioning through various forms of homeless accommodation. Qualitative material reported in chapters 5 and 6 of Padgett and colleagues' book, building on Deborah Padgett's (2007) earlier analysis, shows what meaning housing assumes in people's lives. In contrast to the precariousness and insecurity that characterized their experiences as homeless, sustaining affordable housing through Housing First enables people to achieve home and markers of ontological security.

The success and meaning people attribute to sustaining housing can only be grasped by understanding that, for many people, the affordable and secure housing provided in Housing First programs was a first-time experience. As opposed to service models that have creamed the easiest to serve clients, many Housing First programs purposefully prioritize people with the longest histories of housing exclusion and the highest health and support needs. Housing First provides direct evidence to counter arguments that people with chronic experiences of homelessness and exclusion are not housing ready.

Padgett and colleagues discuss some of the challenges of implementing Housing First in countries outside of the United States with different cultural, policy, housing, and social service systems. In the United States, particularly as practiced through Pathways Housing First, Housing First programs have relied on program budgets and at times on federally funded Section 8 housing vouchers. These sources of funding have enabled programs to lease existing housing stock from the private market. The programs can immediately access private rental housing stock that is available; the immediate access to housing is critical to the philosophy of housing as a human right and to prevent people from transitioning through temporary

arrangements. Access to immediate housing stock, however, can be difficult in countries with systems that differ from those in the United States. When Australia formally adopted Housing First, the inability of some programs to immediately access social housing meant that Housing First was more of an espoused idea than a practice reality (Parsell, Jones, and Head 2013). In Australia, the United Kingdom, and parts of Europe, there are often fewer policy mechanisms or institutionalized systems for social service agencies to lease housing from the market. These countries traditionally rely on what can be slow and wait-listed processes to access social housing (the length of wait and eligibility criteria for accessing social housing varies significantly across Australia, the United Kingdom, and Europe). In addition to system challenges, relying on housing from the market, rather than social housing, is criticized outside of the United States as the state transferring public money to private landlords (Jacobs 2015).

The Housing First approach is rightly juxtaposed to linear and conditional models in the United States, but we must not assume that linear and conditional models prevail and indeed constitute the dominant response to people who are homeless outside of the United States. In Australia, the United Kingdom, and Europe, for example, a linear and conditional system often does not fully explain why people who are chronically homeless do not obtain access to housing. Rather, people predominantly do not get access to housing because the housing allocation system is unresponsive and is not directed toward achieving chronic homelessness reduction objectives. Australia identified Housing First in formal policy, but in practice it rarely considered how housing access could be immediately directed toward people who are homeless (Johnson, Parkinson, and Parsell 2012). In the United Kingdom, many in the homelessness sector did not perceive Housing First as a radical paradigm shift because stakeholders believed they were practicing Housing First already (Johnsen and Teixeira 2012). Thus, in many countries outside of the United States, chronic homelessness cannot be principally attributed to service providers withholding housing because they morally assess the behaviors of people who are homeless. In fact, in countries where social housing is in theory the primary source of housing for people who are chronically homeless, there is no clear policy or practice mechanism for social housing authorities to morally assess applicants. This does not mean that people who are homeless and who also have mental health diagnoses and addictions access social housing without difficulty outside of the United States. They do not. Social

housing providers exclude homeless people with mental illnesses and addictions, but exclusions are generally based on the view that these people are difficult to house and that they will be difficult tenants. Indeed, in Australia and elsewhere, overt symptoms of addiction and mental illness are the primary reasons people are evicted from social housing (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004; Jones et al. 2014). Researchers can reasonably argue that Housing First constitutes less of a paradigm shift outside of the United States because myriad examples exist of social housing authorities providing direct housing access to people experiencing chronic homelessness without the requirement of behavioral change or medication compliance (Johnsen and Teixeira 2012; Johnson, Parkinson, and Parsell 2012).

Housing First programs in the United States, and many supportive housing programs more broadly (see Rog et al. 2014), are targeted toward people with psychiatric illnesses and often with co-occurring addictions. Indeed, having a diagnosable psychiatric illness is often a requirement of accessing Housing First. Thus, health systems play a critical role in judging whether people are clinically and morally ready for housing. Predominantly in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Europe, however, having a diagnosable illness is rarely an eligibility criteria. As such, health systems play a far less significant role as gatekeeper to housing. This, however, leads to other significant problems. In Australia, notwithstanding one-off project responses to address local problems, housing providers and health systems are disjointed. Health patients with psychiatric illnesses struggle to access social housing, and social housing providers struggle to access the health services their tenants require. People in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Europe who are homeless with co-occurring addictions and mental illness experience barriers to housing access, but the barriers are often different from the barriers typically experienced in the United States.

Padgett and colleagues' work presents a thorough analysis that demonstrates that Housing First is morally superior, that it is more effective at supporting people into housing and ensuring that they do not return to homelessness, and that, compared to crisis and criminal justice systems that people who are chronically homeless disproportionately use, Housing First represents a better investment of tax dollars. It is easy to skeptically note that the glowing accolades to Housing First are highlighted in a book authored by the individual who developed the approach (the third author), notwithstanding the frank discussion of the minority of people who are

deemed a "Housing First failure" (99). Although Padgett and colleagues present the robust evidence base for the effectiveness of Housing First, it is likewise noteworthy that Sam Tsemberis has been a coresearcher and coauthor on many of the seminal studies measuring the effectiveness of a model he developed. Irrespective of Sam Tsemberis's potentially conflicted position as model designer and evaluator, the overwhelmingly positive portrayals of Housing First can be substantiated. If Housing First is to be compared to the costly and ineffective shelter models premised on moral evaluations of people's behaviors and deservingness, Housing First will be on the right side of history.

IS WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS DIFFERENT FROM MEN'S HOMELESSNESS?

Women Rough Sleepers in Europe: Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse, by Kate Moss and Paramjit Singh, sets out to show how the nature and experience of women's "rough sleeping" (or unsheltered homelessness) is distinct from men's rough sleeping. From this purported difference, the book argues that female rough sleepers require different service responses than male rough sleepers. The argument draws on findings from a 3-year study funded by the European Commission with fieldwork conducted in Hungary, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden. The study involves interviews with women who had experienced rough sleeping at some point in their lives and interviews with representatives from organizations that work with women experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness more broadly.

Despite its claims to the contrary, *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe* makes no novel contribution to knowledge, nor is the research presented in a way that instills confidence in the results and analysis. There are two fundamental problems. First, Moss and Singh continuously assert that there is no or very little research evidence about women's rough sleeping. They claim that "the research that has been carried out into homelessness on an international level really only focuses on the problem as experienced by men" (184). This mistaken assertion is a significant problem; it not only ignores much of what is known through previous published work, but, in doing so, it presents the findings from the study as new. The book's argument rests on a false premise. There is a mass of research about rough sleeping. Although the existing research presents data indicating that men are over-

represented in the rough sleeping population, the existing research does not ignore the experiences of women.

The existing empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated body of knowledge, some of it cited in *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe*, demonstrates the gendered nature of rough sleeping (see scholars such as Julia Wardhaugh, Sophie Watson, Joanne Neale, Shelly Mallett, Rionach Casey, John May, Paul Cloke, Kate Bukowski, Laura Huey, Einat Peled, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, and Graham Bowpitt). Comprised of early work that illustrated the hidden nature of women's rough sleeping and homelessness, the existing evidence base helps us to understand how violence, oppression, and powerlessness cause rough sleeping for women; the existing body of scholarship likewise shows the risks of physical and sexual assault that women sleeping rough face (there is literature showing that male rough sleepers face these risks, too, but *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe* presents the risks as if they are unique to women). Researchers also show the strategies that women living on the streets use to survive, to keep safe, and to hide their overt signs of homelessness. The existing research evidence, which is not considered by Moss and Singh, shows that homelessness and rough sleeping constitute a threat to domiciled and feminine identities. Rough sleeping is not only a form of material deprivation; it is also an assault on a woman's sense of self and the way women are characterized by society.

Women Rough Sleepers in Europe claims to be a qualitative ethnographic study. The claim for ethnography is based on one-off qualitative interviews with service providers or with women who had slept rough. This series of one-off interviews is described as "immersive observation" (79). Moss and Singh present no evidence of immersive observations or that they conducted participant observations in social services or where women sleep rough; there is no information to suggest that fieldwork involved more than one-off interviews. The study does not use ethnographic interviewing.

Further detail about the methodological approach is fundamentally flawed in several critical areas. Moss and Singh say that the study intended to "sample a maximum of 27 key informants and 20 women rough sleepers in each country" (79). Later, they say that they aimed to conduct 20 key informant interviews. In addition to the discrepancies in how many key informants they aimed to interview (20 or 27), they never say exactly how many people were interviewed. The reasonable point is made that it was difficult to access 20 women sleeping rough, and thus "in some cases the full 20 interviews were not conducted" (161). However, at no point does

Women Rough Sleepers in Europe state how many people were actually interviewed; we only know that fewer than 20 women in some or all of the countries were interviewed. This omission is not only in tension with rigorous research reporting, but in chapter 6, they present a descriptive statistical analysis on the women rough sleeper sample, and we have no idea what the statistics mean because we do not know the sample size. In addition to this, Moss and Singh state that they used a theoretical sampling method, but this assertion is contradicted by their saying that they randomly selected people through service providers. Not only was the sampling approach a convenient method, and not random, the reference to theoretical sampling is consistent with the reference to ethnographic interviewing in that they identify the research as credible vis-à-vis respected methodological approaches, but the approaches were not achieved in practice.

The presentation of qualitative material proceeds in chapters 4 and 5 by pasting large sections of verbatim quotes from interviews with very little analysis. From these chapters, Moss and Singh conclude that women who sleep rough have lives that are pervaded by violence and that there is an insufficient level of specifically women-only homelessness services available. The analysis ignores the Housing First approach, and it repeats assertions from service providers that more shelter accommodation is required. The quantitative analysis of the women rough sleeper sample presents demographic and biographical information on the unrepresentative sample of an undisclosed number of people. Rather than presenting the descriptive statistics in a single table to help understand something about the women who participated in the research, the descriptive statistics are used to make unsubstantiated claims about the extent and nature of women's rough sleeping in four countries and how the extent and nature differs between countries.

WHO BENEFITS FROM HOMELESSNESS?

People who theorize that all of society's ills are explained by neoliberalism will have their views confirmed by *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States,* by Craig Willse. The book commences with two epigraphs that refer to ghosts and monsters. These epigraphs set the scene for a sinister and scary view of how the state, social services, businesses, and social scientists create the conditions for the homeless to be managed—and thus for homelessness to persist.

Willse first developed his ideas for the *The Value of Homelessness* after working in advocacy and practice with LGBTQ youth who were homeless. His insights led him to understand that being gay was an inadequate explanation for why the young people were homeless; rather, he needed to look at the ways that gender and sexual marginalization intersect with other societal forces (7). The book is driven by two excellent questions: Why is housing out of reach for so many people [in the United States]? Why, despite increased numbers of services responding to people who are homeless, is the rate of homelessness increasing? In addressing these questions, *The Value of Homelessness* rejects what are presented as traditional approaches to social services and knowledge generated from social science. Willse says, "I want to cut through the corpse of homelessness management, slicing through capital, urban infrastructure, social science, and social service to find something other than the story social services and social sciences have been telling us" (17).

The Value of Homelessness not only intends to disrupt what practitioners and scholars thought they knew, but the book also intends to move the focus away from people who are homeless and instead focus on the apparatus that produces homelessness. Despite epoch-shaping aims, and notwithstanding that Willse correctly identifies structural inequities that create housing exclusion, the contribution is limited because of a lack of evidence to support its claims, an unnuanced and at times ill-informed presentation of the evidence, ideological determinism whereby neoliberalism assumes a master narrative to explain everything, and a failure to offer alternatives.

Willse dedicates the majority of chapter 2 to dismissing Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk* (1999), an ethnographic study of the lives of African American men selling books on the streets of New York City. *Sidewalk* is presented as an example of homelessness research and moreover as an example of social science and ethnographic research into poverty. Willse then discredits the existing knowledge base, and the methods employed to generate the knowledge base, based on the purported failings of *Sidewalk*. He takes issue with ethnography because it endorses positivist assumptions that the world is knowable. This criticism of ethnography reflects a broader problem with *The Value of Homelessness,* in that it presents a partial picture of the story to generalize about the whole story. First, *Sidewalk* is not indicative of knowledge in the homelessness field. Although I think *Sidewalk* is a good piece of scholarship, I do not think, and I have never heard anyone say, that

Sidewalk represents homelessness research. Second, Willse's rejection of ethnography due to his view of the approach as positivist ignores the many ethnographic studies that adopt epistemologies that do not endorse ideas of objective truth (in the homelessness field, see Blackman [1998], Marvasti [2002], Gowan [2010], and Parsell [2011], among others).

To further his aim of saying something other than what the social sciences and social services have been telling us, Willse critiques *Sidewalk* for not sufficiently taking into account history, colonization, gender, and sexuality when presenting the lives of people who sell books on the streets. Willse is uneasy about *Sidewalk* because Duneier takes seriously the sense of self and meaning that people participating in his research identified. It is not clear why Willse wants to dedicate nearly a whole chapter to criticizing a book published 16 years ago that was never really a key homelessness study, but, more concerning, when reading the argument put forward in *The Value of Homelessness*, I am reminded of John Martin's insights (2011). Martin shows that in order for scholars to feel that they have developed "a real theory," they move far away from people's firsthand accounts, which are deemed to be untrustworthy, and instead they develop third-person accounts (grand theories) to explain how people behave. For Willse, neoliberalism is the only valid means for understanding people who are homeless and other excluded groups. Willse's critique of *Sidewalk* suggests that what excluded groups say about themselves needs to be ignored if their comments—and sense of self—do not endorse the neoliberal framework.

Beyond the dismissal of *Sidewalk*, Willse's primary focus throughout *The Value of Homelessness* is to argue that neoliberalism is the all-pervasive and determining force that creates homelessness; further, he proposes that social services and social scientists are co-opted by neoliberalism to manage homelessness. In a number of ways, Willse raises questions or outlines arguments that are indeed spot on. He shows how racism and housing exclusion intersect. Without engaging comprehensive literature on housing exclusion in the United States (Vales 2013), we are reminded how planning decisions (whose houses get built and whose houses get demolished) together with the availability of finance (who is able to borrow money to purchase housing and who is not) reproduce racialized housing exclusions. Although it is not original either, Willse's call for greater attention to the absence of affordable housing as the cause of homelessness and additional housing as the solution to homelessness warrants reiteration. Also impor-

tant, Willse notes how homelessness is another example of a social problem that becomes medicalized, and thus the social problem of poverty becomes an individual health problem (also see Padgett, Henwood, and Tsemberis [2016], which presents a more illuminating critique of pathologizing poverty).

The Value of Homelessness can only be endorsed for bringing further attention to the limitations of the shelter and conditional modes of service provision. Central to the book is the proposition that social services are benefiting financially from responding to, but not addressing, homelessness. There are, no doubt, many examples throughout history where this is true. Willse thus joins the movement of those advocating for Housing First who have shown that traditional responses to homelessness have focused on managing rather than ending a person's homelessness.

The usefulness and credibility of the valid points Willse raises, however, are diluted by the unnuanced claims and one-sided evidence presented to substantiate his thesis. To prosecute the argument that social services are benefiting from managing homelessness more than from helping people who are homeless, *The Value of Homelessness* cites New York's Doe Fund as an illustrative case. The Doe Fund example highlights the difference between the large salaries of executives and the menial cleaning tasks people who are homeless are asked to undertake—a reasonable disparity and seemingly poor service to point out. This one example, however, is used to do a lot of work. Without using the words *representative* or *generalizable*, Willse presents the Doe Fund as characteristic of not-for-profit organizations and social services more broadly. The Doe Fund case study is not presented alongside or considered with reference to any social service or not-for-profit organization that responds to people who are homeless in ways contrary to Willse's argument. These are important omissions. His damning claims that social services and social scientists deliberately do not challenge structural conditions to end homelessness for their own benefit (167) are provocative and need to be substantiated with evidence and presented in a balanced way. When Willse uses a case study of one to generalize about the controversial actions and motivations of many, it is easy to dismiss his claims as polemical grandstanding.

We see similarly one-sided and unnuanced arguments in the discussion of the federal government and HUD. It is true that the limited section of the population that can access housing assistance under federal law represents a noteworthy barrier to achieving housing security, but this point is not

coupled with recognition of the federal funding for increasing levels of permanent supportive housing as opposed to shelter accommodation (HUD 2015). No serious observer would conclude that the federal government is playing an adequate role in creating affordable housing and housing security for excluded groups. Desmond (2016) has recently shown the human effects of the federal government's failure in affordable housing policy. It is important to identify where the federal government is failing to deliver housing security. Does *The Value of Homelessness* omit examples of the federal government providing funding for permanent supportive housing rather than shelter accommodation because this example contradicts the all-encompassing neoliberal explanation of the state and social services colluding to manage homelessness?

The Value of Homelessness also takes issue with the HUD requirement that agencies receiving federal money collect and report statistics. Willse believes that the collecting and reporting of statistics is not only burdensome but also that counting people who are homeless produces biopoliticization of homelessness—counting people who are homeless sits in a broader neoliberal context of techno-conceptual management. He considers the collection and use of statistical data to be a catastrophe because it leads to the "evaporation of the multidimensional knowledge structure of social work" (119). Absent in Willse's characterization of statistics is empirical investigation of whether collecting statistics actually influences practice and whether statistics can coexist with detailed biographical and qualitative information to drive practice (for a thorough analysis of the effect of quantitative measures in practice, see Eileen Munro's [2011] review of the UK child protection system). I have no evidence about whether the reporting of statistics that Willse critiques has brought or will bring about positive policy change to promote housing security. That said, my reading of the statistics reported by HUD, particularly HUD's direct acknowledgment of areas where homelessness has increased and about federal targets that have not been realized (HUD 2015), says more about the embarrassing failure of the federal government than it does about biopolitizing homelessness.

After *The Value of Homelessness* has already dedicated considerable ink to arguing that the federal government perpetuates homelessness and social services and that social scientists support the federal government in managing and counting the homeless out of self-interest, chapter 5 has to deal with Housing First. This is difficult for *The Value of Homelessness*; Housing First is the product of social service providers and social scien-

tists, with statistical data and federal funding, working to end rather than manage homelessness. On the face of it, all of these facts contradict Willse's analysis. Willse, however, proceeds to assert that Housing First is indeed consistent with his neoliberal interpretation. Although he does not explicitly engage with research showing Housing First's effectiveness, much less qualitative research demonstrating the meaning of Housing First in the lives of people who are securely housed, he recognizes that Housing First is more than managing homelessness. Nevertheless, glossing over the role that statistics and social scientists partnering with social services have played in moving the debates beyond homelessness management and contributing to housing security, Willse explains Housing First as part of the neoliberal doom and gloom project because the structures that give rise to housing insecurity are not addressed and because some of the arguments for Housing First are economic.

First, it is hard not to agree with Willse. Housing First does not radically transform society. It does not alter any of the conditions that we theorize cause chronic homelessness. Housing First provides housing access—housing justice—for people who are marginalized, often people who have endured years of marginalization. Housing First does not disrupt structural inequities. But it is nonsense to refer to Housing First as neoliberal because it does not alter structures that give rise to poverty. Heart surgeons transplant hearts for people in poverty, but heart surgeons do not alter the structural conditions that place people in poverty at a greater risk of heart disease. Are heart surgeons, too, enabling the insidious forces of neoliberalism?

Second, Housing First, along with other supportive housing initiatives, has successfully drawn on cost effectiveness and cost offset narratives to garner political and community support. Many have argued that the financial costs of homelessness are important considerations, but financial costs are but one of the reasons why society needs to ensure secure and affordable housing access (Parsell, Petersen, and Culhane 2016). Until we come up with a society where money no longer exists, financial costs will matter, and thus governments and people responsible for making decisions about how other people's money (tax) is spent will take into consideration the costs of policy decisions and social problems. Although Willse seems to think that economic arguments are new and only evident since neoliberalism, the costs of responding to problems have mattered ever since we have responded to problems. Katz (1986, 54), for example, shows that in the

mid-nineteenth century in the United States, people were rationalizing providing housing as a cheaper practice response than sending children to "the orphan asylum." Discrediting a policy or program response because it takes costs into consideration likewise ignores that the original conceptualization of the post–World War II welfare state drew on social justice, solidarity, and financial arguments.

The Value of Homelessness pushes the neoliberal analysis too far. Every problem observed by Willse is rationalized as yet another example of the all-pervasive neoliberalism. I am reminded of Mel Gray and colleagues (2015), who observe that neoliberalism is used as a master narrative to explain all that is wrong with social services. But without engaging with the many examples that challenge his analysis, Willse not only stretches neoliberalism too far; he makes it ideological determinism. Karl Popper (1963) refers to the act of analyzing everything one sees through a pre-determined theory as pseudo-science. As a pseudo-science, and we see this throughout *The Value of Homelessness*, every instance confirms and verifies the theory.

There are two fundamental problems with the ideological determinism in *The Value of Homelessness*. The first problem is not so much the interpretation of the problem but what the analysis contributes. Many of the historic injustices and structural inequalities that Willse identifies can be substantiated. However, with his neoliberal frame, he uses what Noam Chomsky (2014) calls polysyllabic words and complicated constructions to say in a convoluted way what we already knew. When we strip back the language (biopower, biopolitics, philanthrocapitalism) to monosyllables, we are left with truisms. I agree with Chomsky, who says that using this complicated language, when it does not say something new, is a form of academic posturing to assert our left wing and sophisticated credentials.

The second problem with the neoliberal determinism is the way in which Willse's analysis strips people of agency. In addition to discounting excluded people's sense of self, as is evident in his critique of *Sidewalk*, Willse uses neoliberalism to characterize what he thinks motivates masses of the population. According to Willse, business, the federal government, social services, and social scientists are motivated by narrow self-interests. Business only wants to clear the streets to prime the market, the federal government only wants to prop up business, and social services and social scientists are in cahoots with business to not disrupt the true causes of poverty so as to ensure that their business model endures. The neoliberal de-

terminism dehumanizes everyone considered. The simple and binary analysis presented of people's motivations ignores the reality that homelessness policy and programs contain elements of both social justice and coercion (Fitzpatrick and Jones 2005). People using services similarly accept and subvert the formal policy and practice intentions (Parsell 2015). Rarely can social policy, social services, and the motivation and positions of people using services be simply and one-dimensionally characterized. Through the ideological determinism driving *The Value of Homelessness,* we are left with an analysis that is so unnuanced and simplistic that it takes a lot of generosity to appreciate the contributions made.

WHERE DOES THIS KNOWLEDGE TAKE US?

What do we know about the state of scholarship in the area of homelessness? For those of us in the field of social work and social welfare, for instance, Housing First provides evidence and offers optimism for an approach that achieves housing justice. Housing First demonstrates that housing is accessible and sustainable for people who have otherwise been deemed undeserving. Moral judgments about deservingness are not only disputed by Housing First, but moral judgments about people's problematic behaviors ignore that it is the experience of housing exclusion that mediates the behaviors that we deem problematic. The example of Housing First provides rigorous and compelling evidence to underpin our philosophical desire to change inequitable systems rather than change people excluded from unjust systems. We should be optimistic about the lessons from Housing First, or other models that provide direct access to affordable and secure housing, because the practice and research knowledge constitutes a rejection to claims that people are not housing-ready. Housing First reminds us that if we tolerate chronic homelessness, we do so because we are not ready to change unjust systems.

   The state of scholarship shows that Housing First is effective and desirable, but we must be conscious that Housing First works well in—and it draws a spotlight to—demonstrably failing welfare states and other failing public institutions. The influence that Housing First has on people's lives represents justice, but the social and economic conditions in which Housing First represents a remedy are manifestly unjust. Housing First fixes problems that we could have dealt with earlier with a resourced welfare state.

The existing knowledge base provides theoretical and empirical scaffolding for those engaged in pursuing the next advances in homelessness prevention. In addition to disrupting structural causes of homelessness, future progress includes producing knowledge to (1) challenge the minimalist criteria of the sick and thus pathologized group who have access to housing, especially in the United States (see Padgett et al. 2016), (2) identify how to promote the conditions for people who have endured chronic exclusion and deprivation to improve their lives—the existing research shows that after sustaining housing, many people do not achieve other life changes, and (3) develop models of housing and support that can work, that are desirable, and that comprise individual and or collective forms of ownership. Housing First and other models of supportive housing involve housing that is leased, either through the market or the social housing sector. The majority of support is provided through formal social services delivered by professionals. Can other forms of ownership and delivery of services achieve better outcomes than what is achieved when people are tenants of someone else's property and clients of someone else's social service?

Questions about ownership of property and people's status as clients of a social service not only help us think about what comes after housing security but also force us to reflect on what expectations—or limitations—we place on the life trajectories of people who have endured housing exclusion. Although we may discredit home ownership because of collectivist and anti-market ideals, in Australia, at least, home ownership and achieving a life beyond that of a social service consumer is inadequately considered because our aspirations for people who have experienced homelessness, particularly long-term homelessness, are impoverished. Through our eligibility criteria for homeless accommodation and through practices of case management, we impose upon clients and ask them to adopt an ill-fitting and all-encompassing homeless identity (Parsell 2011). Imposing an identity on people because of what they lack not only risks shaping how people see themselves, but the homeless identity all too often can lead to a limited assumption of people's capacities, values, and life aspirations. The category of "homeless" or even "formerly homeless" automatically limits our vision for a life that people can desire and a life they can achieve. When we think of people who are homeless in ways that are distinct from their material deprivation, this opens up opportunities to understand that they, like us, have desires for lives that do not include being clients or tenants.

NOTE

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