A Blessing or a Curse:

Utilization and Inclusivity in Faith-Based Organizations Servicing the Homeless

By

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ABSTRACT

DABY, MAEVE A Blessing or a Curse? Analysis of the Quality of Services Provided by

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Purpose - Homelessness is one of the most pervasive problems society faces today, and the same

predicament has held true historically. Throughout time, homeless individuals have utilized

different services based on what was made available to them, and what their area of greatest need

was. This need has shifted from shelter, to sustenance and emotional support, as well as mental

health services and evaluations. No matter the need, since the onset of contemporary

homelessness, the sector of faith-based organizations have continuously supported homeless

individuals. In this thesis, I explore the utilization of faith-based organizations by the homeless

and the motivations of those that deliver these services to understand the experience and

rationale for participation among both groups.

Methodology/ approach - I employed two methods of observation. First, I recruited and

interviewed a sample of volunteers and employees of one faith-based organization in the

northeastern United States to understand what motivated their participation and the

organizational efficacy, in relation to their personal religious affiliations. Participants also

recounted their experiences with homeless clients to understand the rationale for participation

and the role that the faith-based model played in the success, failure, and routines of everyday

service utilization. Second, I performed participant observations within this organization to

understand interactions between clients and providers and patterns of inclusion and exclusion which shaped successes and failures among them.

Findings - I discovered two distinct themes. First, people that work within the organization believed that faith-based organizations, in particular, were the most effective strategy for servicing (and saving) the homeless population. This was underscored by faith-based organization's emphasis on the religious values of togetherness, compassion, and deliverance to such an extent that these values permeated every aspect of the services they provided. This sector of service provision was also applauded for how its religious foundation necessitates a future focus and collaborative atmosphere.

The second theme centered on the drawbacks of faith-based organizations serving homeless populations. Faith-based organizations are heavily dependent on their emphasis on internal promotion as a way of ensuring oversight and accountability. This resulted in opportunistic concealment or revealing parts of religious identities in an effort to live up to institutional expectations. These practices both positively and negatively shaped interactions and outcomes among both workers and the clients that they served.

Research implications and limitations: Understanding the experiences of providers and clients of faith-based organizations serving the homeless highlights the importance of symbolic capital, identity management, and concealment in order to better assimilate to institutional expectations, and connects to many aspects of the stigma management of discredited identities.

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home·less

/hōmləs/

adjective

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1. (of a person) without a home, and therefore typically living on the streets.

"The plight of young homeless people" (Oxford Languages 2022)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Society has long blamed the individual for their status as homeless, citing inferior moral virtues, intellectual capacity or general lack of productivity as reasons for their predicament. Thankfully, in the most recent decades, society has turned to blame social institutions as the cause of homeless individual's apparent inferiority. Sociologist Randall Kuhn (1998) alludes to this institutional blame in describing how "much of the period [a homeless individual] spends outside of the shelter may be spent in hospitals, jails, detoxification centers, or on the street" hence emphasizing the many structures in place to combat homelessness that actually fall short in addressing the root cause of the problem (211). Outside of these institutions, the homeless are subjected to frequent transitions in terms of being accepted into and quickly departing "inpatient treatment programs, detoxification services, or penal institutions" (Kuhn 1998: 211). Such a liminal existence leads many to perceive homelessness as a more pervasive problem than it is, as the aforementioned periods of transition expose the population to the public eye more frequently.

Alongside and external to these institutional arrangements, the homeless often utilize services at nonprofit or faith-based organizations; as these two institutions have persisted as the most reliable and widely available sources of services for homeless individuals throughout time (Shumsky 2012: 15). These service providers are met with competition from emergency shelters and governmental organizations that closely resemble soup-kitchens, but have always far surpassed them in terms of capability and adaptability. Burt (1989) explains that "despite the expansion in emergency services for the homeless during the 1980s, the existing services do not meet the need" of the expanding homeless population (121). The number of homeless individuals has only increased since this study was published, while the general trend of inadequate service provision has persisted. Such services and their inadequacies actually expanded in 1987 and

decades after, where it was "estimated 1,160 soup kitchens and 1,700 shelters served the homeless in the 178 US cities in forty-one states with 100,000 or more population" (Burt 1989: 120). Hence, the gap in shelter and food services is even wider than these figures indicate due to the growing population in need and an "additional unknown number of homeless people [who] exist in the cities surveyed who do not use soup kitchens or shelters" to survive (Burt 1989: 121).

Available research has formed the basis of an argument in favor of providing more comprehensive, widely available, and generally better, services to the growing homeless population in need of them, yet these services remain limited throughout the United States. It must also be noted that homeless people utilize different services based on time, place and general need - but the most uniform services that could be expanded upon include shelter, food, mental health, and emotional support. When taking into consideration the full range of services to be utilized in January of 2022, "580,466 people [were] experiencing homelessness on our streets and in shelters in America. Most were individuals (70 percent), and the rest were people in families with children" (National Alliance: 2022). It is increasingly difficult to estimate the number of individuals who utilize faith-based services in particular in a given year because many of these organizations operate independently of regulating forces, so much of their work goes uncalculated or unseen by the greater public. This research has been conducted during a time in which the homeless shelter industry is extremely unpredictable, as showcased by numerous stories about the pandemic's impact on shelter and service utilization. A *Post Journal* article by Frudd (2022) entitled "Churches Asked To Help With Spike In Homeless Population" perfectly encapsulates the volatility of the homeless service sector today, where all other organizations are unable to accommodate the increase in demand, and society has reverted back to religious organizations for their boundless supply of shelter, support and empathy.

In this thesis, I explore the utilization and quality of services offered by faith-based shelters. I used participant observation and in-depth interviews with volunteers and employees at a faith-based homeless shelter in the North Eastern United States to understand organizational expectations and patterns among workers and those that they serve. Through these observations and interviews, I also explored the role that faith-based organizations played in the successes and failures of the homeless clients that utilized their services. Many regard faith-based organizations as more advanced in their understanding of homelessness as a truly complex issue, in that they believe "there isn't one cause to homelessness. There isn't one way to solve homelessness…we need to take our time to really understand what the problem is and then to adjust a strategy to make sense" (Frudd: 2022). Other organizations in the homeless service sector do not possess the same understanding that homelessness is not an individual's predicament, but a more complex failing of society and institutions. Through this research, I shed light on the implications of such dependence on faith-based organizations, as their believed superior understanding of homelessness does not automatically result in superior service provision to all types of homeless individuals.

In the next chapter, I introduce literature that has contended with the issues of homelessness, service utilization, faith-based organizations, and volunteer/ employee motivation in the past. I provide a concise explanation of how homelessness has been addressed in society since its origin which leads to a more precise understanding of the evolution and effectiveness of institutions in place to combat homelessness today, namely faith-based organizations. In Chapter 3, I define the methods that guide my current research. In Chapter 4, I evaluate my findings. In Chapter 5, I connect the literature and theory to my findings to further understand the implications of relying on faith-based organizations to service vulnerable groups.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Homelessness as an experience

What is homelessness?

Homeless, adjective: "having no home or permanent abode… friendless, homeless, unbeloved, unregarded" (Shumsky 2012: 5). "Home" and its derivatives all stress the themes of "safety, family, love, shelter, comfort, rest, sleep, warmth, affection, food, and sociability" (Rossi 1990: 954). Other definitions of"home" encapsulate the noun as: "the place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it" and "a place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections center, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction" (Shumsky 2012: 7). Regardless of the conceptualization used, it can be agreed upon that a life without refuge, rest, or belonging is inherently difficult; but compounded with the fact that homeless people are known to exhibit poorer health (both mentally and physically) than their housed compatriots, the study of homelessness becomes vitally more important. Especially when many think of homelessness as a "tramp walking the street, smelly, dirty and hungry, or the alcoholic, obnoxious, loud and drunk. To view all homeless people in terms of these two stereotypes is to do many an injustice" (Ravenhill 2018: 11). That injustice is exactly what needs to be corrected in how federal agencies define their interactions with homeless people, so that legislation and public opinion can be more holistically well informed. The advocacy community has "long portrayed homeless Americans as being like anyone else, save for the fact that they lack permanent housing. But that 'just folks' ethos tends to obscure non-economic factors such as serious mental illness and drug addiction that often cause someone to lose their housing" (Eide 2022: 1-2). Thus, the fact that some prefer the term "house-less," or "unhoused," even "undomiciled" becomes irrelevant in a world where

homelessness status "must only be a qualifier (e.g., 'person experiencing homelessness)" and not a determinant of their worthiness to receive services or assistance in escaping this transitional period of life (Eide 2022: 2).

Ambiguity in definition

Homelessness can be defined in the broader sense of a person whose life is "absent of love, affection, and identity;" which makes the resolution of this problem largely unattainable. Unlike physical properties where houses and real estate reside, these descriptors are "intangible, abstract feelings and emotions that cannot be bought" (Shumsky 2012: 229). The inability to purchase these entities means that it is also difficult for organizations like homeless shelters to secure them. If these social institutions that are constructed around the alleviation of the social ills that afflict the homeless population are struggling to foster environments where intangible feelings like belonging and refuge exist, the problem can be expected to persist. Moreover, it must be understood that "homelessness is far more than simply housing and support needs" (Ravenhill 2018: 17). The term "rooflessness" has been coined to describe when an individual is homeless for a long period of time and that environment "ensnares and entrenches people into a way of life that ordinarily they would not have chosen for themselves. Once roofless, the very experience of rooflessness compounds the issues involved" (Ravenhill 2018: 17).

Moreover, homelessness is an ever increasing problem with chances at eradication seeming to decrease each year that subsequent instances are measured. In his definitional book about homelessness and the pervasiveness of this issue in modern and historical societies, Shumsky (2012) notes that the aforementioned increase in homelessness means that "states, units of local government, and private voluntary organizations" are largely unable to "meet the basic

human needs of all the homeless and, in the absence of greater Federal assistance, unable to protect the lives and safety of all the homeless in need of assistance" (233). Basic human needs of shelter, nourishment and protection require funding to secure, and rely on employees to maintain organizations where these initiatives can flourish. Ideally, the organization's employees would be able to meet these needs on a fundamental level while also allowing for emotional and creative flexibility to address the more profound needs of the population they serve.

The burden of resolving such gaps in service has been predominantly placed on independent organizations who receive minimal funding or support from institutions like the federal government. Specifically, Congress has excused its absence from supporting the majority of non-profit organizations to the extent that they deserve by demonstrating a very limited application of the term homeless. They focused "almost exclusively on where people lived, and especially on where they slept. Putting it another way, Congress basically defined homelessness as houselessness" (Shumsky 2012: 235). Such a limited application of the term makes the problem appear to be less pervasive than it really is, and allows the government to focus its efforts on the more standardized issue of providing homes for the homeless. This requires fewer funds, commitment, compassion, and personnel than advocating for change in an environment where homeless are regarded as lacking in both physical homes and the transcendental qualities that many homes provide: nurture, encouragement, inspiration and the prospect of a better future.

The obscure interpretations of what constitutes homelessness are furthered by the various classifications of the term that have existed in research throughout time. Essentially, while the term homelessness has always been disputed, its meaning has also changed in correspondence to the period it was describing. These periods have been idly regarded as liminal, however many theorists summarize their categorization as transitional homelessness, episodic homelessness,

and chronic homelessness. During periods of transitional homelessness, individuals generally enter the shelter system for "only one stay and for a short period," to compensate for their predicament as "recent members of the precariously housed population, who became homeless due to some catastrophic event" (Kuhn 1998: 210-211). In a more general sense, Kuhn (1998) explains that the transitionally homeless are hence "younger, less likely to have mental health, substance abuse, or medical problems, and to overrepresent whites relative to other cultures," as they "constitute approximately 80% of shelter users" in society (207). The author's next categorization is that of the episodically homeless, "who constitute 10% of shelter users, are also comparatively young, but are more likely to be non-white, and to have mental health, substance abuse, and medical problems (207). This classification of individuals continues as they "frequently shuttle in and out of homelessness, or the mediating institutions that house them," and may fall into multiple definitions of their position and homelessness over time (211). The final distinction made by the aforementioned author is the chronically homeless, "who account for 10% of shelter users, tend to be older, non-white, and to have higher levels of mental health, substance abuse, and medical problems (207). More importantly, this classification is "most like the stereotypical profile of the skid-row homeless… entrenched in the shelter system," and for whom shelters are more akin to long-term housing than an emergency arrangement (211).

Prevalence

Counting homeless populations proves to be more cumbersome and multifaceted than defining the term itself. Typically, these estimations can be done in one of two ways. The first is point in time counts, which "attempt to count all the people who are literally homeless on a given day or during a given week" (Shumsky 2012: 12). The second method is a bit more forgiving and

arguably more accurate as well, as it "examines the number of people who are homeless over a given period of time" in a specific region (Shumsky 2012: 12). This second method is called the period prevalence count, and has yielded the types of estimations that national programs govern their organizations by. By nature, the population of homeless people proves hard to estimate, and this difficulty has been reflected in several national estimates of homelessness that are themselves dated, or based on dated information.

In a recent approximation, USA Today estimated "1.6 million unduplicated persons used transitional housing or emergency shelters" within the last year (Shumsky 2012: 13). Of these individuals, approximately "⅓ are members of households with children" which is a profound increase from previous years (Shumsky 2012: 13). The accuracy of these estimates is of minimal importance to this research, but the fact that even based on data that is not entirely valid, estimates that rates of homelessness are increasing each year make studies about the causes of homelessness and the motivations of those employed in fields that aim to eradicate this issue evermore crucial. Another approximation is from a study done by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty which states that approximately "3.5 billion people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year" (Shumsky 2012: 13). These statistics are alarming, especially when considering a significant portion of the population will be subjected to a life of uncertainty on the streets from their childhood. At that point, these estimations cease to exist as tools to predict the capacity of homeless shelters in the future and become simple determinants of poorer quality of life for much of the population.

Historically speaking

Society has a long history of helping the homeless, before institutions like the homeless shelter were established. The first iteration of a governmental program directed at the alleviation of the daily struggles homeless people faced was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The main goal of this 1930-1940 program was to employ the multitude of impoverished/ homeless Americans that had been extremely negatively impacted by the economic recession that followed the Great Depression. More than that, they wanted to eradicate the idea of the homeless traveler that arose in the1870s, and was facilitated by the "construction of the national railroad system, urbanization, industrialization, and mobility [that] led to the emergence of tramps riding the rails in search of jobs" (National Academies, 2018). Aside from offering employment, regiment, nourishment, shelter and a quasi-military structure to young men, the CCC also provided an outlet for legitimacy. "Rising juvenile delinquency during the early years of the Great Depression" allowed such a regimented program to capitalize on society's fear that "the nation's male youth [were] becoming semi-criminal hitch-hikers" (Maher 2008, 18). This program gave men the opportunity to earn money and provide for their families through legitimate employment, instead of subjecting them to the deviant forces that ruled their lives on the streets and railroads, in the past.

Later in society's history, the 1960s marked a time to be remembered by the prevalence of the urban slum that has since transformed into our understanding of the modern era of homelessness. In this time period, "studies of 'the homeless' focused on persons living in 'skid row' neighborhoods, often in single room occupancy (SRO) hotels, surviving largely on temporary work, military pensions, charity, and social insurance" (Kuhn 1998: 208). Since then social factors like, "rising inflation, rents, and unemployment" have forced many to enter into the

state of being "precariously housed" which is accompanied by "a decline in the cash value of public assistance, reduced eligibility for benefits, as well as cutbacks in many government housing programs and the supply of SROs" (Kuhn 1998: 208). The effects of the aforementioned social factors were aggravated by this apparent "demise or displacement of skid row" that most certainly did not put an end to homelessness (Rossi 1990: 954). These factors led external observers to attribute the increasing visibility of people living in street locations and the growing demand for shelter in the 1980s to the "reduced ability of families and other social institutions to buffer people from deinstitutionalization" (Kuhn 1998: 208). Hence, major changes in the "complexion of homelessness in the modern era" marked this episodic transition that included gentrification, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, rising unemployment rates, HIV/AIDS crisis, inadequate affordable housing, and budget cuts to social service agencies, and sent the homeless service provision sector into turmoil (National Academies, 2018).

Essentially, society was forced to turn to institutions as a prelude to shelters when all of the aforementioned attempts proved fruitless. The most prevalent of which were lovingly called urban slums, and were often plagued with "overcrowding, poor hygiene, and rudimentary sanitation, [that] became a frequent source of outbreaks of major infectious diseases" and was a direct reflection of the lack of federal funding such important institutions received (National Academies, 2018). The Housing and Urban Renewal Act of 1965 was enacted to solve the housing crisis many experienced that made them resort to community living arrangements like skid row areas and SROs that soon became "home to thousands of transients" (National Academies, 2018). SRO's actually provided a semi-permanent place for homeless (primarily men) to live as they sprung up in less desirable places within cities that came to be known as skid rows. Skid rows are ever connected to our history of conflict, in that they were used in the first

two postwar decades as "collections of cheap hotels, inexpensive restaurants and bars, casual employment agencies, and religious missions dedicated to the moral redemption" of the less than virtuous residents (Rossi 1990: 954). This inexpensive solution to postwar stress became uprooted in the 1950s when "urban elites turned to the renovation of the central cities" as a way to revitalize society as a whole (Rossi 1990: 954). In a study of 41 cities with similar composure, the same study found "skid row populations had declined by 50% between 1950 and 1970" (Rossi 1990: 154). This is due to the demolition of these community housing coalitions and their eventual replacement by luxury hotels and offices that catered to an entirely different section of the population. However cunning of an adjustment to the apparent need these institutions aimed to be, this legislation fell short of addressing the problems of food insecurity, disease, substance abuse and mental illness that often coincided with an individual's experience of homelessness as going far beyond mere houselessness.

Helping the homeless today

The first federal legislation enacted to explicitly address homelessness was the 1977 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, that first defined homelessness in a way that entitled those experiencing it to more equal allocation of federal resources, while also setting the precedent for the provision of "federal money to support shelters for persons experiencing homelessness" (National Academies, 2018). All subsequent legislation, both federally and locally initiated, have since maintained a degree of public orientation as they address the social problem of homelessness. More modern legislation relies on nonprofit organizations, homeless shelters, low income group homes and food pantries to supplement direct federal assistance to

individuals in need. Luckily, all initiatives are governed by the U.S. Interagency Council on

Homelessness (USICH), which was in fact authorized by the aforementioned 1997 Stewart B.

McKinney Act. USICH is an "independent executive branch body established to better

coordinate homelessness programs across government agencies," and is most paramount to the

success of society as a whole because it is able to observe, predict, and adapt to the varying

needs of the homeless population by location, population, time and age (National Academies,

2018). This much more multifaceted approach to combating homelessness has proven to be more

effective as well. The majority of the programs that USICH oversees now are non-profit shelters

and an overwhelming number of them are currently/ have historically been, faith-based.

Public perception of homelessness and homeless services

These organizations work tirelessly to improve the human condition of being homeless,

but sadly have had little effect on the public's interpretation and subsequent stereotyping of this

problem. Even though the public opinion consensus generally states that all members of society

experience a "certain amount of compassion toward the homeless, such as recognizing the

structural conditions that lead to homelessness and supporting paying more taxes to address the

problem of homelessness"; an overwhelming majority of the population also "sees homelessness

as related to irresponsible behavior and laziness, perceives the homeless as dangerous or

undesirable, and supports restrictions on panhandling and other activities associated with

homelessness" (Meanwell 2012: 74). This "irresponsibility" was historically reflected in

America's perception of the homeless as mere travelers, using the newly accessible railways to

gain an unfair advantage over their paying and law-abiding peers. Sadly, this perception has in

fact changed for the worse in recent years, in spite of the incredible work the organizations

highlighted below continue to do. This unfair and unproductive evaluation holds true even among women and children, who are typically thought to be perceived more sympathetically; but homeless mothers may be labeled "bad mothers" or "welfare queens" throughout their stay at or interaction with shelters and food banks (Meanwell 2012: 74). However unfortunate the current interpretation of homeless women is by society at large, their inclusion in this population is important to discuss. The skid rows of the 1950s and 1960s were "male enclaves" that allowed homelessness to "be defined (or perhaps, stereotyped) as largely a male problem" (Rossi 1990: 956). Thankfully, public perception of the ever-evolving face of homelessness has also changed over time, namely to include the presence of figures that do not conform to the stereotype of the single, unattached, deviant, male.

During the rise of homelessness, this perception was limited to society's evaluation of the "typical homeless person" which they defined as a "middle-aged to older man who is frequently unemployed, often mentally ill, handicapped, or an abuser of substances, and who exhibits little to no attachment to common media or social solidarity such as family, workplace, or membership in any unions or organizations" (Kuhn 1998: 208). Traditionally, the entire notion of a homeless family was almost a contradiction as it centered "around 'unattached' or 'disaffiliated' men, on the road or on skid row" who were in fact socially defined by not being part of a family (Eide 2022: 95). This distinction deprived society of understanding the true problem at hand, that being Eide's (2022) recount of the evolution of homelessness to encompass a broader population than single men. Over recent decades however, the same author has noticed "the once-fairly-young single adult male homeless population has trended older, but the single mother homeless cohort… has remained young" (95). With this transition, society has overall become more accepting of the fact that many are not homeless because of their inherent deviance, disposition

or inferiority; and understood the prevalence of homelessness as a failure of society's institutions as a whole, not society's citizens. Moreover, in perceiving homelessness for its ability to impact all types of people and family structures. For as long as homelessness has been around, and despite all of the aforementioned perceptions and populations, there has been an "industry'" to supply the "goods and services consumed by the homeless population" (Eide 2022: 71).

This "industry" has faced intermittent criticism and exaltation by the public. In the old skid row days, that "industry" was made up of hotel operators and owners of bars and liquor stores. Nowadays, those who make a living serving the homeless work mainly for "nonprofit social service providers funded by the government" (Eide 2022: 71). Hence, changes in the face of the homeless service sector have skewed public opinion towards what Eide (2022) understands as "an indictment of modern American society" in that an individual's predicament of homelessness "developed because social conditions improved" (74). With this assumed improvement came higher expectations for standards of care and quality of low-rent housing. This realization that "people lack stable housing not because of a deliberate scheme" but because institutional solutions to "pressing policy challenges created in their wake new challenges" is testament to the fact that the shift from personal blame to societal conditions would not have been possible without a shift in public perception of homelessness as well (Eide 2022: 74). In all degrees of this perception, the institution of non-profit organizations has retained its relatively positive perception as a cornerstone of quality homeless service provision in the United States.

What services are available to the homeless?

"Homelessness is not an easy experience" as it subjects one's life trajectory to criminal victimization, food insecurity, stigmatization, and an ever-diminishing quality of life (Meanwell

2012: 73). Luckily, there are plenty of services available to the homeless that make this difficult

path a little easier to navigate. In this section, statistics about service utilization will be discussed.

But, for now, it is important to highlight that many who make use of the plethora of services

available in the homeless sector provide mixed reviews about their efficacy. This results in varied

consumption of services by region, gender, and even time. A case-study that highlights this

differential use of services cites that "many homeless women interviewed for this study

express[ed] a mixture of gratitude to homeless shelters for providing a 'roof over their heads'

and distaste for some aspects of the communal living arrangements, staff interference, and shelter

rules" (Williams 1996: 77). More than shelter life, many express discontent for the quality of

food, service, care, or hospitality presented to them within these organizations. This is a direct

assault on the government, which has an entire sector dedicated to predicting and catering to the

needs of the homeless population. A sector of such grave esteem and wealth should be held

equally responsible for properly funding, staffing, educating and supporting the homeless

shelters and organizations they oversee; without such response, less than rave reviews can be

expected of the less than reputable services made available to a population much bigger than the

organizations are capable of serving.

Shelter

The aforementioned case-study is joined by a multitude of others with similar stories: all

underscore the fact that shelter is the most desired service by homeless individuals, as well as the

one that could be most improved upon. This dissimilarity between the needs of the population

and the ability of the government/ non-profit organizations to provide for the satisfaction of such

a need can best be described in terms of prioritization. Most homeless shelters prioritize giving

beds to those looking to get out of the cold for the night, but in doing so assign the problem of "fixing" homeless people to individuals like social workers and underpaid staff to such an extent that it "individualizes and medicalizes the reasons that people become homeless" (Williams 1996: 78). This happens when those in positions of superiority use the homeless person's deplorable health and wellness conditions as reason to attempt to eradicate their "dysfunctional behaviors," before focusing on the fulfillment of their most primal needs, such as shelter (Williams 1996: 79).

In recent years, federal, state, and local officials have initiated more "programmatic and policy changes" to help the homeless find shelter than ever before in history. Nearly "110,000 emergency-shelter beds available nationwide on any given night" make up the backbone of the service system," yet these shelters continue to fill up as soon as they open (Bassuk 1985: 125). The fact that shelters are reaching capacity while community members experience greater need than ever before leads many scholars to circumvent blame onto the medical system. The author notes, "not only have the numbers of homeless persons increased but so has the percentage of chronically mentally ill among them. A combination of deinstitutionalization policy and changing demographic patterns may account for this trend" in shelter capacity's inability to meet community demand (Bassuk 1985: 126). This goes to show a transition from seeking services in healthcare institutions to those of criminal justice, where mental health conditions were criminalized in the 80s and 90s. Much of the population may have the perception that the greater visibility of homeless individuals and their criminality was due to innate characteristics of the homeless, but it was actually due to economic forces and joblessness that culminated in the greater likelihood of homeless people being criminals automatically by trying to survive on the streets. Sociologist David Snow (1986) alludes to this misconceived "root image" as due to "the

medicalization of the problem of homelessness, a misplaced emphasis on the causal role of deinstitutionalization, the heightened visibility of homeless individuals who are mentally ill, and several conceptual and methodological shortcomings" (407). Understanding this misconception sheds light on the importance of shelter utilization among the homeless throughout time.

Among the issues impeding comprehensive understanding of this issue is the purpose of the medicalization of homelessness, as it appears to have deterred many from seeking services and only cornered the homeless in an institution that does not know how to properly address their struggles. Historically, the closing of state hospital beds and a shift to a community-based system of care have explained why those who "previously would have been institutionalized now receive only brief and episodic care" because that is all that homeless shelters can afford to give (Bassuk 1985: 127). Allowing homelessness to become medicalized subsequently allows society and policy to focus "on 'flaws' and 'impediments' within homeless individuals and the mental health system, rather than on the larger social structure" (Snow 1986: 420). Such a focus removes the blame from society and makes homelessness much more palatable to the general public. However, this shift also reduces the number and quality of services available to the homeless. Most markedly, demonstrated by an inability to supply enough beds to keep up with the demand of shelter. This incapacity is also exacerbated by the cold weather, or inclement conditions, in which the weathered homeless that have engineered their own systems of surviving on the streets even find it necessary to enlist the help of non-profit and faith-based organizations to protect them for the night. There is really no way to predict these spikes in demand, but increasing the available supply of beds would be a step in the right direction. Since "beds in the shelters fill to capacity as soon as they become available, more shelters continue to

open," but the cycle of unsatisfied needs and overstretched organizations continues to permeate the homeless shelter industry even today (Bassuk 1985: 130).

Emergency

Fortunately for those in need, the government and other agencies are most giving to the homeless during times of emergency. This is because giving attention to the plight of the homeless has provided politicians with a "timely opportunity to gain positive recognition for meeting the needs of a disenfranchised population" that only requires short-term commitment of their energy (Bassuk 1985: 130). By offering emergency shelter and food in times of natural disaster or exceedingly high demand, officials have responded to the" need for warmth and refuge without committing expensive, long-term resources" (Bassuk 1985: 130). This decision reflects well on the character of policy makers, and allows the general population to take pride in their society's efforts to eradicate homelessness one emergency at a time. However, homelessness is a pervasive problem at all hours of the day, in every season, and continues to grow every year. It does not exist in isolated instances or only during times of crisis and emergent need. This is not meant to dismiss the necessity of emergency shelters as an "essential short-term solution to the plight of the homeless" but rather to introduce the problem that "many shelters do little more" than provide such "emergency" services all the time (Bassuk 1985: 134).

Most scholars and citizens alike can agree that everyone has "a right to safe, predictable and stable shelter," which would then support the shelter system's belief that "once stabilized in a sheltering facility, homeless persons can focus their efforts on obtaining long-term housing, and that integration back into society will naturally follow (Bassuk 1985: 134). This is a beautiful and hopeful assumption that many detest, as one researcher artfully put it: "if this were true, then

the shelter system would suffice" (Bassuk 1985: 134). But the system is largely insufficient, and lacking in ability to fulfill the most basic needs of those they claim to service. That said, many outside factors combine to ensure this dreamy prediction does not become reality for the majority of emergency homeless shelter users. Those factors include "the scarcity of low-cost housing, the difficulties in finding adequate employment, the lack of social supports, and the more recent finding that many homeless people suffer from chronic mental illness" - to such an extent that these short-term facilities have "become 'homes' for many guests" to use long-term (Bassuk 1985: 134).

The impermanence of emergency shelters is inherent in its definition, but when the forces at play in the surrounding society combine to ensure individuals have a harder time exiting these facilities and finding legitimate housing and employment on their own, it means these short-term shelters have long-term occupants. Such occupants are consequently taking up valuable bed space for those in most immediate, arguably abrupt, shelter. Many argue that the "implementation of emergency shelters… simply provided a 'safe' place to sleep, often a meal" but did "little to address homelessness and were often unsafe, inhumane, and degrading places that warehoused poor people" (Lyon-Callo 2000: 329-330). This inhumaneness and impermanence perfectly differentiates emergency shelters from shelters in general, as emergency shelters are standardized by their ingenuity and innovation, often as a trade-off for true safety and solace. Emergency shelters where a homeless individual is subjected to "sleeping on an army cot in the gymnasium" greatly differs from the residential environment of a more permanent homeless shelter where individuals are given their own beds, often their own rooms, and a sense of permanency, privacy and protection (Bassuk 1985: 134).

Food

Arguably the most important service society is able to provide to the homeless is food, as this service is more than sustenance to a hungry body: food also heals the mind, makes sickness less detrimental, provides company and camaraderie, and most of all acts as a predictable, constant, encouraging part of an individual' everyday routine. When taking into consideration all American cities with populations larger than 100,000 people, there are a total of nearly 3,000 providers of services to the homeless: "348 shelters without meals (including welfare hotels and missions), and 1,356 shelters providing meals (Strasser 1991: 66). In addition to "1,164 soup kitchens (53% of which are church affiliated)" and widely defined by many theorists as "an ecological niche for a segment of the poor who are considered 'marginal' to the dominant culture" (Strasser 1991: 67; Glasser 1988: 2-3). Above all, this marginality takes form in the identifying factors of those who frequent soup kitchens and have "little income, long-term unemployment, debilitating physical conditions, serious mental illness, and a separation from family relationship" (Glasser 1988: 3). Thus, regardless of which members of society are using these services, it is important to note that "almost 80% of the 1,704 shelters provide food" in America (Strasser 1991: 67). The staggering presence of shelters that provide food is testament to the importance of this service, but are all shelters providing adequate food to those they serve?

Unfortunately, most shelters are not taking into consideration the health and wellness needs of the population they serve when putting together services like community lunches, or food pantries. This is not done with malintentions, however it is a result of lack of funding and government oversight in planning and executing these programs. Providers of food to the homeless, such the shelter operators and soup kitchen staff, should be properly educated in and encouraged to "follow principles of sound nutrition and the special nutritional needs of the

homeless" (Strasser 1991: 65). This aspiration is simply not practical, given the fact that these individuals are tasked with providing the only form of sustenance, positivity and consistency for many community members, it is almost impossible not to cast aside quality for the sake of preserving the quantity of those in need they are able to serve. If more governmental assistance and funding was made available, service providers would have a better understanding of the effects of "low-calorie intake, nutritional imbalances, and the relationships between chronic disease and diet" that plague the lives of many homeless people (Strasser 1991: 68). These imbalances and intricacies have been proven to create numerous nutritional and vitamin deficiencies, and have also been observed to impair the healing of wounds (Strasser 1991: 68). That means that food designed to correct such imbalances could effectively make the lives of many homeless people much more bearable: freeing them from the daily struggle of chronic illness and wounds, repairing their energy and mood, and allowing them to gain more control of their surroundings.

The second possible effect of increased awareness of the importance of properly nourishing the homeless through food and providing a more comprehensive service than mere sustenance is an increase in understanding. If soup kitchens and shelters with food pantries were given the flexibility in their list of daily tasks to think more profoundly about the population they serve, the health effects of homelessness could be better understood and consequently eradicated. One health effect that has been observed in numerous types of homeless populations across history is the prevalence of an electrolyte imbalance that very often leads to death in homeless people. This imbalance presents itself as contingent on the highly unpredictable nourishment habits of the homeless population. Those who are unable to seek services that offer food are left to find food and water on the streets: ravishing through trash cans, eating highly processed foods,

and drinking anything that they can find from non-potable water to solely alcohol. Thus, "drinking too much or too little water, or erratic consumption of salt, sugar and water, combined with extremes of heat and cold and lack of toilet facilities can lead to serious health calamities in homeless persons" (Strasser 1991: 69-70). Many people who have access to stable housing and consistent nourishment are dehydrated on a daily basis, and they are not subject to the weather and living conditions that define homeless people's lives. That is why shelters that provide food services are so vital to the homeless population, they fill the gap that separates many from life and death on the street.

A service of such importance to an entire population is therefore very popular amongst many, as evident by the fact that "mealtimes in shelters or soup kitchens are often silent. People usually eat quickly with little or no social interaction. Homeless people are hungry and may fear that others will take their food. Often there is competition to be the first in line, because many food sites do not always have enough food for everyone" (Strasser 1991: 71). This silence speaks volumes, and should be alarming. Historically, mealtimes have been a reason for families to gather, discuss their individual days, and come together as one for a short period of time. Life on the streets denies many homeless people of this opportunity to have a common interest or connection to a group of people, which they could fulfill in a group oriented meal at a shelter. However, this is simply not possible for many individuals like those with mental illness that "may prevent them from using available food services, due either to their condition, lack of availability, or fear" (Strasser 1991: 68). For those with similar mental or physical health conditions that prevent them from using food services as a way of gaining group support and emotional interaction, one must understand that they are also prevented from using the service for nutrition, sustenance and survival as well. In my opinion and based on numerous

observations of both local and global organizations, some communities have addressed this issue especially well in times of the pandemic. These times were marked by less frequent in-person interaction and subsequent offering of "grab and go" dining options; both nourishing those who were previously able to eat in person, and providing sustenance in a more convenient way to those who may have shied away from the group setting due to their preexisting conditions or pandemic related preoccupations.

Mental health

Many mental health conditions have been proven to be exasperated by a lack of routine or constant activity in one's life. This expands on the importance of the service of food provision not only as a way of nurturing/ nourishing oneself from the inside out, but also as a way of incorporating this constant activity into a routine. Unfortunately, many homeless shelters and food service providers do not have the funds or staff to support food as a constant fixture in one's day for more than one occurrence. Meaning that "of over half (54%) of the 1,356 shelters providing food, only 3% of the soup kitchens serve three meals a day. Almost three quarters (72%) of the soup kitchens serve only one meal daily" (Strasser 1991: 67). Any constant, recurring activity has been shown to be especially beneficial for those with mental health conditions, but it is understandable that the more this activity occurs, the better the outcome would be. Many shelters provide only one hot meal per day, but send their guests out with a bagged meal and canned goods from the food pantry. This is not to say that they aren't providing adequate sustenance for the community, but that the most ideal scenario for all homeless individuals and especially those with mental health conditions would be the structured routine of eating three meals per day inside the shelter setting.

This ideal scenario is furthered by an increase in funding and education that could allow for a more comprehensive understanding of mental illness in all of its capacities. Sadly, many shelter workers view mental illness as a one dimensional, one size fits all diagnosis that is "rooted in a complex moral framing of [the] beneficiaries as deserving" (Froyum 2018: 466). Such moral framework is typically enhanced by the homeless person's possession of a mental illness or physical disability that makes it more difficult to "challenge the deservingness of beneficiaries to receive help" and results in the volunteer's "sympathy [being] disrupted and so too the motivation to volunteer" (Froyum 2018: 466). This disruption is evercommon in the world of faith-based shelters, and negatively impacts volunteer's ability to predict, prepare for, interact with, and advocate for individuals whose conditions don't fit that exact mold. When this occurs, many find their mental health conditions to be "medicalized" or "standardized" in the name of providing equitable treatment to all. It must be understood that health is influenced by a variety of "social factors beyond our individual control and homeless people are especially vulnerable in this regard" seeing as compared to the general population, the homeless population has higher rates of "mental illnesses, experiences more victimization, and has higher rates of incarceration and legal issues, poverty, unemployment and social isolation" (Duchesne 2016: 94). If these increased rates of mental illness were properly explored, it is plausible that there would be connections between an individual's experience of homelessness with mental illness as less favorable than one without. An individual is unable to control their predisposition to or experience of mental illness, this unequal experience then becomes a reflection of society's inferior treatment of and protection for those experiencing mental illness.

That is why shelters are only able to offer "rudimentary medical and psychiatric services for the disabled [and mentally ill] among the homeless" and even more unfortunately, are unable

to "provide adequate protection and treatment" to this defenseless population (Bassuk 1985:

134). These "rudimentary" mental health services are usually difficult to acquire, and require

obdurate and unfaltering dedication to one's own mental and physical wellbeing. Most shelters

with mental health services like counseling, inpatient treatment and psychiatric evaluations

operate with a predictable 6 month waiting period for service acquisition. Many homeless people

are unsure of what tomorrow holds for them, let alone have the ability to plan 6 months ahead

and ensure they get the treatment they require. Waiting is simply not an option for many

individuals, especially because "a longer duration of homelessness is associated with poorer

health outcomes," and decreased possibility of finding stability and solace in a housing situation

after being homeless (Duchesne 2016: 94). More important than these poor health outcomes is a

poor life experience with improper services and negative perception by society. This perception

is due in large to the aforementioned medicalization of homelessness, contrary to popular belief

about the importance of deinstitutionalization policies. Such medicalization has negatively

impacted the types of services available to homeless individuals with mental illnesses, and these

inadequacies "create a perpetual trap wherein the behaviors and appearance of the most

conscious element among the homeless are seen as typifying all the homeless, thus giving rise to

an illusion of homogeneity that shapes public perceptions and media dramatizations of the

problem" (Snow 1986: 420). This goes to show that the mental health services that exist in

shelters are largely inadequate and unfit to serve the large population in need of those services,

but also acts as a catalyst for change in the way mental health is discussed by society at large.

Patterns in service utilization and avoidance

Some homeless individuals make use of the services available to them on a regular basis, to such an extent that they become enveloped in the culture of the shelter they rely on. This means their daily visits for food or counseling transform into more permanent and long lasting interactions, like temporary housing or finding employment through the shelter. Individuals who are able to find employment through the same shelter that they utilized for its services when they were homeless prove critical to the organization's operation, as they have a unique disposition to help others that find themselves in the same position. It can be incredibly beneficial for a homeless shelter to internally promote homeless individuals in their program to employment within the organization, for example as an intake manager. Lyon-Callo studied an employee with the same job description and noted her uncanny ability to comfort homeless individuals in this time of transition, the research he conducted in 2000 details this encounter: "in addition to the required components of the intake, the staff member works to comfort the recently homeless person, who is often quite nervous about being in a shelter. A caring staff member uses this opportunity to develop a sense of rapport with the new guest.Through this more informal discussion and from the homeless person's mannerisms and articulations, the staff member attempts to gather additional data on possible disorders within the person" (334). Having an individual manage this intake from a place of empathy and understanding can make these interactions much smoother, and may also make the homeless individual feel more comfortable divulging personal and private information that could enhance their shelter experience and open their access to a broader range of resources. Conversely, internally promoting a homeless individual helps to manage the cycle of poverty and lack of self-sufficiency that many homeless people fall victim to following their release from a shelter.

Individuals who utilize shelter resources then go on to be employed by that shelter make up the minority, as the majority of homeless individuals use homeless services only on occasion and find it more useful and practical to drift between services. They may maintain the same routine of eating two meals a day and using the service of the counseling center, but the organizations that they seek these services from may change over the course of a few weeks, for example. Hence, their impermanence within shelters would not accommodate seeking employment through one. Those individuals have stories that resemble the findings of many studies, one of which found that approximately "40% of homeless people returned to the [same] shelter within a year of transitional program departure" (Culhane 1998: 97). In a transitional program, organizations like homeless shelters usually focus on the importance of past events for their ability to influence a person's trajectory, but not entirely define their future - a drastic shift, from reconciling the past to preparing for a better future.

These types of programs are most common in shelters that have residential components, meaning guests rely on the shelter for more than the occasional meal service, they face more acculturation and assimilation. The aforementioned statistics are thus representative of the pattern of recurring visits to service providers even after the projected end of service utilization. Most transitional programs aspire to prepare the guest for life after homelessness, so their return to the same shelter marks the sad but common occurrence that is a testament to the presence of other social forces preventing someone from transitioning out of homelessness so easily. Hence, that statistic is most likely an "underestimate of repeated episodes of homelessness as people may utilize other shelter services, live on the streets, become jailed or hospitalized, or return to the shelter after the observation period" unnoticed (Culhane 1998: 97). The aforementioned statistic is also representative of the fact that social forces impact patterns of service utilization

more than many would like to admit. Such social forces range from inflation and the rising cost of rent to the medicalization of many different mental health conditions and the prevalence of food deserts in urban areas. All of these factors exist beyond an individual's control, and make them more apt to utilize services for longer periods of time, even encouraging them to return to service utilization after graduating from the program or transitioning to another phase of life.

Conversely, there's also a host of social ills and patterned relationships between those who work in/ volunteer with the shelters that provide services and the guests who utilize them that makes many less likely to continue service utilization. The most common determinant of service avoidance is the very complicated and multifaceted human emotion of compassion: it can "either underline the common humanity of the benefactor- unfortunate dyad or breed feelings of condensation and shame" for the socially inferior member of the exchange (Guinea-Martin 2014: 540). The positive side of compassion is that it "makes us equal because we recognize the suffering of the person and ourselves as individuals with a common human nature, regardless of our sense of social place" (Guinea-Martin 2014: 541). However grandiose and well meaning this assertion is, most homeless people remark that their experience with compassion within the service sector is largely negatively connotated. There is a "hierarchizing dimension" of compassion that creates negative emotions for the person on the receiving end of what appears to be a positive, virtuous, emotionally charged action (Guinea-Martin 2014: 541). More specifically, compassion has a negative connotation with its ability to engender "embarrassment, and conceivably, resentment among the recipients of help" (Guinea-Martin 2014: 541). The recipients of help, in this case the homeless population, would therefore be less inclined to enter into situations where feelings of compassion may be generated, and receiving food, treatment, shelter, or support from a more well-off (financially and mentally) individual lends itself to this

possibility. It is for that reason that many become service avoidant, not because they no longer need or desire the services, but because of how dependent the services are on compassionate individuals; well-intentioned or not.

There is one common experience within all homeless shelters that is connected to service avoidance, that being "homeless women are significantly more likely to be accompanied by family members (such as dependent children), and homeless women - especially those with children - are more likely to be regular shelter users than men" (Meanwell 2012: 73). Aside from homelessness being a largely gendered experience across many different types of organizations and shelters, gay and lesbian homeless youth also face different circumstances than their peers who conform to society's normative expectations and traditional beliefs a bit more. These individuals are at "higher risk of sexual victimization" and many in the LGBTQ+ community face particular struggles "in obtaining access to safe shelter due to the gender-segregation of most shelters and the discrimination by social service providers" (Meanwell 2012: 73). While these groups of people existed in the early stages of homelessness, they certainly were not as visible. However, recent estimates "reveal that LGBT adolescents make up approximately 5% of the general adolescent population, yet constitute between 15% and 45% of adolescents who are homeless" (Stablein 2017: 24). Hence the importance of analyzing the experiences of this predominant demographic, as Stablein (2017) studies their increased "overall risk for estrangement and homelessness" as it translates into a worse experience of homelessness itself; they "may be avoidant of services, estranged, and disconnected from families when they become homeless… [and the] survival strategies they employ on the street may put them at increased risk for violence and victimization" (29). As society's values have shifted to be more inclusive of all

types of people for the identity that they embrace, we can only hope that shelters start to embrace

and engender the same inclusivity in their services as well.

Service sector

Non-profit organizations

Non-profit organizations exist largely to fill the gaps created between the public and

private sectors of the helping professions. The origins and behavior of nonprofit organizations

reflect "institutional factors and state policies as well as the social-choice process and utility

functions emphasized by economists" (Jang 2007: 137). Meaning, they derive motivation from

finding a solution to a problem that other areas of legislation have been unable to. Hence,

non-profit organizations in the homeless sector do receive some governmental funding and

assistance, but are mainly privately funded through individual donations, partnerships and

religious organizations. The role of nonprofit organizations becomes evermore critical in

metropolitan areas, where the growing need could be attributed to a growing nation, or the fact

that most individuals experiencing poverty to the extent that they could become homeless

congregate in metropolitan areas where there are simply more resources, opportunities and

camaraderie than the rural areas they leave behind.

Such "critical services" have also shifted with time, as when these organizations first

arose, many individuals simply needed nourishment and shelter to supplant their lack of

employment and income. In more recent years, non-profit organizations in the homeless sector

have had to expand their services to include childcare, mental health evaluations and clinics, safe

injection and overdose training sites, as well as career development and a focus on life after the

shelter. Transitions are a crucial element of non-profit organizations and the homeless world in

general, as even the populations one aims to serve have shifted with time. For example, shelters for the homeless prior to the 1980s were typically "missions, serving a predominantly single, male, alcoholic population" (Burt 1989: 120). Nowadays, the population that makes use of homeless shelters and the non-profit organizations that run them are quite varied in terms of gender, age, background and status.

With this shift, the foundational basis of non-profit organizations has remained constant, in that they all are: "(a) private (i.e. independent of government), (b) self-governing, (c) non-distributive of profit, (d) voluntary, and (e) for the public benefit" (Jang 2007: 176). The most important distinction to make here is that even though non-profit organizations are independent of the government, this does not exclude them from applying for and securing local, state, and governmental grants. If awarded, these grants do not restrict the organization to being purely for-profit, because of their innate ability to function independently of government oversight. This is beneficial to society since the government itself is a "late entrant" in the support for services to the homeless. On the other hand, the non-profit sector that includes religious congregations and organizations, were the first to respond to the current homeless crisis" (Burt 1989: 112). Aside from being the longest standing method of support for the homeless, the non-profit sector is also the "dominant operator of services for the homeless, as well as the largest source of donated labor, space, food, and other goods and services" (Burt 1989: 113). While it can be assumed that many non-profit organizations have conflicting policies and ideologies as to which populations they welcome to use their services the most, it is still important to consider that in ideal scenario where these organizations are equally inclusive of LGBTQ+ and other minority groups, these groups may be negatively impacted or even deterred from service utilization. This has significant consequences for "LGBT adolescents as they must

navigate new territory alienated, disconnected, and often avoidant of support and services designed to minimize these dangers," and calls for policy and societal change in how we approach these marginalized groups and their unique needs (Stablein 2017: 31).

Faith-based organizations

Some non-profit organizations receive both monetary (grants, donations) and operational (space, promotion, volunteers) support from religiously affiliated organizations to such an extent that the homeless shelter or program itself becomes faith-based. The transition from the "old homeless" of the 1950s to the "new homeless" existing after the 1980s has been marked by a transition in funding and services to support the ever-changing population (Rossi 1990: 954). Since the modern rise of homelessness, when "economic depression, a dearth of affordable housing, and the release of mental health patients by state hospitals converged to send thousands out onto the streets", faith-based organizations have been at the forefront of sheltering the homeless (Mulder 2004: 137). Two schools of beliefs about faith-based homeless organizations have emerged: one that believes the religious aspect of some homeless shelters functions as an integral component "to care for those who find themselves outside the mainstream economy" and its ever traditional beliefs, and another that finds the institutionalized nature of faith-based practices to be counterintuitive (Mulder 2004: 136). This counterintuitive nature was best displayed in a Michigan case-study where it was discovered that clients were left "deeply institutionalized because of the regimentation and controlling environment" of the faith-based shelter they frequented (Mulder 2004: 136). Such a negative evaluation was fueled by claims of "hyper-institutionalized men [that] ultimately became a cheap workforce for the shelter and left after the year inadequately prepared for the radical adjustment to life outside" the shelter (Mulder

2004: 136). Many argue that the rigidity of faith-based shelters in their quest to impose religion on the guests they serve makes "those involved become utterly dependent on the imposing presence of the institution," instead of forming some degree of self resilience that could propel them to a better standard of living after graduating from the shelter's methodology and services (Mulder 2004: 137).

The positive side of faith-based services is their ability to "facilitate the effectiveness of governmental programs designed to eliminate long-term poverty" by supporting participants who effectively "build or rebuild social and instrumental resources" for those in need (Bass 2009: 314). By working alongside governmental organizations and not in spite of them, faith-based homeless organizations have received a rather warm welcome from those that use their services. One study uses these guests' testimonies to formulate the conclusion that faith-based organizations are actually more effective than their nonreligious counterparts (Bass 2009: 318). A testimonial included in Bass' (2009) research comes from a woman named Patty, who reflects the future focus most faith-based organizations hold, as they use their religious roots to inspire hope for a better tomorrow for all people, no matter their status as drug addicted or anything society may condemn as deviant (318). She references this method as her guiding light, since "the faith-based support that she initially received gave her a base for seeking the services she needed to succeed" and established a sense of self-sufficiency that resulted in her employment as a "leader in the counseling center" that she once frequented as a patient (Bass 2009: 318). Another testimony recounts the struggles a woman named Alica, who felt as if each service she was able to encounter never gave her the strength to turn her life around, enabled her to find employment, housing, care or sustenance on her own. That is, until all varieties of programs

converged in a faith-based organization and the "combination of services from public, community-based and faith-based sources…made the difference for her, finally" (319).

Faith-based organizations offer such a robust range of services and accommodate many different types of people that it is difficult to recognize patterns amongst the types of people that volunteer with/ are employed by these social centers. With many shelters operating under the "auspices of faith-based service," these shelters have been required to expand their programs to take in men and women for fixed periods of time. Once in residence, these men and women participate in activities that prepare them for independent living, such as leadership training, cooking classes, and personal wellness seminars (Mulder 2004: 137). Working in an environment where "religion, spirituality, and religious community" coexist and inspire guests to better "cope with their past and improve their situations" requires a certain type of person (Marr 2021: 1). That being someone who is able to use their religious beliefs to help homeless people "start tackling issues such as low self esteem, depression, and addictions" (Marr 2021: 1). With such an impressive list of responsibilities, that type of person has been subjected to harsh evaluation from external observers. They are perceived in two distinct ways: the virtuous Christian looking to help others and serve God, versus the demeaning individual who uses their religion as reason to look down upon those they deem to be less deserving or virtuous than themselves.

Volunteers/ employees of faith-based organizations

The first category of volunteers who serve the homeless out of a "sense of compassion and/ or religious obligation" luckily makes up the majority (Eide 2022: 69). These individuals may cite, as inspiration or authority for their actions, "Scripture, the corporal works of mercy, various artistic figurations of Jesus Christ as a homeless man, and heroes and heroines of the

Christian social work tradition" (Eide 2022: 69). Such a virtuous person uses their religion as a reason to push themselves out of their comfort zone and accept tasks that may seem daunting to others. For example, "in paid or conventional work settings, employees often perform sets of well-learned tasks during contiguous hours, days, weeks, and so on. In contrast, potential volunteers in nonprofit and service organizations are often called on to perform fairly novel tasks during one or a few isolated occasions" (Harrison 1995: 372). Most volunteers at faith-based organizations have other ways of fulfilling their virtuous duties outside of church, and may even volunteer at a number of similar organizations. The impermanence of their routines leads many scholars to describe the volunteer/employment patterns of faith-based individuals as "discrete or episodic, rather than continuous or successive. It is a carefully considered departure from one's attendance routine rather than a scripted or automatic part of it" (Harrison 1995: 372).

It is also important to note the motivations of many who volunteer in or are employed by faith-based organizations do not include direct remuneration for their efforts, but more internal satisfaction and moral fulfillment in the eyes of God. This is because these activities allow one to adopt the identity of "helper" as dependent on work that is underpaid or unpaid, and "especially powerful [at crafting] moral identity, leading to moral wages" (Froyum 2018: 467). While volunteers in non faith-based organizations may "cultivate positive emotions through crafting moral identities as productive workers," the faith-based field attracts individuals who seek deeper satisfaction (Froyum 2018: 467). Although volunteers should not expect payment in return for their work no matter the religious affiliation of the organization they are helping, studies show they can expect "commensurate pleasurable emotions," whether in the form of self satisfaction or knowledge of moral superiority (Froyum 2018: 467). This tension between personal and moral satisfaction has produced a debate that categorizes members of the

faith-based volunteering community as good (virtuous, morally correct, empathetic) or bad (enhancing inequality, condescending, apathetic). This distinction is highlighted by the growing gray area that defines reactions between volunteers and those they are volunteering for as much of the same. Recipients of helping, for example, are expected to express their gratitude by "bowing from the heart, by saying 'thank you' and giving looks of appreciation" to such an extent that these bows make "volunteers feel a host of positive emotions: appreciated, valued, proud" (Froyum 2018: 468). Since volunteering affirms people's high status, it leads to positive emotional experiences for those giving their time to others. Volunteers often help people of a lower social status than themselves, which "leads others to perceive them to be sacrificing their time, energy, or money" for a greater good, and qualifies them as an overall virtuous person (Froyum 2018: 468). But is this distinction really beneficial? The opposite side of the spectrum takes these demonstrations of "bowing from the heart" as an insult, and reduces those who thrive off of this differential treatment as merely beneficiaries of other's "deservingness"; making judgements as to who is "needy or blameless enough to be worthy" of help, instead of helping anyone along the way (Froyum 2018: 466).

Volunteering and working in a homeless shelter is often seen as a key way in which individuals can "ameliorate class differences through intergroup contact and help those being served" (Rogers 2017: 23). Thus, a unique space is created in which an individual "can feel generous and virtuous, while also maintaining cultural stereotypes of the homeless as immoral" (Rogers 2017:23). This immorality was reflected in a case-study conducted by the same author, who found that "how the affluent staff at a suburban homeless shelter engage[d] in borderwork and construct[ed] moral identities for themselves in opposition to the clients" made them feel infinitely superior than those they were servicing (Rogers 2017: 23). The establishment of this

superiority consequently made the staff then feel good by 'helping the homeless help themselves' while maintaining a safe distance from them" (Rogers 2017: 23). I argue that true volunteerism with correct moral reasoning does not prioritize keeping a safe physical and cultural (in terms of socioeconomic status and capital) distance from those most in need of help, in fact truly religious organizations eliminate this hierarchy altogether by mimicking the terminology used in the service industry. My own experience in these industries has exposed me to the tradition of calling the homeless individuals that frequent these shelters "guests" and referring to fellow volunteers as "servers". This terminology conforms to the social hierarchy implied in similar interactions between individuals when shopping, eating, traveling, and being served in all other situations of life. That being said, why would its appearance in the world of faith-based homeless organizations raise any red flags in terms of respect or identity?

Current ethnographic study

The aforementioned literature has provided a comprehensive overview of the culture of homelessness, and this experience throughout history. In establishing a conceptual framework around defining and understanding homelessness, institutions in place to combat homelessness, and the intricacies of the inner workings within these organizations, a gap in our knowledge has emerged. According to this literature, people think differently about homelessness and the organizations in place to address this issue. Some believe that faith-based organizations help to relieve homeless individuals from their current state and introduce them to more productive ways of living. Others believe this attempt to be fruitless and counterintuitive as it enables homeless people to be homeless longer and reinforces the superiority of those who service them .

Building on this, my research explores how people who work within these organizations think about their work and its effectiveness. Interviews with employees of a faith-based nonprofit organization serving a large urban population in New York will confirm or dispel the fact that there are generally two distinct perceptions of faith-based organizations. These categorizations include their proficiency or their incapability in addressing the same social problem. In doing so, these interviews will allow me to draw independent conclusions about the effectiveness of the social institution of nonprofit and faith-based organizations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In-depth interviews and participant observation

I conducted in-depth interviews with a wide range of participants (n=12) over the span of multiple months, and across various formats. The goal of these interviews was always exploratory, as I wanted the research to be as inductively informed as possible. In addition to general questions about demographic information, I included open-ended and in-depth prompts about their experience within homeless shelters, potentially as homeless people, and in relation to faith-based organizations. The content and direction of the interviews evolved over time as I learned more about the patterns emerging in each interview, and correlations between individual participant's responses. I used these correlations to generate new interview questions for the following conversations. Each participant offered a unique and personal story, but many repeatedly mentioned similar topics, opinions, suggestions and criticisms.

All questions asked in these interviews were open-ended and allowed ample room for expansion and digression. Some participants took these questions as an opportunity to expand more than others, as shown by the varying length of the conversations from 30 minutes to upwards of an hour. Prior to being administered the set of questions, participants read an informed consent form to be found in **Appendix A**. This form did not require their signature or other acknowledgement of understanding in an effort to preserve confidentiality to the fullest extent and alleviate any formalities that might have discouraged some participants. Following the administration of these informed consent materials, I began with a set of basic questions to gather demographic information. There was virtually no room for expansion in these questions, as participants simply informed me of their gender, religion, and age as we moved onto the next type of question.

These questions were accompanied by open-ended varieties in which we discussed their opinion of the faith-based method, any stories they had to share from personal experience that supported these observations and assertions, and their analysis of the organization's most urgent needs, greatest successes, and largest hurdles to success. Much expansion and explanation came from asking these questions, and I used these diversions to guide subsequent questions. While most of the questions that were asked in these interviews can be found in **Appendix B**, some were more organically formed and only pertained to one specific participant, so they are not included in this general matrix.

In addition to in-depth interviews, this study also made use of participant observation. The observations offered by volunteers and myself serve as confirmation of the themes that had reached saturation in the interviews. I have personal experience volunteering within this organization, and shared some interview questions with fellow volunteers during our shifts together. They seemed to ponder these questions for the entire shift, and came to me afterwards with an observed example of their answer. Such observations were helpful in illustrating the drawbacks of faith-based organizations, to which many participants did not feel comfortable addressing in their interviews.

Sample characteristics and interview procedures

The sample characteristics of interview participants included individuals who identified with a range of genders, religions, ages, and occupational positions. These characteristics are summarized in **Figure 1**, below. Many of the employees and volunteers I interviewed were also former clients and/or had homeless experiences themselves. It is common among people that work at this organization to have once been clients/ guests/ residents, and the importance of this

assertion will be discussed in the analysis section. This past experience with homelessness may be linked to which participants I was given access to through the external recruitment figure, and may actually predict an individual's analysis of the organization they not only currently work for but previously depended on.

RELIGION	FREQUENCY
Christian	10
Methodist	2
Total	12

AGE	FREQUENCY
<40	3
40-50	4
50-60	4
>60	1
Total	12

RACE/ ETHNICITY	FREQUENCY
African American	5
Caucasian	5
Hispanic	2
Total	12

GENDER	FREQUENCY
Male	4
Female	8
Total	12

Figure 1: sample characteristics

Each participant was presented with a list of questions they may be asked throughout the course of the interview in order to determine if they were interested in participating, and to alleviate some stress of the unknown many expressed. The interviews were conducted remotely, as the individuals involved expressed their interest in participating as long as it conflicted in the least amount possible with their very busy schedules as homeless shelter employees/ volunteers. I deemed remote methods to be more appropriate and accommodative of such time constraints.

In the remote delivery of interviews, the majority of participants elected to meet over the phone as opposed to Zoom - a virtual engagement platform that mimics the benefits of face-to-face interaction by allowing both parties to see and hear each other. The use of phone interviews proved to be more convenient for those without access to computers or stable wireless connections. The final method of delivery used in the conduction of these interviews was informal conversation, this was done with two employees while we volunteered together. They granted me permission to take notes and/or record our conversation, as they wanted to assist with this project but could not find the time to do so outside of work. These methods of data collection are detailed below, in **Figure 2**.

MODE	FREQUENCY
Zoom	2
Phone	8
Informal	2
Total	12

LENGTH	FREQUENCY
~ 45 min	4
~ 1 hr	6
Other	2
Total	12

Figure 2: interview characteristics

I did not notice any patterns in the quality of conversation as it differed by each type of delivery, but can confirm that the Zoom conversations were typically shorter than the phone calls. Interviewees who selected either phone or Zoom were presented with the option to be recorded, as I made it clear that this would make the synthesis of information and the collection of material to quote in my study much easier. Most participants accepted this offer, but some didn't want to be recorded for fear that their voice would be identifiable to the greater public or their employer, despite numerous advisements that these recordings would only remain

accessible by myself and my research advisor, followed by prompt deletion after the necessary material had been gathered from them.

Recruitment process

The recruitment process for the individuals in this sample ultimately took hold in two different forms. Some of the participants were recruited by an administrative figure at the local faith-based homeless shelter of interest to this study. This group will be denoted as "Group A". Other participants were recruited by myself, as I have developed a passion for volunteering within this organization and had a number of personal connections to draw upon. This group will be denoted as "Group B". The reason that there are two recruitment methods at play in this study is because after I had exhausted my personal resources, I proposed putting up fliers advertising the benefits of participating in this study, and accepting participants from various different backgrounds and positions in this organic format. This latter strategy proved not to be a feasible option seeing as the mention of compensation on the flier would liken this study to solicitation, which was prohibited by the organization's policies against similar types of compensated activities.

In order to overcome this problem of lack of variety in the samples that I recruited myself, I enlisted the help of an administrative figure with knowledge of many different ancillary cites at this faith-based shelter, and with connections to diverse types of people. This individual helped to recruit the remaining participants for the study. However, upon interviewing both groups, it was apparent that they responded to my questions differently. For example, the individuals from both recruitment methods praised the program in the same way, but those who were recruited *for me* (Group A) were less critical of the organization. For example, Group A

paid less attention to emerging patterns of concealment/revealing of faith-based identities and

stigmas than those I recruited myself (see below for a discussion of these specific findings). I

was admittedly a bit concerned about how this administrative figure who conducted the

recruitment of Group A may have been capable of gatekeeping. I feared they would only give me

access to individuals that would speak favorably about the organization, or who would choose

their words carefully to please the administrator. These distinctions are represented in **Figure 3**

and discussed in detail throughout the analysis where relevant. I will also clarify each

participant's respective Group in the analysis chapter.

RECRUITMENT	FREQUENCY
External (Group A)	7
Myself (Group B)	5
Total	12

PSUEDONYM/ GROUP	PAST EXPERIENCE
Colin/ A	Homeless, program
Calla/ A	Volunteer to employee
Sasha/ A	Homeless, program
Becky/ A	Homeless, program
Annie/ A	N/A
Jerry/ A	Volunteer to employee
Ben/ A	N/A

PSUEDONYM NAME	GROUP
Colin	A
Calla	A
Sasha	A
Becky	A
Annie	A
Jerry	A
Ben	A
Bella	B
Mollie	B
Mike	B
Brianna	B
Sophia	B

Figure 3: recruitment characteristics

Compensation via SRG

Much like how all participants were presented with the option to be recorded and chose

two instinct paths, all participants were also presented with the option to be compensated for

their participation. This compensation came in the form of $10 cash per hour of conversation. I

chose to compensate the participants primarily because I thought it would encourage more participation, but also because I am aware of the precariousness of the financial situation of those who work in nonprofit organizations like faith-based homeless shelters. These occupations typically lack both monetary and moral compensation, do not include luxuries like paid vacations, sick leave or holidays/ weekends off, and often go underappreciated by employers and the public. I figured my research could contribute in the slightest to resolving this issue, so I proceeded with the necessary steps to secure SRG funding.

Student Research Grant funding was offered by my educational institution to students whose research was deemed beneficial to the greater academic community and exempt from or already been granted a successful review from the Human Subjects Research Committee. My application for this funding included a proposal of the problem to be investigated, prior work in the field, research design and methodology, and reasons for the procurement of funding. Upon successful completion of this proposal and the awarding of the aforementioned funds, I have periodically secured parts of this grant money to send to my interview participants.

The majority of participants were excited about the offer of compensation, some calling it a major blessing and happily accepting. Others felt the opportunity to share their story and the word of God with me was compensation enough, and recommended I hold onto the funds I had set aside to compensate them as it would allow me the opportunity to speak to even more individuals, some of whom would then accept such mention of compensation. There were no egregious patterns in which sample groups accepted compensation the most, but I was surprised as to the scant amount of participants that were truly excited about the prospect of compensation. The individuals that were recruited for me (Group A) accepted compensation marginally less than the other sample group, most likely because they were instructed not to accept payment by

their superior. I also posit that they were told to participate in this interview as part of the requirements or expectations of their normal day to day work, so additional compensation was not anticipated. This supports a study mentioned in the literature review that equated volunteer work as immune to monetary payment, in lieu of preference for moral compensation. This compensation could have then come in the form of "commensurate pleasurable emotions," instead of monetary settlements (Froyum 2018: 467). Conversely, those in Group B indicated their reluctance to accept compensation from a friend, not that they felt they had already received an alternate method of moral payment for their services. Once I shared that I was offering money from my educational institution and not my own pocket, most were more than happy to accept. Some even indicated their intention to donate the money back to the organization.

HRSC Exemption

The procurement of funding was dependent on my research obtaining HSRC exemption, as confirmed through an application and statement of exemption. My research advisor and I deemed this research to be exempt from review as it did not involve vulnerable populations (employees/ volunteers of homeless shelters, not homeless people themselves) and because all interview questions were carefully designed to be benign, with no risk of intellectual harm or potential for the arousal of harmful thoughts or actions. The Chair of my institution's Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) agreed with this assertion upon reviewing my application, and granted my exemption. Please see **Appendix C** for my formal HSRC exemption application, and the letter of exemption granted by my educational institution. This exemption was also contingent on my ability to ensure complete confidentiality to all participants, through the use of pseudonyms in identifying their responses to interview questions.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The patterns below were discovered organically, through the creation of a systematically coded matrix to identify themes. Following each in-depth interview, I entered critical points of information into a spreadsheet. Such points included recruitment method, demographic information, rating of the interaction, and quotes or timestamps that corresponded to specific themes and categorizations. The thematically coded data from in-depth interviews with, and participant observation of, employees/volunteers revealed two distinct themes and multiple sub themes within each of them.

First, employees and volunteers believed that the services they offered were impeccable assets to their community, as they prioritized different aspects of service provision like perseverance, future focus, and structure. This future was usually described as one full of stability, hope, structure, legitimacy and respect for the clients that they served. For example, a middle aged man named Ben (Group A) who served as one of the many ministers at the organization noted,

> Without some sort of faith foundation it's hard to overcome some of those struggles deep down if you just rely on your own volition and desires to get you where you want to go… a lot of times I see it happen with guys that go right back to where they were before because there's nothing bigger than themselves to believe in.

His recommendation to avoid such an unfaithful plunder after finishing a transitional program like those offered by this organization was to believe that "God is there, he's in the midst of everything that's going on around you, submitting your life to him would bring change". He encouraged individuals to embrace this faith-based method throughout their time at the organization and once they integrated into life with the rest of society again. Those who did had significantly better outcomes: longer lasting periods of stability, better willpower to avoid falling into the traps of substance use, mental illness, or illegitimate sources of generating income. With

such lofty aspirations for one's life after going through an institutionalized or faith-based

program, it is understandable that belief in a higher power and larger purpose would alleviate

many of the day to day obstacles that plague a life of uncertainty and transition.

The data in this study was fairly equally split between the aforementioned positive view

and the second: an overwhelmingly negative, condescending, and counterintuitive perception of

faith-based organizations. This second theme was largely only reiterated by individuals that I

recruited myself (Group B), as evidence of the previous assertion that my recruitment methods as

dependent on the administrative figure may have empowered certain individuals to be more

forthright with unflattering information about the organization than others. Interestingly, I found

that the two groups of participants agreed on the positive aspects of faith-based organizations,

and differed on the negative aspects to be discussed below.

Benefits of faith-based organizations

Living the faith-based method

Both groups of participants emphasized the benefits of faith-based organizations, no

matter their recruitment method. A point that was reiterated again and again was that faith-based

organizations don't just make policies and procedures arbitrarily, but they truly put these policies

into practice in their daily lives as well. Thus, the largest benefit of the faith-based method was

how the traditionally religious practices are embodied by all employees and volunteers, at work

and in their personal lives. This transparency in policy was reassuring to many employees, as

they felt they could trust their coworkers to take care of them, value and encourage them with the

same religious practices and subsequent values of compassion, dignity and respect that they

showed all guests of their organization. Sasha (Group A), a 35 year old graduate of the intensive

residential program, is now employed by that same organization as a peer coach and facilitator of the same programs she used to attend. She mentioned the benefit of truly living the faith-based method instead of just arbitrarily enforcing it in an example of "the way that we handle everything is with the love of Jesus, we practice forgiveness, we practice grace, when we teach people life skills it's always what scripture says about it."

Her testament to the power of the faith-based method in terms of benefiting the guests of the organization and the attendees of the residential program was seconded by another individual by the name of Becky (Group A). Becky is a 60 year old former graduate and current director of one of the many residential programs this organization sponsors. She claimed the faith-based method allows employees to feel comfortable "walking along that journey [of recovery][1] with them [the guests]" and said she didn't "want them to feel like they are with someone who is overseeing them, but be someone who they can go to". Her recollection of the faith-based method as a way to equalize and destigmatize the interaction of giving and receiving help was very appreciated; but she went one step further in describing her affiliation with an organization that is not "a ministry that preaches about Jesus... we not only give the message but we live it". Hence, practicing the faith-based method to the point of living it in both the employment setting and in one's personal life to really underscore the true benefit of religion as an equalizer, or agent of destigmatization.

Another benefit of living the faith-based method was emphasized by Annie (Group A), an older individual with some type of authority in almost every ancillary site of this organization. She mentioned the faith-based method as something that inspired her to treat everyone with kindness, no matter their position as a guest, administrator, coworker, or volunteer. She said: "I don't want judgment or bias to be the first thing they see, I want them to see light and love and

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[1] Bracketed information within quotes is added by the researcher for clarity or emphasis

know that they are respected". I believe her ambiguous use and definition of the term "they" to

be intentional here, as Annie (Group A) wanted to emphasize her organization's ability to live

the faith-based method in any circumstance, and project these values to any individual.

Guided by religious values - togetherness

One core pillar of all religions is camaraderie, or togetherness. The employees of this

faith-based organization certainly prioritized such values in their daily life, first and foremost by

referring to each other (fellow employees, new volunteers, guests/ those being served) as their

brothers and sisters. Annie (Group A) also commented on the integration of these religious

values into their life at the organization in saying:

> I try to be very sensitive to the fact that we're all at the foot of the cross. I don't know
> what religion you are but God looks at us as his children, there really are no favorites.
> When one of us has come through a tragedy or a triumph then it is kind of our
> responsibility when we see another brother or sister going through the same that we take
> a moment and just stop and meet them right there at whatever need that is.

Her testament continued with the mention of her life goal as "being able to work with the

community, the people - just being able to walk with them through everything that they are going

through". In that way, she wanted to "be that consistent light" for anyone in need, no matter their

circumstances as someone who is "down on their luck, and even in the times when they had a

great victory". The multifaceted nature of support that believing in a higher power has given

many individuals is admirable and sought out by many. Annie (Group A) believed the

employee's commitment to values of acceptance and togetherness just added "to the blessing that

people get to have when they come here," in that there was no hierarchical structure between

those being served and those providing services. This highlights a possible advantage of the

faith-based method in its ability to surround individuals with such complete systems of support

and encouragement that as long as they embraced the ideals presented to them, they were apt to

succeed. Many participants referred to this as making sure their guests felt overwhelmed with love, to such an extent that even if they did not love themselves, they were able to recognize the presence of others who truly did. Thus, breaking down the traditional barriers of service provision as a higher status individual walking through treatment and recovery *for* someone in need, as a more equal situation where this individual walks *with* those in need.

Guided by religious values - compassion

The notion of meeting someone right where they are was a very saturated theme throughout my interviews, as reiterated by Ben (Group A) in saying he valued his brothers and sisters who "care[d] enough about me to sit with me in my mess and my struggle, [and] see more than me being an alcoholic or a drug addict or no good". This view of religion as an equalizer with the ability to bring individuals together to experience the same pain and glory despite differences in their history, upbringing, status or current position always seemed to come full circle. Ben (Group A) described this interaction as what gave him hope that those who extended grace and care for their brothers and sisters were "special [people] created by God" with "special gifts and talents and skills that somebody else doesn't have". It was assumed that those "other people" were less religious or faithful, in that they had lost the value of compassion that enabled so many volunteers and employees to keep going at this organization, as they viewed their ability to lift people out of their darkest times as the only recognition or compensation they needed.

Ben (Group A) also recounted this experience of walking with a fellow brother or sister as something that gave him true happiness. He encouraged guests to "walk with me as I walk with Jesus… let's just walk through your struggles together, and most often that's where you see real positive changes". He mentioned this in contrast to what many other non-religious organizations practiced, in which there was a hierarchy of individuals with the person receiving

services at the bottom. He felt this experience was demeaning and not actually beneficial to anyone, and that's why he joined an organization with completely opposite values. Hence, some employees of this organization were hesitant to refer individuals elsewhere for services, since they knew they may not be afforded the same level of compassion. Employees usually referred guests to other faith-based organizations, but in the event where only non-religious services were available they withheld this referral. This is potentially troubling as they could be implementing an "it's either us or nothing" approach to service provision as contingent on religion, not need. But as Becky (Group A) said, it is important to focus energy on the people I am helping here. Those that come in and are "automatically involved in the program because we do make it clear to them that we are not just a shelter; we make the investment in making those provisions available for you so that you can focus on you for one whole year". However, such lived collaboration and passion for religion may not be a good fit for everyone. Bella (Group B) is one of the youngest and newest employees of this organization, and she recounted how the administration encouraged her to practice her personal religious values in her workplace to such an extent that they talked about walking through the word of Christ, something "they take very seriously and literally in the sense that they really do want you to be a disciple with them". This literal interpretation went one step further to include her bosses encouraging her "to go to chapel every Friday, just to take that hour out of [her] day to go and worship with the residents and staff".

Bella (Group B) admitted that in her short time with the organization, some employees have shown a little hesitation to embrace and live their religious values as boldly as others. She said, everyone (employees and guests) "comes at different points in their journey, some are a lot stronger about their faith, some are still developing their faith… not everyone is as comfortable"

truly living their faith outside of structured activities like going to chapel. Moreover, she noted how the administration lives these religious values daily, by way of "open[ing] and clos[ing] a lot of our meetings with prayer, and everyone respects that. Not everyone is comfortable being in that moment and being the one that says the prayer," but for the most part all participated or at least recognized the moment of silence and reflection it created. This was an illustrative example of how someone's personal values were becoming absorbed by the organization, where they were more respected or admired for publicizing their private beliefs - that is, if those private beliefs were in alignment with the organization's.

Guided by religious values - deliverance

Another religious value that was repeated throughout this study was the acceptance of circumstances and deliverance from evil. For example, Sasha (Group A) was kind enough to share her personal experience as someone who used to be homeless, who was at a "very low point in life" for an extended period of time. When I asked her how this life course was changed, she said:

> God just brought me out of it and delivered me from being hopeless. He's made it very clear to me through my time here that that is not to be in vain, and my story of hope is meant to be used to help other women get out of the same types of situations I had gotten myself into…I can't even tell you all of the things that I have been spared from, I should have been dead many times.

Her unwavering dedication to the idea that whatever was meant to happen happened for a larger purpose was more than admirable, it was also very popular. Mike (Group B), a middle aged man who "used to be homeless" mentioned the benefit of surrendering his life to God as it gave him a new perspective and passion. The positive perspective that allowed him to turn his life around through this organization is best summarized in his own words:

> When you're out on the streets all by yourself it's good to at least be accompanied by a

> positive outlook too. A change in perspective can totally change your life trajectory, and usually the easiest way to change that is by believing something besides yourself is responsible for all this gray. God got rid of my gray life and told me I deserved some color.

The notion of being deserving of something better is something I think all need to hear, especially those who have been dealt a pretty bad hand in life. It is interesting to see how these personal stories of deliverance from evil have changed an individual's perspective in such a profound way that it also inspired their current position or continues to inspire the way that they interact with those they work with. Annie (Group A) felt this perspective contributed to her organization's position as the best in the region in that "not only do they provide services that individuals need but because of the spirit - what resides there. They are able to be fed good food but also spiritually, through the classes, the conversations, the relationships they build - we build their spirit". It would be impossible to build someone's spirit if they didn't believe they were deserving of a better outlook in the first place, so these values really came full circle in how the organization was able to present itself, recruit employees, and attract guests all with similar mindsets and appreciation for religion.

Future focus

Most religions practice fostering hope for the foreseeable future, or even long term plans, like the discussion of an afterlife or better place to come. This organization was no different in that the wide range of programs, classes, instruction and support they offered were all underpinned by the common goal of planning for the future. Calla (Group A) recounted this future focus in her own words, "we're not trying to train you to be homeless for the rest of your life but to give you the skills that you need to be successful wherever you are". A similar philosophy was reiterated by Ben (Group A), who thought an individual's acceptance of the

religious values presented to them by this organization made them better prepared for a successful future. He thought an individual's future was entirely their choice, seeing as if they were to take full advantage of everything available to them at their time here, or if they limited their use to what they thought they needed and were comfortable talking about. Ben (Group A) said the latter was usually the case when "they avoid the spiritual stuff;" seeing as

> not believing doesn't affect their ability to get an apartment or a job or anything material like that after they leave [this organization], it just…gives them less internal belief and confidence that makes it harder to get by emotionally. If they are only seeing the problems and the pain around them, that faith journey then I think helps them see there's more resources and goodness that comes out of this struggle.

I discovered many of the programs that this organization endorses are operating under the auspices of empowering an individual to take control of the next chapter of their life, but are especially rooted in religion in that they only inspire such positive outcomes through God. Becky (Group A) was able to comment on the goals of all the programs offered by this organization: from cooking classes to learning about formal registers/ how to communicate professionally, and the underlying factors that contributed to and prolong poverty. The diversity in the type of programs and courses offered is really remarkable, and shows how this organization was focused on preparing the individual to understand their circumstances and what brought them to this point in life as something external to themselves. We often blame the individual for their condition as homeless or addicted, but taking a step back to consider the societal and organizational or even generational factors that may have contributed to their condition can empower them to take more control of the future. Her comments revolve around the individuals that "allow themselves to utilize the program" in such a way that "they will gain the tools that will help them to be sustainable when they leave". To her, this sense of sustainability meant "being able to come away with something that you can sustain once you have obtained it, and

learn how to maintain it and not lose it again and find yourself... not just going around the same mountain". This analogy of going around the same mountain without the proper tools to reach its peak was really beneficial in understanding one positive aspect of faith-based organizations; for their ability to empower individuals who had lost all sense of self worth, independence or deservingness came from their acceptance of an external figure like God who was willing to provide them the encouragement they so desperately needed. Planning for the future is much easier when you are able to recognize the presence of other people or divine beings that want you to succeed on that journey, who want you to climb the mountain when you feel you are only equipped with the tools to keep circling it.

Creating collaboration

Finally, a benefit of the faith-based method appeared to formalize in terms of encouraging collaboration. This collaboration existed between employees, as they shared a common mindset and belief system, but also between this organization and similar ones around the area. As far as the benefits of working for an organization where it was almost guaranteed that your coworkers will have similar experiences and beliefs about their faith as you do, to which Calla (Group A), an older female in charge of multiple sites at this organization, recounted as remarkable. She said the collaborative model of the organization means "you're shoulder to shoulder" with fellow employees and guests. She enjoyed this method because it made her feel independent but also supported. Better summarized in her own words: "you don't do work for people, you do it with people. So that means we get in the mess... giving [everyone] the tools that they need to do it for themselves because they're not always going to be [at this organization]". Becky (Group A) works alongside Calla (Group A) in this journey and recounted their collaborative efforts as rewarding, saying:

> I work on a team with lots of like-minded people who prioritize themselves too. We take time to talk about not only our residents, but to talk about us. One of the things about working here is that you have to take care of yourself, get the rest you need before you can even think you are doing a good service for someone else.

It is refreshing to see how these individuals understand the limits of their own abilities, and rely on collaborating with fellow employees to provide the best service to those in need. Nonetheless, all of this collaboration and compassion was largely dependent on the employee's faith in themselves to begin with. Sasha (Group A) emphasized this point by saying: "I need to replenish myself with the word of God so that I can continue to be a positive influence to my coworkers and those around me". Other organizations without such a healthy emphasis on individual success were unable to ensure the corresponding collaborative structure, and hence sacrificed the quality of their service provision for the individual reward of one person completing the task or obligation that was assigned to them. Sasha (Group A) also reinforced the benefit of this collaboration by describing the organization she was previously employed by as the exact opposite. She said that the organization prioritized the importance of individuals completing their individual tasks, and lacked any sense of camaraderie and cooperation. This made her feel "a little bit burnt out, and it's not in a resentful way, it's just that I know I can't pour from an empty cup". In contrast, the employees of the organization that this report focuses on all seemed to reiterate the priority they place on filling up their co-worker's cups in addition to their own, so to speak.

More valuable to those being served was not this organization's emphasis on internal collaboration, but how their religious values enabled them to collaborate with similar organizations. As such, they were able to cater to a larger population, satisfy a greater need, and provide more specialized attention to individuals that aligned with the beliefs of their organization. Becky (Group A) appropriately summarized the benefits of such external

collaboration as what allowed the guests/ residents of this particular organization the freedom and opportunity "to focus on themselves". This was compounded with the fact that the organization did not require or request anything of their guests, but rather provided them with all the necessary resources, comforts, accommodations, and connections to secondary sources of support like mental health counseling or inpatient treatment to such an extent that "when people come to us there's so much that we offer that other places don't , and they're overwhelmed when they come here". This ability to rely on other nearby faith-based organizations in times of need also helped alleviate some stress from the organization, who simply doesn't "have the ability to take in" every individual in need of help.

Ben (Group A) recounted the benefit of collaboration in terms of beds. He said, "in this morning's report we had just over 10 guys sleeping on the floor last night. Now we have 76 beds available and those are all full, but when it's cold like this we call it a code blue night and that means we're going to be busy". Being busy is great for a normal business, but when this faith-based organization reached capacity and continued to take in individuals to exceed that capacity, they recognized the disservice they were doing to the quality of their service provision. This love of collaboration was shown in how they "have tried to kind of pawn some guys off to other shelters" because this time of the year "everyone is so full that there's no way we could send someone to another shelter without taking in one of their residents first". I understand this organization's love of collaboration extends only to collaborating with organizations that implement a faith-based model. As noted above, employees are hesitant to refer guests elsewhere because they think all other organizations offer inferior services. Thus, collaboration with faith-based organizations is welcomed for their ability to recognize the same priorities, but in times where no faith-based organizations are accepting individuals in need of services, this

organization may be prone to implementing practices that only afford guests services based on their religious affiliation, not their genuine need or best interest. Knowing the limits of collaboration were important, but it was also essential to note that each organization had different capacities, capabilities and values. Many of the individuals I interviewed mentioned how they thought their organization was the best in the country, and they were wary about sending an individual elsewhere for shelter when that place didn't have comparable services (mental health, food, job training, etc.). The above was reiterated by many participants no matter their recruitment method, and really emphasized the giving nature of the organization. They don't care about personal gain or publicity, but rather the joy of fulfilling the common goal of helping the most people in the most beneficial way. However, those who were recruited by me had the unique perception of drawbacks of the faith-based approach, which will be discussed below.

Drawbacks of faith-based organizations

Internal promotion

One of the most heavily saturated themes that emerged from interviews observations was the prominence of the practice of internal promotion. The group of participants that were recruited *for* me shared the same belief as the group I recruited myself, in that it was standard practice of the organization to take in homeless individuals, support them throughout long term or residential programs, and subsequently employ them. The character of this employment had taken two forms. Those who were recruited for me (Group A) felt it was beneficial to hire these individuals and internally promote them as a way to ensure their success while also generating the best kind of service provision. The other group of participants (Group B) thought such

internal promotion was responsible for an artificial inflation of the success of the organization, and counterintuitive to the life of the individuals that graduate from the institution.

The benefit of internal promotion as a way to ensure excellent service provision was supported by a statistic offered by Bella (Group B), who recalled that:

> 40-50% of our staffing population were residents [in the past]. This is great because they understand who's coming in the most. It also allows them to progress and grow both themselves and their faith.

She also went one step further to explain the intermediate position of an intern, which usually occupies an individual's time for 90 days, and has been historically limited to low-level jobs with the perception of being "unskilled". Bella (Group B) offered the benefit of this low-level work in that "most of the time it translates into a part-time position but it also depends on what's available". Her assertion was seconded by Ben (Group A), who positively recounted the organization's ability to enable independence amidst some individuals, who "spread their wings right after they finish a program" but was overshadowed by the overwhelming presence of the others, who tended to "stick around for the long term and get promoted".

He said upward mobility and occupational fulfillment was actually possible, in that "there's guys that [he] works alongside that are program graduates, so people have gone from entry level positions to supervisor/ management positions". More interestingly, Ben (Group A) used an anecdote to describe how beneficial this structure is to those who received services. He said it alleviated some anxiety when guests learned that he "can say with confidence [that] 95% of the people [they] will see working there once join[ing] a program…are people who at one point slept where you slept". He said those individuals were always shocked, thinking:

> No way this guy has to be lying to me. And that's when I tell them, nope - me and I can think of like three other guys that are the exceptions and haven't slept in this shelter at some point or another, but we're still here to support them [either way].

Jerry (Group A), a middle-aged man who is deeply devoted to his religion, supported Ben's

assertion about the benefit of internally promoting individuals to better serve other guests: as this

was the exact reasoning behind his current position. He said this organization actually sought

him out, in that he never applied for a job. One day he received a call from the organization's

founder who was inquiring about his passionate position as a Christian and avid volunteer within

the community. Jerry (Group A) was sad to report that he wouldn't be able to switch jobs and

pursue a position at this organization (that he recognized as more morally respectable and

exciting) due to the limited financial incentive offered. Nevertheless, he said the founder was

willing to "make the numbers work so [he] could still live on [his] fixed income and be able to

take care of [his] family," while also befitting the lives of millions of people. When I asked why

the founder of this large organization would take the time to convince one individual to work

there, Jerry humbly replied:

> Because they realized that I had a gift because I grew up in poverty, I went through a
> homeless shelter, I went through the prison system, I grew up in the gang life, I was an
> addict for the majority of my life - they decided to make me an advocate while
> co-facilitating groups at the same time.

This personal experience has proven to be very useful in assisting individuals going through

similar situations, but is it really beneficial to all?

Emphasis on accountability and oversight

Many participants, mainly those who I recruited myself, shared their apprehensions about

contributing to this internal promotion structure. They feared the organization was internally

promoting individuals from their status as residents/ program attendees, to interns, to full-time

supervisory roles, to be synonymous with an artificial inflation of organizational success. The

organization clearly wanted to capitalize on its ability to say "X amount of participants in our

program now hold long-term positions and are financially stable/ independent, and that is X

amount better than this organization that competes with us for resources and volunteers" - and

that assertion was a lot easier to make since the organization was able to guarantee such

measures of success (stable income, legitimate occupation, set hours, housing, etc.) by

employing these individuals within their own walls. This allowed the organization to ensure its

external perception was a positive one, and afforded them the ability to step in and intervene in

someone's life before it was too late, so they wouldn't have to be counted as part of the

program's dropouts, unsuccessful stories, cases of relapse or re-admittance. Colin (Group A), a

middle-aged man who was very passionate about ensuring the individuals he helped were given

the utmost sense of independence and integrity, shared one downside of his philosophy. He said:

> There's going to be failures, people relapse - it's just part of the process. Especially those
> with mental health problems... people are ashamed to say that they have a personality
> disorder or whatever so instead of taking medication they medicate themselves with street
> drugs. It's a pretty common thing.

His evaluation of those receiving treatment at this organization included assertions that

sometimes their prioritization of oversight in order to ensure success is counterproductive, for

eliminating the learning and self betterment that comes from failing the first time left the

"younger kids shell shocked, [wondering] what am I supposed to do now?". Colin (Group A)

emphasized the importance of holding individuals accountable for their actions, but not to such a

point that oversight was perceived as overcompensating for their inability to get by on their own.

He has watched "some guy that's been homeless for 20 years [move] from shelter to shelter,

never able to get his own apartment" because he was never told it was something he was capable

of doing on his own. Colin (Group A) characterized this traditional perspective as

counterintuitive, "when you try to help them it seems like that they feel that's the only way that

they can live" so they don't want to put aside their bad habits or tendencies. This apparent lack of

foundation or encouragement to pursue their own independence led many guests to stay committed to their old ways. More flamboyantly, he said this "sounds a bit strange" but to these individuals, "being on the dark side can be pretty scary" and leaving it is even scarier.

How are service providers supposed to encourage their guests to leave "the dark side" feeling fully empowered to create new opportunities for themselves, if those individuals feel they are undeserving of such treatment in the first place? This underscores the second downside of such high levels of oversight and accountability as making those on the receiving end of services feel they are only able to succeed if they commit to everything that is recommended to them. This commitment extends to the possibility of changing their beliefs, concealing parts of their identity, and conforming to popular opinion in an attempt to please those caring for them. For example, Calla (Group A), who was in charge of service provision in a number of ancillary sites within this organization said that "people who are really committed to changing their lives do the whole program" and they were widely outnumbered by "people who aren't ready for that yet". No matter which type of person was being served, Calla said it is the goal of the organization "that everyone who comes to this organization can leave feeling as if they've been served". Admittedly, it was easier for her and others to "serve" those who were ready to conform and assimilate. The individuals who resisted this faith-based method were harder to convert into believers (in themselves and the power of the organization) and thus were welcomed by the "dark side" for longer.

Employees were not the only members of this organization that were being held accountable for their religious identities, as observed by a volunteer named Sophia (Group B) who spent most of her time in the dining hall. My conversation with her revealed that her favorite aspect of serving guests was talking to them, as this exchange of information was never

hierarchical, and made her feel empowered to give up her oversight role at that moment. She said "conversation is good for all, if I can get a laugh out of a guest and know I am healing their soul, then all is well and the extra few seconds the person behind them will have to wait to be served is all worth it in the end". She seemed to believe this philosophy of treating the guests like real human beings who are deserving of conversation and laughter often goes unvalued at other organizations who prioritize efficiency more than personability. However, within this organization Sophia (Group B) was able to attest to the fact that there are rules in place for how much food you are supposed to give to each individual guest, to ensure everyone gets a fair serving (emphasis on their prioritization of oversight in every manner). She admitted that sometimes these rules can be bent, and some individuals may receive a bigger portion from her simply out of kindness:

> If the person is especially nice or maybe especially skinny, I might do God's work and give them a little extra to eat. Most of the times this goes unnoticed or at least unsaid, but I like to think when they leave the serving line they feel that little bit of extra love on their plates and appreciate it"

I take "especially nice" as meaning an individual is so accustomed to the inner workings of this organization that they know the key words to emphasize, and probably feign or exaggerate religious affiliations in order to acquire special services like more food. It almost seems implicit from Sophia's testimony that the kind of conversation determines an individual's deservingness of special services and favors: meaning those who discuss conforming Christian beliefs and values are likewise rewarded throughout this exchange. Even though the organization attempts to uphold utmost oversight in every interaction its employees have with guests, there is still room for the employees to shape these interactions in unique ways. More than emphasizing the organizational limitations this may introduce, Sophia's testimony reflects how there are implicit

rules in place within this organization that privilege believers over individuals who just go

through the motions and conceal/reveal certain parts of their identities in order to seek favor.

Concealment of non-conforming religious identities

The previous downside of unwavering emphasis on accountability and oversight is

something that is especially harmful to the trajectory of those with conflicting religious beliefs.

This is connected to the symbolic interactionist perspective, in which specialized knowledge in

the decision to conceal or reveal attributes of certain faiths provides corresponding benefits for

certain individuals. The intricacies of this theory will be discussed in the discussion chapter, but

for now it is essential to understand how this theory privileges certain individuals based on their

decision to conceal or reveal certain aspects of their identity. Despite this organization's attempts

to cater to individuals of all religions and affiliations (who reveal all aspects of their faith and

conceal only the most pervasive aspects of their lives), many employees mentioned their

dissatisfaction with this policy. Sasha (Group A) said "it's not like we [the organization] don't

accept people who are not Christian, and of course we do, but they have to be willing to respect

what we believe and not shoot down our beliefs and our ideals". The simple fact about the

situation is that some people were so devout to their beliefs that they wouldn't be able to abandon

these ideals in favor of a more conforming, widely accepted viewpoint. She thought that "a lot of

the people…can recognize that the only reason that they were delivered from their addiction or

homelessness or whatever brought them here [to this organization] was because of God and that

He has orchestrated every single thing in our lives". In conclusion, she discussed the select few

individuals who failed to conceal their conflicting religious identities, in saying:

> If someone is going to be like 'I don't believe in God and I'm not going to go to chapel
> and I'm not going to follow the expectations of the place' then either they choose to leave

[the program] or quite frankly, they will end up going to another place because God called them there.

Her persistence in saying that an individual's eventual removal from the programs endorsed by this organization would actually be dependent on their own personal failures or religious callings proved the point comes full circle. Essentially, this organization prioritized their own oversight to such an extent that when individuals failed to comply with their expectations, they placed the blame on their own religion or personal tendencies. Inability to be contained by the organization's oversight was then framed as a personal flaw, not something in need of a structural solution. Thus, connected to the theoretical camp of blaming the victim in which society holds the victim responsible for their own failings, instead of investigating the larger institutional forces at play that may have contributed to their predicament.

Organizational oversight was a large determining factor in regards to which services were available to which people. Another level of such differential provision of services based on an individual's ability to conceal certain parts of their identity was reinforced by Mollie (Group B), a young volunteer in the dining hall. She commented on some of the discriminatory or otherwise exclusionary practices she had observed throughout her time volunteering. The presence of multiple other participants who made similar comments makes me believe that the dining hall is where these practices are most easily observable. In the classes and residential programs, individuals still may conceal parts of their identities but this may be overlooked by the administrators of these programs because it is a time of wild and rapid transition. Every individual that is transitioning from life on the streets to an institutionalized routine of sleeping with other people, attending classes, mandatory religious activities, etc. will probably conceal or reveal parts of their identities at specific times as well. For in this process of recovery, an individual just wants to finish the program and gain a sense of stability and sustainability - they

are not prioritizing their own integrity or interests, and are more prone to assimilation. Thus, the

dining hall proves to be the perfect space to observe a wide range of people in a relatively

unregulated environment. The people who receive the food are referred to as "guests", and range

from homeless to impoverished and even include individuals who work in social services and

construction. Anyone who passes by this organization is welcome to join, provided precedence is

given to those truly in need. Some of the strict practices and conforming behaviors that are

prioritized in the regimented programs are unenforceable here, so individuals may feel free to let

certain parts of their personalities or identities shine.

Mollie's (Group B) testimony comes from her time as a volunteer server, where she

admits to seeing someone of a different faith but adhering to the routine that all volunteers are

encouraged to follow, in greeting every guest with the same Christian message. She says:

> One time I served a man with a yamaka which I think is part of the Jewish religion and I
> told him 'God Bless You' and he nodded and smiled. I think he wasn't weirded out by it
> because he also respects a god, and I didn't say which one, so maybe he thought I was
> Jewish too and was talking about his God.

She continued to say that her experience serving individuals of different faiths was limited to

those who externally display this faith, and she refrained from making judgements about other

aspects of their character or appearance in an attempt to be as compassionate and egalitarian to

all as possible. In her own words:

> I guess I have never served someone with like an anarchist shirt on that outwardly
> showed they were against all religions, I have served people of different religions and it
> has been a fine interaction because they understand the importance of respecting a God or
> some God, that doesn't have to be their God.

Mollie's (Group B) description of the people she served in the dining center spanned to

include the methodology she tried to use in doing so. That being, trying to "treat everyone the

same" no matter their religion, to which she admits "honestly [it] is a little bit easier to connect

with Christian people and wish them well because I know they are doing the same for me". This ease of connection with people of similar faith backgrounds was repeated by all participants in these interviews, as seen in the aforementioned sections where the employees recounted their similarly minded coworkers as the best part of their jobs. It is not a crime to enjoy working with people who are the same as you, but it is not very kind to then treat those who do not conform to this perception as inferior or less deserving. To combat this tendency, Mollie (Group B) tried to keep in mind that even though these guests may not be outwardly receptive to her religion, maybe once they left the dining hall they would exhibit some characteristics that she can identify with. She said:

> Even if they don't say [God Bless You] back, I know when they eat or once they leave here they thank my... our God... for me. For the food I gave them and for my presence in the community and that makes me feel better because it's mutual. When I leave here I thank God for sending these people to me and letting me serve them. I'm not sure if people that aren't Christian leave here and feel like that, so I guess maybe I do treat those who I know feel the same a little better than others…I don't think I give them any more food or respect, but I definitely talk to them for longer... maybe that helps them and they feel like they have a friend in me or maybe they hate that and want me to stop talking so they can eat their food and leave.

Notice how this participant paused in between differentiating between the God that she worships and the higher power that she hopes the individual she serves also respects. Her insistence that they are worshiping the same - "our" God shows how pervasive the belief of religious assimilation is within this organization. Coincidentally, the select individuals that she noted an ease of connection with also seemed to be Christian, despite her refusal of this selectively preferential treatment:

> No, I don't think I give extra food to people who are Christian, but I guess I might be guilty of talking to those people more. If I say 'God Bless You' and you say it back but add that you really needed to hear that today, then of course I am going to offer another blessing or ask if I can talk about you at church, or ask for your story. It always helps to talk to someone about your problems, and share the load a little bit. If we're taking the time to share in that way then maybe I would feel you are entitled to a little more food

too. Although I don't think anyone can deserve more nourishment, it's more about appreciation of that extra love. Maybe if I notice that isn't reciprocated or acknowledged then I won't do it again, but in my whole history of being the nice lady back here, nobody has ever told me not to give them extras. To that, I say amen!

My own experience volunteering in the dining hall confirmed what the other participants noticed about service provision as it seems to favor individuals who concealed their nonconforming religious identities. Once again, as a way of regulating the types of individuals that are able to receive services, and ensuring the organization has the utmost oversight into this differential treatment. As a server we are told to give the same portions to everyone, and say "God Bless you" to everyone. I have learned that it is common practice among the other volunteers to say this statement with the same passion to every guest, but to reward those who reciprocate this blessing with more food, a warmer smile, or a more personalized experience (for example following that up with "I hope you have a nice day, the sun is really shining! Instead of the usual "enjoy your meal!"). Some guests have taken notice of this informal rule and in my opinion, used this inside knowledge to play the system a bit better than their more integritous counterparts. Many guests have entered the service line speaking about all kinds of inequalities and overall sinful topics, but once they are within earshot of the servers this rhetoric shifts. All of a sudden these individuals embrace conformity and Christian values, proudly saying "Amen" or speaking about more virtuous topics, knowing that if this sparks up a similar conversation with one of the servers, they may be rewarded with special favors and heftier portions.

I have also observed guests who acknowledge this informal rule by visually altering their appearance to make their response to the volunteer's blessing more believable. For example, One time I observed a man enter the line to be served with his coat zipped and a scarf on. By the time he made it to the front of the line, he had unzipped his coat, taken his scarf off, and removed a cross necklace from under his shirt to the new completely visible location on top of all of these

layers of clothing. A volunteer took notice and reinforced this behavior with an even longer

blessing than usual, saying "May God bless you and your family on this wonderful day, thank

you for joining us". This went over well, the man accepted many compliments and smiles as he

filled his tray, then before leaving the salad bar portion of the serving line, proceeded to tuck his

cross necklace safely back inside his shirt and zip his coat back up. When he sat down to enjoy

his meal, his coat remained zipped and I failed to overhear any religious sentiments coming from

his direction.

     I do not believe the aforementioned anecdote to be operating in isolation, as I think this is

a common practice of revealing pieces of religious identity that volunteers would notice more if

they were aware of the problems it could cause. To highlight my experience as it connects to the

statements of others, I offer an explanation given by a dining hall staff member named Brianna

(Group B). She said she was "positive [that] some people get special treatment or extra servings

because we go through way more food than [she] knows we have people in here". Moreover, she

very diplomatically communicated to whom she preferred that extra food to go to:

> I guess I would hope that those extra amounts of love and nourishment go to a Christian
> person or someone who shared my beliefs, but I certainly don't do anything to make that
> happen, and would never give someone less so someone I identify with could have more.

     To exemplify the opposite side of the spectrum, I offer my own observations of a guest

who chose to conceal a part of their identity (instead of projecting it) in order to secure a

favorable outcome. I was in the serving line on a hot summer day when I noticed a guest entered

the organization with a short sleeve shirt on. By the time she made it to the front of the line, she

put on a raincoat that perfectly concealed her half-sleeve of tattoos. Before her coat was fully on,

I was able to make out some writing in a different middle eastern language. This observation,

combined with other factors about how this individual was dressed, what her voice sounded like,

and the way she carried herself, has led me to make the educated assumption that maybe she is religious but definitely not in observance of the same God that the people of this organization are. I think this is why she covered a tattoo that possibly referenced a deity outside of the Christian faith before interacting with the very outwardly Christian volunteers and staff. She also could have covered her tattoos as a way of avoiding negative stereotyping, as tattoos often stigmatize someone as non-conforming, unvirtuous or rebellious. I did observe this individual saying 'God bless you' back to the server, but I think the server was aware of the superficiality of this statement as her acknowledgement of the Christian religion was not reciprocated in terms of a heftier serving. The act of covering her tattoos may have been done in order to cast less doubt about her faith, and her subsequent display of faith in order to seek reward.

Ben's (Group A) testimony and my own observations offer a generalization about the types of people that use the services provided by this organization, including the dining hall. He said "we get guys from all different faith backgrounds and my conversation with them is always like well what does it hurt to just participate [in the religious activities IE going to chapel with the group]? You may not believe it, but what's it hurt to go to a class about Jesus or spiritual things?" I believe this assertion was made with the intention of dispelling the belief that this organization only caters to those of the same religion, but it actually supports my hypothesis that individuals may benefit from concealing or repealing certain parts of their identities. Ben (Group A) also provided a statistical summary of the types of people that use these services, that being:

> A third of the guys that come in may at least relate somewhat to a Christian-based perspective, a third who are from another religion, and others who say I want nothing to do with God, religion, or any type of faith because more often than not they believe it associates with harm and hurt that's been done by somebody abusing their power in this way.

His recognition of two-thirds of guests who simply did not identify with the same faith beliefs as

the majority of the employees/ volunteers/ servers is crucial to this argument, in that it highlights

the fact that there will be disagreement in terms of philosophy, and arbitrary rules of saying 'God

Bless You' to every guest will not have the same impact on every guest.

This variance in belief underscores the major disadvantage of the faith-based method, in that it is

unable to effectively serve all diverse types of people without forcing some of them to change

something about themselves. This change is usually superficial, in that they may hide their

tattoos or show their cross necklace in order to outwardly present the same level of

deservingness as that one-third of people who do not need to change anything about themselves.

But for that rebellious two-thirds of the population using these services, if they fail to conform or

assimilate, the consequences could mean the difference between going hungry or being served,

learning how to live sustainably or living on the streets, getting help with mental health or

struggling to get by. Jerry (Group A) put this statement more interestingly, in saying

> I might be a believer but my job is not to convert somebody, it's to meet them right
> where they are. Not to convert you or save you because I couldn't even save myself.

Luckily for Jerry, the employees of this organization are not presented with an opportunity where

they have to try to convert or save someone else, as that person usually alters their identity and

presents themselves as a believer before it becomes problematic for them. Ben (Group A)

mentioned how "everybody gets the same amount of love, care, compassion no matter if they're

here for a week or twelve months finishing a whole curriculum in our program," but made sure

to leave the distinctions about the amount of love people of different faith backgrounds were

eligible to receive up to the conforming individual themselves.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The implications that different recruitment strategies had on my findings are essential to the conclusion of this study. My research has ultimately yielded two different samples, those recruited by the administrative figure (Group A) and those I recruited myself (Group B). This shows that in some respects there were efforts to sugar-coat the general experience of these shelter services. This led to the discovery that the way in which the two samples spoke about the organization was important in and of itself. This demonstrates how the institutionalized nature of faith-based organizations is often perceived in a negative light for their tendency to be too overbearing. The individuals that were recruited by the administrative figure may have felt there was little freedom for personal expression that did not align with the organization's traditional religious beliefs, and hence concealed their true beliefs in favor of respecting this hierarchical structure.

The individuals that were recruited for me spoke as candidly about the positive aspects of their organization, but held true in their position of unapologetic advocacy for the benefits of these faith-based programs. I even communicated that some other individuals shared a particularly negative observation or perception of the organization, hoping members of this sample (Group A) would be motivated to agree with or recognize its merit, but to no avail. Each subsequent time I tried to elicit a truly honest response from both samples, those who were recruited for me held strong in their opinion that faith-based organizations could do no wrong. Many in Group A dismissed the claims other employees made, and suggested Group B was simply overexaggerating or misrepresenting reality for the sake of providing me with an interesting story. I am strongly compelled to not trust these claims, as I shared an excellent rapport with members of the sample who I recruited myself, and because the negative aspects of

faith-based organizations that these individuals highlighted was confirmed over and over again. Independently of each other and without knowledge of what any other party had said, the individuals in Group B honestly portrayed stories, observations, interactions, and regulations that painted the faith-based method in a more negative (and realistic) light than their counterparts.

In summary, both groups praised the organization, commenting on their enjoyment of the faith-based method, and the benefits of having this service in the current urban environment. They also both commended the volunteers and staff of the organization, in that these people operated on a different moral code than many of their previous coworkers, and truly have good intentions and wholesome motivations. Conversely, interviews with these groups yielded different responses in terms of the participant's ability to be critical of the organization they work for. Those who were not recruited by the administrative figure (Group B) felt more comfortable sharing less than flattering information about that organization. They often noticed patterns in service of homeless individuals that made the faith-based method seem subject to excluding or negatively impacting certain individuals, which was confirmed by participant observation. More interestingly, this differentiated recruitment strategy revealed that numerous individuals claimed this organization thought its services were superior to all other organizations, and if they were to refer someone elsewhere, that had to be a faith-based organization. If no faith-based organizations were accepting new guests, they either gave the individual the bare minimum services they had available or sent them away to figure it out on their own. This organization took control of the referral process and only made it easy for guests to seek services from others with faith-based methods, going as far as actually turning people away if they could not refer them to an ideologically similar organization. Moreover, the individuals I recruited myself spoke more candidly about their experience within the organization in terms of storytelling,

ethnographies, and first-hand participation that offered complete saturation of these (positive and negative) themes.

The sample characteristics table (**Figure 3**) in the methods chapter included a distinction between interview participant's past experience with homelessness and the group they pertained to. I did not notice any patterns in terms of the group I recruited myself (Group B), but find it striking that the majority of participants from Group A had previous experiences with homelessness. Of the seven individuals in that group, only two are exempt from this assertion. Three individuals indicated that they used to be homeless, and extensively utilized the services this specific organization offered throughout that time. They all used the dining and mental health services, and most also made use of this organization's residential treatment programs for overcoming substance and alcohol abuse. The other two members of this group still had previous experience with this organization, as they were never homeless but used to volunteer here so frequently that they were eventually employed and promoted. This makes me believe the individuals the external recruitment figure gave me access to make up what this organization views as its success stories: people who did the programs, lived on the streets, volunteered in the kitchen, overcame their own struggles, and are hence now much more well equipped to help others in similar (but contemporary) situations obtain the same profound successes.

Symbolic Interaction

The findings above have highlighted the importance of specialized knowledge in many individuals' decisions to conceal/reveal their faith depending on a multitude of factors. Some participants observed and/or posited a connection between a guest's identification with religious beliefs other than Christianity and their desire to conceal those beliefs in order to better assimilate to the very outwardly Christian organization they found themselves seeking services

from. Other participants noticed times where the organization itself held meetings, instituted guidelines, mandated religious demonstrations, or otherwise operated in a manner that was not inclusive of the wide range of devotions and beliefs they claimed to be. Thus, their preferential treatment of conforming Christians was demonstrated in terms of providing guests who presented themselves as in possession of this identity with an increased quantity and quality of food, conversation, blessings, and camaraderie. The aforementioned generalization was reiterated by many employees and volunteers, which makes me believe that the guests and homeless individuals receiving these services also took note of such discrepancies in equal treatment as dependent on their identity. In times of need, whether that be need for sustenance, support, counseling, or mere conversation; it is understandable that anyone would alter their appearance, conceal any identifying information of conflicting religious beliefs, and feel they were supposed to conform to this rigid description of what this organization identifies as deserving. If an individual failed to conform or present themselves as a good Christian in need of the same services as their faithful peers, then they could expect to receive inferior treatment, and have a harder time accessing those services in the first place.

For the reasons mentioned above, it is understandable that someone may feel inclined to conceal or reveal parts of their identity in order to receive recognition from the organization in the form of advantageous service provision. This management of identity as a way of gaining advantage is closely linked to Ervin Goffman's symbolic interactionist theory, and more specifically his analysis of impression management and stigma. As such, in context to Goffman's stigma management, concealing or revealing information about one's stigma is a way of "passing" (Goffman 1963). To begin, I offer Peter Kivisto's definition of symbolic interactionism as the peculiar way in which "human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of

merely reacting to each other's actions" (Kivisto 2021: 169). Thus, proving how "human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions" as more than how it presents on the surface (Kivisto 2021: 169). As such, making this theory perfectly adept at attending to the phenomenon observed and commented on in the faith-based organization at the forefront of this research.

Goffman metaphorically describes the aforementioned actions and interactions as a theater, in what is called his dramaturgical perspective. This is because "in a play, action attempts to convey to an audience a particular impression of the actor and the social scene," for their enticing portrayal of life results in the advantage of recognition, applause, awe, from the audience (Goffman 1963). Actors use additions like "scripted dialogue, gestures, props, costumes" to convey this performance and "create a new reality for the audience" (Goffman 1963). The way in which guests (those receiving services) at the faith-based organization I studied were reported to behave or observed acting in certain ways easily lends itself to this theory. A guest who added the special prop of their cross necklace to the setting of the food service line was subsequently rewarded for their performance - as a form of "passing"(Goffman 1963). The volunteer serving them recognized this specialized addition and rewarded the fact that it had aided in the believability of the new reality they had created. Such reward was observed in the way of a larger portion of food being allocated to them, but in other settings of similar performance I would expect increased respect, legitimacy, status and dedication to be attributed to this individual. David Snow (1987) produced a great volume of literature concerned with this exact question of how "passing" and other forms of stigma management work differently within the context of the homeless. He concludes that homeless individuals are effectively "at the bottom of status systems" and use this inherent inferiority as motivation to

"attempt to generate identities that provide them with a measure of self-worth and dignity" to properly advance their position in that system (Snow 1987: 1336). In this case, the homeless individuals who engage in "passing" are attempting to make their identities less "visually stigmatized" and may do so by concealing stigmatizing agents or revealing props that communicate the opposite (Snow 1987: 1339). By making their cross necklaces uber-noticeable they are intentionally revealing an anti-stigmatization prop, as a way of appealing to the Christian individuals serving them and forging a connection from which they posit beneficial outcomes. Their attempt to conceal tattoos or other signs of non-Christian identities may be viewed as "passing" by "concealing or withholding information about the stigma [of being unvirtuous/ undeserving] so that it is not as easily perceived by others" who make up the Christian majority in charge of determining the deservingness of individuals and serving them accordingly (Snow 1987: 1339).

One strategy of identity management revolves around stigma. I posit that the homeless people seeking services from this faith-based organization have realized they are going to be stigmatized if they do not conform to the majority Christian beliefs of those serving them. In order to conform and better manage the stigma associated with being deviant, without virtue, morally unregulated, holy inferior, a homeless person may feel compelled to alter parts of their identity that readily identify them with these stigmatizing features. For example, putting on a jacket to cover tattoos from a different religion allows the actor to put on a performance of social conformity and religious homogeneity. Likewise, revealing a cross necklace that was previously hidden beneath layers of clothing allows the actor to enhance their performance as a Christian, and leaves the audience feeling much more satisfied/ convinced of their portrayal. This stigma management goes both ways, as individuals are compelled to either conceal or reveal attributes

and aspects of their identity to better manage such stigmatization. I argue this management occurs in what Goffman refers to as the front; that being "the 'expressive equipment' used to convince the other about the authenticity of an individual's performance" (Goffman 1963).

In order for an actor to present a believable front, they must first understand their stigma as positive or negative, and consequently embrace it. If one possesses a negative stigma associated with their tattoos, they will conceal them before engaging with the audience members that clearly value conformity, and may attribute values of promiscuity, insociability or incompetence to that individual. The positive stigma associated with those who wear cross necklaces encompasses the belief that they are Christian, comfortable enough with their religion to outwardly display it, and devoted enough to their religion to want it to become a part of their visibly identifiable, or most accessible, identity. Either way that stigma is managed in the dramaturgical perspective, Goffman posits a connection between the scripted performance being put on by the actor and the predictable response of the audience. He says, "when an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it" and within this predetermined "social front" it "tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise" (Goffman 1963). Such stereotyped expectations allow the front to become a "collective representation" with stability and meaning apart from the specific actions that make up its performance. When an individual is able to manage their stigma in such a way that it becomes predictably advantageous for them, their role as an actor is transformed and the audience isn't even able to suspect those interactions as a performance. I argue this is exactly what is occurring within this faith-based organization, as the guests have become so accustomed to their performances of stigma management being rewarded by volunteers that they have encouraged their fellow non-conforming Christians to perform as

one of the same. Even if this performance ends abruptly when the individual leaves this organization, or even this food service line, their management of a stigmatized identity was successful if the audience (in this case the volunteer serving them) was either unaware they were witnessing a performance, or was satisfied with the props and gestures that performance encompassed.

The final connection to Goffman's stigma management strategies is described by "embracement" in which an individual "accepts the identities associated with his status" (Snow 1987: 1353). More specifically, Goffman's theory of ideological embracement that many scholars have noticed manifests itself particularly well in studies of homeless individuals who develop an exceptionally "avowed commitment to a particular religion or set of religious beliefs" (Snow 1987: 1357). The guests of this organization often embraced Christian identity markers, even if doing so superficially, in order to gain reward from the servers. By saying "Amen" or revealing their cross necklace, they embraced a characteristic that had the potential to "denote or embellish a personal identity" they viewed as favorable (Snow 1987: 1353). This favorable view of a soon to be embraced identity is also covered below, as it is similar to when an individual accepts the label that society has given them for they see doing so as potentially more advantageous than concealing or denying that description.

Labeling Theory

Another theory that may be applicable to the testimonies and observations of this faith-based homeless service provider is the Labeling Theory, which Howard Becker defines as the framing elements of an individual's performance or actions that "are sometimes unrelated to the behavior itself" (Adler 2011: 40). As such, these labels have the power to "lead one act to be designated as heinous and regulate another, similar one, to obscenity" (Becker 1963). Moreover,

he defines labeling theory as the way in which deviance is rooted in people's responses to it, not

the act itself (Becker 1963). Becker's theory is usually used to define interactions related to

deviance, in which an individual receives the label of deviant and anything they do thereafter is

perceived as deviant by larger society. Nonetheless, this is still applicable because of this

organization's emphasis on religion for its ability to produce like minded individuals who share

the values of compassion, integrity, devotion, sacrifice, etc. Thus those who possess this identity

may be compelled to view individuals who outwardly present as non-Christian as inferior,

uncompassionate, disingenuous, undevoted, and selfish. In order to avoid these labels, it makes

sense why an individual would conceal or reveal a certain part of their identity, hence adopting

the identity of being religious/ conforming in order to succeed. Success could come in many

forms, as the label of conforming or virtuous could extend its influence to include larger portions

of food, easier access to mental health services, upgraded housing options, even job offers.

Labeling also occurs in terms of an individual's identity as a homeless person. When they

embrace the label of being a homeless person in need, they subsequently become an embodiment

of the organization - as similar to Goffman's "embracement" or "acceptance of a set of beliefs or

ideas" that results in "the avowal of a cognitively congruent personal identity" (Snow 1987:

1357). What gives faith-based organizations (and all nonprofits in this sector, for that matter)

purpose is being able to label someone as "in need" and find volunteers, services, food, shelter to

satiate that need. Such a label results in the perception that an individual has to fully embrace this

view of themselves in order to be successful, to the point that they internalize the label given to

them. Therefore, the labeling theory can be traced back to an institutional imperative of the

organization itself, as they want to make this individual a success story. In order to do that, they

assign the homeless individual the label of being in need, that person commits to that label as

they believe internalizing such an identity will promote benefits for themselves within the organization. My interviews and observations revealed testimonies of numerous individuals who felt anything short than their full dedication to their job, identity, or label, would result in less than favorable consequences for themselves and the organization they were trying to please. In order to avoid such a plunder, they necessarily had to embrace the organization's policies and practices. This meant concealing any identity that was not that of a conforming Christian person, and upon presenting this newfound identity to others, accepting the label that was given to them. As such, the label of "homeless person", "in need" or even "Christian looking to be virtuous" boils down to nothing more than mere expectations to live up to; at that point the label is so deeply internalized that behaving in a way that is not in accordance with it will result in the social demise of that person.

A label's ability to permeate societal expectations and individual identities holds true for homeless people as well as the employees/ volunteers of the organizations they seek services from. Being a volunteer or employee at a faith-based homeless shelter is certainly accompanied by a number of labels, some may include being "virtuous", "selfless", "collaborative" or "committed to the success of each individual". If someone fails to perform in accordance with those labels and the expectations that accompany them, they risk the same type of social demise noted above. While they would be able to continue living as normal, their integrity may be compromised to such an extent that their interactions and relationships with coworkers or even those they serve may be so different that they wish otherwise. Structurally speaking, faith-based organizations have earned the label and consequent expectation of being extremely selfless and well-prepared to welcome any kind of individual with open arms. My research has revealed they may value their label of "Christian" more than the aforementioned one, as services seem to be

catered towards individuals who present themselves as in possession of the same religious beliefs and identities as what rules the organization they wish to join.

Connections to literature

Much of the previously established literature torts faith-based organizations as the unquestionably best method of homeless service provision. Bass' (2009) study reveals similar positive descriptions of faith-based organizations, in terms of their ability to better serve a more diverse population and motivate all types of people to persevere amidst adversity. Such perseverance is extremely valued in the realm of homeless service provision, since the ultimate goal is always to empower the individual to look forward to and strive for a future after homelessness. Additionally, the findings of this research supported the conclusions in Eide's (2022) study of volunteer motivation. He posited volunteers were compelled to work at faith-based organizations because of the strength of their own religious beliefs and the "corporal works of mercy" they admire so deeply; likewise empowering them to spread their own Christian beliefs among guests and service users that do not share such devout convictions (69).

Marr's (2021) study reinforced the necessity of faith-based organizations providing their guests with the proper tools to "cope with their past and improve their situations" (1). The organization that this current study interviewed and observed shares the same priorities, in that they have classes and programs designed to improve the quality of life of those receiving services. Such an improvement is impossible unless the individual is able to recognize their past and the conditions they were subjected to as formative to their future, but not to such an extent that they are powerless against their own intentions. The faith-based method that this organization employs ensures individuals are able to use their past as something that inspires a

better future, gives them hope for what is to come, and keeps them grounded in times of great

success.

Productive service provision relies on both willing recipients of services and

understanding/compassionate providers of those services. Guinea-Martin's (2014) study focused

on how service provision may be negatively perceived by guests, as a counter to the popular

belief of religion as an equalizer. Individuals interviewed at the faith-based organization at the

focus of this current study emphasized religion as an equalizer in between their position of

authority and what many perceive as the inferior and "in need" class of individuals using these

services. Guinea-Martin's (2014) study underscored the "hierarchizing dimension" of

compassion that many volunteers seemed to deny, as they prioritized the possible positive

outcomes of such an exchange (541). However, my current study exposed volunteers who

perceived their interactions with guests as beneficial as long as they conformed to broader

religious expectations. Failure to comply with these expectations shows how service provision

may be negatively perceived by clients, much like how the aforementioned study reached the

same conclusion by studying the underlying negative attributes of the quality that presents itself

as compassion.

The drawbacks of faith-based organizations are not as heavily studied in the existing

literature, but certainly formed the majority of opinions based on the interviews and observations

of the faith-based organization at the forefront of this current study. One negative aspect of

faith-based organizations that was revealed by my study is their insistence on maintaining

policies and guidelines that are not very inclusive of individuals with conflicting or nonexistent

religious beliefs. Froyum's (2018) study revealed how those receiving services are usually

perceived by service providers as deserving of assistance, reciprocated by their genuine

appreciation of such attention as "bowing from the heart" (466). Such bows of appreciation were seconded in my study, when guests were expected to show their gratitude for the services given to them by saying "God Bless You" to the volunteers serving them. However, this artificial response was just forcing them to conceal a part of their identity in order to better assimilate. Hence, necessitating a loss of the genuine character and personal identity that religion claims to value.

Another contradiction that has been made apparent by faith-based organization's methodology and practices is their prioritization of structure to such an extent that it is detrimental to those on the receiving end of the services. Many scholars posit the importance of structure and consistency in the lives of those experiencing the phenomenal changes that accompany being homeless. If anyone would benefit from a predictable and well-regulated environment, it would be someone who previously did not know where their meals were coming from, where they were sleeping that night, or how they were going to receive medical care. While I agree with the popular belief that well structured organizations function the most efficiently in terms of the amount and quality of services they are able to provide to the homeless population, I do believe there is a limit to the degree of this structure as helpful. Mulder's (2004) study determined the limit of the utility of rigidity as what differentiates success stories from those who become "utterly dependent on the imposing presence of the institution" (137).

Multiple participants shared their fears of the organization's emphasis on oversight and control as what contributed to the internal promotion of many individuals. On one hand, it is beneficial for the guest to receive services and be supplanted into this life of predictability and legitimacy in that their future is fully determined by the organization. They no longer have to worry about finding another job, securing housing, having a legitimate income, etc. The other

side of the coin paints a much darker picture in that the aforementioned individual is lacking in a whole host of social skills like adaptability, self confidence, independence, and self sufficiency. They learn to rely so heavily on the organization that has created the life they have now, that any thought of breaking free from this institutionalized order seems irrational. The same holds true for employees, who may feel pressured to commit every ounce of their time and energy to the organization, out of fear that their less than absolute attention will have negative consequences for all involved. The aforementioned generalization is eerily similar to Jerry's (Group A) testimony and experience as a homeless individual that became involved with this faith-based organization and internally promoted until the organization encompassed his entire life. He had a number of justifications as to why the organization was so interested in his talents so as to offer him a special position and capitalize on those passions by internally promoting him to different positions; however these justifications prove that ultimately it would be hard to imagine him finding occupational or personal success elsewhere. Essentially, this organization became his only option, which he now rationalized as something that was meant to be or in alignment with the predictions of a higher power, but it all boiled down to organizational control and oversight. This view that an employee's position at an organization is due to a divine circumstance of fate is unhealthy and unrealistic to uphold, but nonetheless makes up a pervasive part of the methods of accountability and oversight that mark the downfall of faith-based organizations.

Limitations

This study was widely successful as an educational and exploratory element of my sociological understanding, but was admittedly limited on a number of fronts. To begin, the theoretical analysis above can only explain the impact these organizations have on those they

serve, and further research should be conducted on the volunteers/ employees themselves to determine the generalizability of any patterns in treatment, perception, and evaluation based on religion or other demographic information. Secondly, due to the recruitment strategies that were necessitated by this organization, some potential participants may have been deterred from participating out of fear that their personal information would be linked to their responses or conveyed to their superiors.

Future research

Many studies have examined volunteer/ employee motivation for being involved with a faith-based organization, and others have examined the efficacy and quality of the services offered by this group of providers. However, very few have explored the obvious connection between these two schools of thought, in that the motivations and evaluations of employees and volunteers of faith-based organizations are essential in predicting and assessing the kinds of services offered within them. It would be interesting to conduct this same study with members of nearby or globally located faith-based organizations. I would also be interested in expanding the sample size within this particular organization, to examine if any more prominent patterns emerge between one's evaluation of the efficacy of their organization and the services it provides is at all linked to their own religion, race, age, or position. This study has offered tentative conclusions about the connection between an individual's religious identity and their evolution of the faith-based organization they work for, but these conclusions could be substantiated by a more representative and wide ranging sample.

I understand the possibility that the majority of the members (both volunteers and employees) of this organization may demonstrate similar religious beliefs, but if the conclusion

about their religious values as a determinant of their evaluation of the organization could be made more directly (as opposed to being obscured by differences in recruitment methods), I believe the validity of this study would increase tremendously. Despite differences in recruitment methods that ultimately yielded two distinct samples, the themes of the interviews of both samples became very heavily saturated. As a researcher and volunteer I used my own experience and observations as confirmation of the themes and ideas other individuals were repeatedly noticing, but did find a few categories that could benefit from future research.

Some participants shared their concern that the religious beliefs of the employees and volunteers of the faith-based organization they work for were exaggerated as a way to gain more popular public perception. One participant, Calla, perfectly encapsulated this theme in her testimony that "we [the organization] have relationships with the agencies around us" and a "good reputation of being here regardless of what's going on. A lot has gone on between 1906 and now, not only has [the organization] been sustainable, it has grown." She attributed this growth and positive perception by the surrounding community as entirely contingent on their faith-based method, in that their religious beliefs were the sole element that gave this organization the "reputation of being a safe place". Her evaluation of the importance of the faith-based method was reiterated by many, but only a few participants claimed their religious values were essential to the perception and evaluation of the organization by outsiders. This theme could become connected to many theoretical understandings of the institution of homeless services in general, if future research was dedicated to it reaching a higher level of saturation.

The final element of this study that could benefit from future research was only echoed by one participant, in that they felt the needs of the organization did not align with the needs of the community it serves. Investigating this claim could open the door to a number of institutional

and organizational overhauls, as providing ineffective or unwanted services is almost worse than providing no services at all. I understand this issue may be difficult to investigate due to the fact that not many employees and volunteers of an organization would be willing to admit its faults to this extreme extent, but I do think an attempt should be made to shed some light on this issue.

Conclusion

The main findings of this study are entirely dependent on the recruitment methods, in which two types of conclusions emerged. The first was reiterated by all participants, who praised faith-based organizations for their uncanny ability to connect with the most homeless individuals and provide them the best, most comprehensive and all encompassing services possible. The other was only emphasized by participants I recruited myself, as they shared a possible downside of faith-based organizations as their inability to serve members of the community with conflicting faith preferences. This tendency to prefer serving conforming Christians results in the development of many informal rules within the organization, that are understood by the guests and manipulated for their own advantage. Hence, resulting in the need to manage stigmas and conceal or reveal certain identity markers as they guests attempt to portray themselves in the most favorable light, as most deserving of superior service provision. This study is confirmation of much previous research, and in alignment with many theorists like Goffman and Becker. However this study has exposed a gap in the established literature, in its understanding of the downsides of faith-based organizations that many are not comfortable acknowledging.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

My name is Maeve Daby and I am a student at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am inviting you to participate in a research study as part of my Sociology Senior Thesis requirement. Involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may freely choose to participate or not. I am interested in learning about volunteers/ employee's motivations for joining [this organization]. I will ask a series of interview questions in order to establish a comprehensive background of your history with volunteering/ working at a nonprofit organization like [this one].

Participant data will remain anonymous and confidential, meaning that it would be impossible for someone to determine how a specific participant responded. If you no longer want to continue participating in the study, you have the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. There will be no deception involved, as you will be informed that the purpose of this study is mere discovery. I hope to establish a connection between your motivation for working at [this organization], and identification of the goals and reach of said organization.

If you have any questions about the research or your participation in it, please contact me, Maeve Daby (dabym@union.edu) or my advisor, Timothy Stablien (stableit@union.edu). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the Union College Human Subjects Review Committee Chair Joshua Hart (hartj@union.edu) or the Office for Human Research Protections (https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/).

Appendix B

Interview questions

<u>Personal</u>

- Background/ demographic -

    - What is your race?

    - What would you estimate to be your yearly income?

        - Is that the only income in your household?

        - What's your living situation like at home- married, divorced, single?

    - What gender do you identify as?

    - What is your age?

    - Would you mind sharing your religious affiliation?

- How long have you worked at [this organization]?

    - What is your role at [this organization]?

    - Run me through a typical day at [this organization] for you?

    - What motivated you to work at a nonprofit organization?

- Are there any downsides of day to day life working for a nonprofit, like [this one]?

    - Are there any areas of opportunity - room for improvement?

    - Is there anything holding the organization back from making these improvements now?

- Do you enjoy [this organization]'s faith based method?

<u>Religion</u>

- Was your decision to work at [this organization] motivated by religion at all?

- How do you think [this organization]'s religious affiliations impact its reach?

  - Could you give me an example of this impact?

  - Would you say it entices more individuals to volunteer/ seek resources there?

    - Do you have any examples of a time when an individual discontinued use of [this organization]'s services due to their religious affiliation?

- How do you reconcile serving people of different faiths than what [this organization] is founded on?

  - How do you reconcile serving people with no faith preference?

  - Could you give me an example of a time where you served someone with conflicting faith preferences?

Organization

- What is [this organization]'s most successful program and why?

  - Do you know the religious affiliations of the individuals that participate in this program?

  - Could you give me an example of how this program is connected to the [this organization]'s faith based method?

  - Why do most people come to [this organization]?

    - Could you give me an example of a specific reason someone may walk in the door for the first time, and why they would routinely come back?

- Give me your best example of how you've seen your organization make a difference in someone's life?

- How have you personally made a difference in someone's life through your work

   at [this organization]?

- Do you attribute this success to the organization, yourself, or a higher power like

   God?

- What are people's experiences - good and bad, within the Mission?

- What are [this organization]'s most urgent needs?

   - What have you observed as the community's most urgent needs?

   - Can you explain the (dis)similarity between the two?

- How would you compare your organization and the results of your programs to similar/

nearby organizations?

   - How do you work with similar organizations to address similar issues?

   - Do you think your organization is better at addressing these issues because of

      your religious emphasis?

Appendix C

HSRC Exemption

UNION COLLEGE HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE
STATEMENT OF EXEMPTION

THIS FORM TO BE USED TO DECLARE THAT A HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH PROJECT IS EXEMPT FROM REVIEW

Please type your responses in the fields provided. The grey fields will expand if more space is needed. When completed, please deliver to Joshua Hart, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee, Bailey Hall 302 (hartj@union.edu).

1. Name of faculty researcher or sponsor > Professor Timothy Stablein
   Email address > Stableit@union.edu

2. Name of student researcher (if applicable) > Maeve Daby
   Email address > Dabym@union.edu

3. Please briefly describe the research (i.e., who the subjects will be and where will they be located, what they will they experience, and what kinds of information will they provide). >
   Subjects will be employees and volunteers at City Mission, they will be asked interview questions about their motivation for working at a nonprofit

4. Will subjects be given an opportunity to agree or decline, in advance, to participate (e.g., via informed consent)? **If "no," please complete an application to engage in research involving human subjects.**>
   Yes, all subjects will be able to read the interview questions then sign an informed consent form, prior to conducting the interviews

5. Will the information collected from subjects be anonymous or confidential? **If "no," please complete an application to engage in research involving human subjects.** >
   Yes, the researcher will have access to PII but will keep this information confidential. Any information the subject reveals that could identify themselves will be omitted.

6. Is it likely that this research will cause subjects harm or pain? Is it physically invasive? Is it likely to cause subjects to sustain any significant adverse lasting impact? Is it likely the subjects will find any aspects of the research to be offensive or embarrassing? **If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," please complete an application to engage in research involving human subjects.**> No - all interview questions are benign

7. Does the research involve deceiving subjects about the nature or purposes of the research? Does it involve the collection of sensitive information? **If yes, please complete an application to engage in research involving human subjects.** >
   No - subjects will sign an informed consent form, and the information collected will be personal information that they are comfortable sharing.

8. Does the research involve subjects under the age of 18? **If yes, please complete an application to engage in research involving human subjects.** >
   No - all subjects will be above the age to consent for themselves. Any volunteer/ employee under 18 will not be admitted to the interviews.

CERTIFICATION: I certify that:

The statements above are accurate to best of my knowledge.

Maeve Daby	9/13/22	*Timothy Stablein*	9/14/22
Student researcher (if applicable)	date	Faculty researcher/advisor	date

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Hart, Joshua <hartj@union.edu>   Sep 16, 2022, 9:51 AM
to Timothy, me

Greetings,

Thank you for submitting a statement of exemption. Your project is exempt from review by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Union College as per 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

Best,

Josh Hart
Chair, Union College HSRC

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