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Our Home is Gone: Homeless Veterans and the Road Back

By

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Our Home Is Gone

Homeless Veterans and the Road Back

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For My Father

Without him, I would never have survived

my war at home.

homecoming: (n)

a return to home’s home; arrival at home

fantasy: (n)

1. the forming of mental images, esp. wondrous or strange fantasies
2. an imagined or conjured up sequence fulfilling a psychological need; daydream

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ABSTRACT

Society has become familiar with the plight of individuals who line the streets of almost every major city in America. Sociologists, social workers, and government agencies have studied the homeless as long as they have existed in modern society. But the inundation of homeless individuals who began to flood the streets in the 1980s contains an additional demographic, the homeless as a veteran.

The presence of veterans among the homeless population has consistently and proportionally been higher than in the general population. Past research has indicated that the service member's unique wartime experience is correlated to instances of mental illness and post-traumatic stress, both of which may have contributed to the prevalence of homelessness within such a distinct population. This notion has been bolstered by depictions in popular media and through representations of the "Rambo-like" imagery used to illustrate veterans, much of which serves to fuel society's ill-conceived impressions of homeless veterans. With a few notable exceptions, there has been very little qualitative study on homeless veterans, their lives, and their subculture; the page on qualitative explanations for the causal link between veterans and the phenomenon of homelessness remains mostly barren.

Results from this research indicate that the primary path to homelessness in veterans is not unlike those taken by non-veteran homeless, that substance abuse has a significant role in the perpetuation of this phenomenon. Homeless veterans do however exhibit a wider range of feelings that propagate homelessness in the non-veteran homeless population, namely isolation, loneliness, and limited access to vital social resources, some of which can be identified as preexisting risk factors that accompanied an individual to his enlistment into the military. The individual's status as a veteran serves to complicate or otherwise exacerbate negative circumstances rather than necessarily assisting efforts to repair social relations and reintegrate into civilian society.

Through the use of qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews with homeless veterans, detailed ethnography, and by employing a multi-perspective approach, data were

collected from homeless veterans and considered in addition to the perspectives of the institutions involved in caring for homelessness. This study is intended to bridge the gap between the organizations that seek to serve the homeless, the homeless veterans, and society at large, and to penetrate the veneers of what we know about homelessness by capturing the voices and experiences of those who live it.

INTRODUCTION

When the Spartans returned from their odyssey after the long and tumultuous Penopelisian Wars, they were eager to reunite with their families. As Greece's finest warriors, the Spartans had fought bravely for their native land. Land that consisted of nothing more than soil and dirt was, to the weary warriors, the home for which they had fought for so bravely. Upon arriving at their villages, the men were surprised to discover that the place that had so vividly occupied their dreams appeared vastly different in reality. Their own homes were unfamiliar to their eyes. Mothers and wives who had known their sons and husbands since birth, had difficulty in recognizing the men who came home. They may have returned with their shields, instead of upon them, but they nonetheless suffered wounds, that were for many, just as deep.

Portraits

Homelessness is not a condition limited to the "others." Nor is it a characteristic of specific individuals, races, or demographic. Homeless veterans have names and faces; they have lived lives and are real people.

Spencer Smith

Spencer Smith was born in Many, LA and was interviewed at a boarding house in Lawrence, MA. As a black, fifty-one year old male, he appeared much younger due to his athletic physique. Mr. Smith lived in both Louisiana and Massachusetts, moving to New England in the 10th grade. After arriving in Massachusetts, he was expelled from school and “never bothered” to return. He attributed his move as simply resulting from wanting to leave where he was for something new.

When he turned seventeen, Mr. Smith enlisted in the U.S. Army and was stationed in New England. During this time, he also met a girl that he later married after he learned she was pregnant. He eventually had two children with her during the 1980s while he worked at a shoe factory in Lawrence. He said that the factory and the city in which he now lives was a very different place from where he grew up because Mr. Smith was an adolescent during the American Civil Rights Movement. He recalled being in school while they were being racially integrated and attended an all-black kindergarten, an all-black grammar school, and all-black junior high school. It was not until high school that Mr. Smith became regularly exposed to white teenagers. Race was much more conspicuous then and he recalled how polarized the country was during his childhood and commented at how different the world had become.

He currently lives in a boarding house in Lawrence, MA and spends most days by himself in his room. When interviewed, he was clean, sober, and neatly dressed. His answers were coherent and articulate.

Robert Folks

Robert Folks was interviewed at a transitional house in Roxbury, an inner city area of Boston. He was forty-nine at the time of the interview and lived by himself in one of the rooms. Mr. Folks was born in Trinidad and came to the U.S. when he was about seventeen, first living in Brooklyn, NY. After a few marital problems, he said that New York was “too small” for both his wife and himself and moved to Boston, staying with a female companion he knew in the area.

About that time, Mr. Folks said he left active duty in the U.S. Army to join the reserve component. Initially, he was supposed to be a helicopter pilot but was rejected from the program when the military later learned that he was not a U.S. citizen. He later went on to drive trucks in the Army and became a school bus driver following his military discharge. After some time driving the bus, Mr. Folks said he was unhappy and asked to be reactivated in the Army and was later sent to the Persian Gulf during Desert Storm.

When he returned from deployment, his Class 1 license (to drive trucks) was invalid due to the introduction of modern commercial driving licenses. He trained for the licensing exam, and in the meantime drove trucks for a sausage company, but was later forced to leave after the test examiner failed him for having less than an inch of his tire over the line during the parallel parking portion of the test. He never retook the exam and instead left to work elsewhere.

Mr. Folks suffered from back and knee pain he sustained in the military and while working for Federal Express years later. Unable to lift heavy boxes, he was fired from his job with FedEx and said he has been in and out of homeless shelters ever since. He seemed reasonably distraught over what occurred in his past and remarked at how difficult life had been for him.

The interview was cut short after his ex-wife had come to pay a visit to him at the transitional house. He planned to speak a little longer but upon seeing some of the other gentlemen at the house talk to his ex-wife, Robert began to appear anxious and apprehensive and promptly left to intervene, asking to have the remaining part of the interview rescheduled.

Nick Coard

Nick Coard was interviewed in the fall of 2006 at a shelter in Boston, where he stayed for a number of weeks. He was soft-spoken and very neat in his appearance. With his thick-rimmed eyeglasses, Nick looked much younger than his forty-four years.

A native of Massachusetts, he said he grew up in Mattapan, a place he affectionately called “Murder Pan” because of its high homicide rate. He enlisted shortly after high school in the early 80s and served as an engineer with the U.S. Army. Upon discharge, he worked a number of jobs including pumping gas at a gas station.

This began a number of other short-term jobs: he worked as a temporary laborer, then with a cleaning company, and finally in a laundry room at a Boston hospital. He was later fired from the hospital because his car broke down and he could no longer arrive at work on time. Without his wife or any family to support him, he checked into the shelter.

Nick’s ex-wife was also his Sunday school teacher and there existed a considerable age gap, yet he expressed very traditional views about marriage and considered the institution of marriage as sacred and did not really believe in divorce. During many of the arguments with his now ex-wife, he said he often felt emasculated because of her treatment towards him. He reported feeling powerless at certain times while with his former wife and said it this had something to do with why he became homeless. He seemed uneasy speaking about his wife and

quickly changed the subject to talk about how his physical injuries had also been responsible for his homelessness.

He was hurt badly and temporarily paralyzed after being intentionally struck with a baseball bat only a few years ago. He did not elaborate on the exact details but said that after the injury, he was unable to work or provide for himself. This pain was later made worse when his wife had left him. He began to use drugs more frequently afterwards and self-medicated regularly to deal with the physical and emotional pain.

America's Wars

"When I despair, I am alone, and I am often alone. In crowded rooms and walking the streets of our cities, I am alone and full of despair…a quiet scream within a buried coffin" (Swofford 359). These words, written in the memoirs of a Gulf War Marine, so eloquently capture the sentiments that are far too removed from contemporary sociological research today. However, events like September 11, 2001 and the 2003 Iraq conflict brought to the forefront of the American psyche something that has led us to examine more closely those who have fought for our country, something that was forgotten for more than a decade: war.

Iwo Jima, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq. For some, they are simple words, places around the world in Asia and the Middle East. But to others, the words conjure up images of dark figures darting through tree lines, the clattering sound of machine gun fire, and the memories of a past life. For many veterans, the wars of their past rage on at home, as they continue to struggle with the obstacles of civilian life. The increased number of American forces deploying overseas for military operations in the Middle East has correspondingly multiplied the number of possible at-risk veterans returning home from these areas. The parallels being drawn between the most

recent conflict in Iraq and the Vietnam War have already been proven accurate to some degree by the difficulties facing returning veterans. Research is now catching up with these current events, and an increased number of quantitative studies on veterans and mental illnesses are appearing (Hoge 16).

The American experience in Vietnam and the numbers of veterans who suffered from mental illnesses following their homecoming, increased society's consciousness of the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder. Medical research conducted in the last half century has significantly improved recognition, diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses faced by our troops. In light of this, recent research on homeless veterans has often been limited to demographic information regarding illnesses, disabilities and pathologies, such as alcoholism and mental health issues.

This study was not intended to simply uncover correlations, but rather, to give a substantive view of the subculture of homeless veterans within urban areas, more specifically, to focus on the strategies and mechanisms utilized by the homeless to facilitate their survival in civilian society. If we can understand the challenges faced by homeless veterans, we can gain a better understanding of the larger systems at play and ultimately have greater appreciation for the situation faced by our nation's veterans.

Purging Preconceptions

The image of the combat veteran as a maladjusted, alcoholic, violence-prone individual suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is strengthened by the very research that intends to help them. As Americans read articles in newspapers and magazines that summarize scholarly journals about veterans and these ailments, they will inevitably associate one with the

other. In this sense, the irony of such research is discovered: as these studies bring to light new findings on mental health issues and other aspects of maladjustment, they attempt to help veterans and may even lead to policies and programs that facilitate successful adjustment by recommending such things as PTSD clinics and other avenues of care. But by doing this, the research affects society's perspectives on veterans.

The stigma that has followed veterans most notably in America during the Vietnam War still continues today for veterans at large and affects the newest generation of returning troops from Iraq. The image of the Vietnam veteran has been solidified by theatrical depictions of them in such films as *Rambo* and *Taxi Driver*, where the public is fed the image of the veteran as an outcast and loner, who is unable to establish any meaningful connections with the world. Even the Veterans Administration (VA) has come to inadvertently promote this image. In previous literature which aimed to profile veterans, a VA brochure described the veteran as somewhat unstable and belligerent that, "…he is less willing to accept authority…veterans typically exercise less control over emotions and feelings…" and leads us to this stereotypical persona of the veteran as this "crazy person" (Katzman 9). This image of the veteran is one that still remains today, albeit perhaps less obvious, but nonetheless society continues to stigmatize veterans as acting or behaving a certain way.

To this extent, there are a number of preconceptions of veterans and how they are *supposed* to act or things he is expected to feel. They are expected to have traumatizing experiences in war that they are unwilling and/or unable to share, and few people will ever question them about it. But such conventional wisdom is not necessarily applicable in all cases and to all veterans, and furthermore, may lead to even more isolation of the veteran and his experiences. Veterans may *want* to speak about their experiences that they have had kept within

themselves, to normalize these experiences by discussing them with friends and family, and thereby enjoy a therapeutic sensation from sharing these stories. But popular culture has almost stipulated that veterans should not want to talk about these experiences and it may become difficult for them to make sense of what they went through simply because there is no one to talk. As veterans may not be willing to necessarily pursue formal therapy, the only people left to discuss these experiences with are family members and friends, but because of the assumptions perpetuated by popular culture, that veterans do not want to talk about their experiences, many veterans are deprived of this opportunity to express themselves and normalize their experiences.

This is the rationale for capturing the voices of veterans, to normalize their experience not only amongst themselves, but within larger society as well. The process of normalization allows stigma to be overcome and facilitates integration. Countries like Israel and South Korea, which mandate obligatory military service, may find that their veterans have an easier time returning to civilian society. With the so many families having sons, husbands, or even daughters in the military, they are more likely to be familiar with the homecoming of veterans and may be able to better assist them in overcoming feelings of isolation, alienation – perhaps even more willing to give them the recognition that Vietnam veterans struggled so much with. In these countries, the veteran is not considered so *different* by civilian society and this potentially facilitates the transition of his identity from soldier to civilian thus aiding in reintegration. The significance in this is that the perception of being different can often precipitate later feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social disintegration, the risk factors for veteran and non-veteran homelessness.

There are no tale-tell signs for identifying a veteran and as such, a person's gardener, lawyer, or classmate could easily be a veteran. They are just as normal as others in society, but

when a veteran identifies himself, how he is perceived to those around him is immediately altered, as every subsequent perception of him will be through the filter or lens of viewing him as a veteran. For example, if the veteran begins to exhibit tendencies stereotypically assigned to those in the military, anything from eating particularly fast or being confrontational or physical, these attributes will immediately be seen as a result of combat experiences. To this extent, the traditional studies that reinforce correlations between combat experiences and the prevalence of PTSD serve concomitantly to reinforce preconceptions that a veteran will experience mental illnesses (Hoge 16). This leads to a lack of opportunity for the veteran to shed this identity and assimilate himself into other civilian identities. If the gardener, lawyer, or college student will always be a veteran first to those around him, and if they see his veteran's status as the primary distinguishing factor in his identity, then it makes more difficult the fulfillment of a civilian role and hinders the successful transition to civilian life. If he's always a veteran first, he can never fully become anything else and never become fully a part of the society outside of being a veteran and thus never integrate and transition into larger society. He will never be able to truly come home – his home will be gone.

A PERSONAL INTEREST

I first read about the Swofford memoir quoted previously from a book review in a *People* magazine more than three years ago. Quality reading materials in An Najaf, Iraq were quite scarce and I quickly learned to enjoy reading everything from Danielle Steele to the latest celebrity gossip concerning Jessica Simpson and husband Nick Lachey. But I eventually picked up Swofford's memoirs, entitled *Jarhead*, on the flight back from Kuwait in a gift shop at an air base in Germany. I had only twelve dollars in my pocket and buying the book meant I would have no cab fare from the base to my apartment once we returned home. In light of the more than twelve-hour flight I had to look forward to, I rolled the dice and bought the book.

The Road Back

The buses that shuttled us from March Air Force Base to our own installation in the Mojave Desert in Twenty-nine Palms, CA were hot and uncomfortable. We caught sight of these beautiful "freedom buses" sometime mid-afternoon, and quite unlike our midnight departure almost a year earlier, they arrived promptly. Pretty girls, convertibles, and outlet malls

glimmered under bright Southern California sky as we drove east on Interstate 10. At sixty miles an hour we drove, away from Iraq, away from war, and away from the things that would nevertheless haunt us for years to come.

I returned to see that my family had unexpectedly flown the three thousand miles from New York to our base in the Mojave Desert. I pretended to be a little upset that they had spent so much money on airfare, but in actuality, was happy to see them – and happy to not have to plead with a cab driver for a ride home. I never really thought of my own homecoming as anything significant. We were among the last units to return and the parades had long been over. The buses drove us to an empty parking lot on the base to a small gathering of family and friends; many of the junior Marines did not even have any family there. Once they got off the bus and turned in their weapons, most of them simply walked back to the barracks.

The New War

I never looked at life the same way after I came home. The memories of Iraq pervaded every facet of my life as I began to appreciate things I had never noticed before. Ice cubes, electricity, the scent of women's perfume, the world seemed to open up for me the way I imagine it does for a cancer patient, who had just been told his disease had miraculously vanished.

"Coming home" was the *fantasy* of all the Marines, it essentially became the one hope we lived –and died – for: to regain the normalcy of the lives we had once lived. My first day back I felt like the entire world seemed to be the same, that *I* was the only thing that had changed. I was an alien visiting a world I vaguely remembered but no longer belonged to. I saw things with a clarity that I never could before, but sleepless nights and the shock of coming home underscored my new lucidity and the sense of novelty the world had taken.

My fantasies, as it turns out, were just that, they were fabricated dreams of a conjured up reality – real life proved much more difficult. For months I could not sleep in my own bed unless I set up my sleeping area as it had been in Iraq: in one hundred degree weather with a space heater on all night and a nine-millimeter pistol placed under my pillow. I had trouble with loud noises and rarely ate. I began to use alcohol and tobacco more frequently and spent most of my off-duty time alone in my apartment.

My friends had either reenlisted and received orders to more "relaxed" units outside of the infantry or had completed their enlistment and moved on. For the most part, being alone on a semi-desolate Marine base out in the desert was quite pleasant. It afforded me time for self-reflection, for introspection, and for obtaining the peacefulness one can only find in the barren landscape out in the middle of nowhere. I never really got lonely out there, perhaps because I only really get lonely when I am around people. It was a moment to refresh and renew myself after the war and to prepare for the war that lay ahead.

Finding a Way Home

I never graduated from high school. I suppose at the tender age of sixteen I had been lured in by the beguiling spiel of brass-balls recruiters, movies that glorified war, and ultimately the chance to predicate my life on something more. Growing up in Port Washington, NY, I was raised in an ethnically and socio-economically homogenous area of Long Island, where the logical progression of life after high school demanded entrance into college to meet the social expectations of normalcy.

In the summer of 2000, after turning seventeen, I signed my name on a dotted line that would change more than just the next four years of my life. As a teenager I wanted so much to be

different, but sitting there, on the cheap swivel chair in my apartment, I realized there were worse things than being ordinary.

I took night classes whenever I could, tactfully requesting permission from my commanding officer for this luxury of luxuries. Although my unit was already gearing up to return to Iraq, my time in the Corps was short and they had already began to scale back my responsibilities, assigning them to my eventual replacement. For six months, I worked on my grades and took the necessary admissions test. Sending the application, I hoped for the best and dreamt about spring break trips to Cancun and lazy days spent waking up at noon.

After struggling to finally be admitted to an institution of higher education, I was surprised to discover that my first few days as a full time college student were much more difficult than I could have ever imagined. As a twenty-one-year-old-minority-transfer student moving from California, trying to find my place was difficult enough, but being a veteran seemed to compound everything; it was like I was just out of step with everyone else. I knew "who I was" out there in the streets of Iraq – it had taken me years to explore the depths of myself and finally become comfortable with my inner character and identity. But on the college quad I was awkward and lost. I had no idea who or what I was supposed to be.

I first became interested in the experiences of other veterans mainly because I wanted to know how those before me dealt with the problems and obstacles in returning home from war. I read from memoirs of veterans from the World Wars, Vietnam, and the Gulf War, and realized that such struggles were actually more common than I had expected. They helped me to understand my own life in context of their experiences and I learned much in studying the biography of veterans who had truly struggled with their homecoming and faced financial and

social difficulties, as well as homelessness. Through this reading, I felt as though I was not alone and that I was only just a little removed from those I intended to study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The phenomenon of homeless veterans is unique because it encompasses a variety of different issues regarding not only the occurrence of homeless men in urban areas, but also the distinctive quality of a veteran returning to civilian society. A holistic reading that recognizes the particular traits of the homeless veteran is required in eventually researching and discussing the topic.

The amount of research dedicated to homelessness is varied and extensive. A simple Google search of "homelessness" will yield more half a million entries. Research has been performed on a variety of topics, from facts and figures published by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to substantive investigations on the causes of urban homelessness. Although research on homelessness is abundant, specific research on homeless veterans is typically featured as excerpts, appendices, or chapters in larger works devoted to homelessness in general. However, such quantitative and qualitative information, in any form, is still essential in any discussion of veterans' experiences with homelessness.

The important aspect to remember is that homelessness has almost always been related to the themes of poverty, integration, and social isolation. Throughout the decades, these features have been reiterated in both the veteran and non-veteran homeless population with a few notable differences. Firstly, an analysis of general homelessness and the manner in which it has developed through the years is explored. Secondly, the evolution of homelessness throughout the years in terms of how it has been related to the crucial variable of *integration* is investigated. Integration is linked to isolation, loneliness, and social bonds – the most salient risk factors in both veteran and non-veteran homelessness. Thirdly, the significance of *when* these issues arise for the veteran is of central concern, specifically in relation to whether poverty or feelings of loneliness were a consequence *of* military service or as grounds *for* military service. An all-volunteer force (AVF), compared to a draft-era force, means that only a small proportion of the population will actually want serve – having fewer veterans also means that the experience will be more exclusive, more exceptional and perhaps fuel feelings of isolation or anomie.

Fourthly, of importance is the issue of how the "otherness" of general homelessness slowly began to pervade the minds of Americans and the manner in which this relates to veterans, especially in the context of a country where the burden of service is placed on only a small fraction of the population. Special attention was paid to how poverty, integration and social isolation related to the evolution of homelessness throughout the eras, in both veteran and non-veteran homeless populations and how homeless veterans differ from non-veteran homeless men. Later emphasis will be placed on how veterans' status specifically relates to isolation and loneliness in eras concerning Vietnam and the AVF, comparing AVF-era veterans to draft-era veterans. Lastly, a brief overview of a rare qualitative study on veterans is reviewed. This will bring us closer to the issue of how veterans' homelessness differs from non-veteran

homelessness and lead us to possible clarifications on the inexplicable link between military service and homelessness.

The Progression of Homelessness

Homelessness in American history is certainly nothing new and individuals living without a regular domicile have arguably been present since the inception of the country. Being poor and being homeless have often been considered as similar conditions and representations of poor "hobos" have become staples of areas like New York City's Bowery. There are many issues in which the two groups, the poor and the homeless, are virtually indistinguishable and the scope of any qualitative study of homelessness needs to take into account the problem of extreme poverty. The extremely poor often constitute the "pool from which the homeless are drawn" (Rossi 8). Simply put, those with little or no income are often at the highest risk of becoming homeless and thus the two phenomena have long been synonymous. But beginning in the 1980s, the landscape of homelessness began to differ substantially and has evolved to more closely resemble the current homelessness (Rossi 8). Consequently, a brief but concise historical analysis is necessary.

Homelessness in Colonial and Early America

Specifics about homelessness in colonial times are unknown primarily because little was kept in the form of written record. The homeless were simply viewed as being indigent members of each respective community who were unable to support themselves to the extent of providing their own shelter. At this point, the homeless were not necessarily seen as a separate subculture as they sometimes are today. In modern society, a certain "otherness" leads to the transparency

that has been extended to members of the homeless population – passersby often try to keep their distance from the homeless, ignoring them as they step over their huddled bodies in subways.

The significance of this relationship between contemporary and colonial homelessness is the critical distinction made between those who were "original" members of the town with settlement rights and therefore entitled to assistance from fellow citizens and those who were nonmembers or simply part of the transient population to which the town had no responsibility for (Rossi 17). This distinction allowed for a stable social support network to be supplied for those original members who found themselves in adverse situations. The community existed as a safeguard for members fall back on during difficult financial times or from deaths of family members. Since original members of the town who had become homeless were seen not necessarily as a separate group people or as another group of "others," they were treated cordially as equivalent members of the community (Rossi 18). The value lies in the fact that such members were still *integrated* within the community even after becoming homeless – they were not disintegrated or segregated from the village or forced to subside on the margins of society.

Occurrences of "neighborly actions" can be said to characterize the era of colonial America when communities were generally smaller and more closely-knit than they are under modern conditions. Shelters as we know them did not exist, and instead local responsibility fell upon the shoulders of the fellow members of the community, fostering a stronger sense of mutual dependence and commitment between individuals. Kinship bonds presumably remained intact, as did levels of social integration, perhaps helping to deter instances of anomie, alienation, and isolation. Since written records were generally not maintained, the specifics of veterans in these communities remains largely unknown but as standing armies were generally not kept at this

time, the distinction between veterans' homelessness and non-veteran homelessness had most likely not yet been made.

Those who were counted as part of the "transient poor" were often in more difficult situations and accounted for the other side of the homeless population. Town meeting minutes, from which data on the poor and homeless were drawn, fall silent in terms of the outcome of those who were not part of the town (Rossi 18). Historical evidence indicates that such individuals simply continued to wander from place to place, were taken in by good Samaritans, or lived on the outskirts of such towns and settlements. Without settlement rights, they did not deserve the same level of support.

This attention paid to between the "deserving poor" and those who did not merit such support, continued throughout history and extended to the post-Civil War period, during which time the aftermath of the war caused a substantial increase in homelessness and transience (Rossi 18). Unlike the "local" poor who were viewed as members of the community, the men who were often employed by such labor agencies were from areas far away from where they worked; they were young, *unattached* men who were largely uneducated and lacked the necessary job skills for more gainful employment (Rossi 19). This more socially disintegrated and unattached individual during the post-Civil War period began to more closely resemble the isolated homeless today. The vast amount of physical labor needed during the various phases of Reconstruction supplied the poor and displaced with short-lived opportunities for cheap labor but little stability. It served to temporarily suppress the future problems of homelessness, with work readily available, men who would otherwise be homeless could find unskilled labor with decent wages. But the decades following the Civil War can best be characterized as an extremely turbulent time that followed one of the deadliest wars in our nation's history in which three

percent of the entire American population became casualties – the economic, societal, and familial impact became almost inevitable and most severely hurt the veterans who had escaped the physical traumas of war (Nofi 1).

After the work for Reconstruction dried out, men and families began to suffer the delayed repercussions from the war. Families were shattered as many of them had lost sons, fathers, and brothers to the war. The veterans and other men who survived were recruited by labor agents (middlemen commissioned to recruit workers) and worked in the highly transient labor markets and were accompanied by immigrant workers, and other young males (Rossi 19). But as the need for cheap physical labor began to shrink, these men found themselves out of work and without wage to support themselves and became homeless.

For veterans, poverty, instability, and disintegration were compounded with war related stress, and at times simply proved too much. Mental illness and the difficulty in reintegrating with civilian society often became enough to perpetuate homelessness within veterans. Named after the physiological alterations in blood pressure and pulse rate that developed in a soldier's cardiovascular system after being in war, instances of what was being called during the post-Civil War era as "Soldier's Heart" began to take shape and what would later became known as post-traumatic stress disorder made its early appearances during this time – further adding to the difficulty faced exclusively by veterans within the homeless populations (Friedman 1). It was at this time that veterans began emerging out of the woodwork as a distinguishable subset of general homelessness.

The Great Depression and the Emergence of Skid Row

The homeless population remained part of the transient and poor, and for a long time, was counted under the same heading. But in the years leading up the Great Depression and beyond, the numbers of families and individuals being displaced skyrocketed. Although various federal relief agencies were involved in the studying and instituting of relief measures, no official count of the displaced was ever made; estimates ranged from the hundreds of thousands up to 1.5 million during the worst years (Wickendon 1987). Distinctions for homeless veterans were generally not being made because of the substantial increase in general homelessness. This coincided with the nineteenth century rise of Skid Rows, which were established in most major cities as sections of the city that were taken over by the homeless and essentially became exclusive homeless neighborhoods (Rossi 20). Cheap housing facilities, restaurants, and pawnshops often characterized such neighborhoods and offered its dwellers food and lodging which attracted large populations of indigent men. Many of these men provided the labor for construction, agriculture, and the unloading of ships or railroad freight as they offered seasonal employment in urban areas (Rossi 20). The sporadic employment brought these single men into the urban areas and many decided to stay on after completion of their jobs. The appearance of such seasonal workers and temporary laborers provided a steady flow of individuals into the Skid Rows that inevitably began to grow.

The Great Depression changed much of the composition of the homeless men. Suddenly, homelessness became a norm and one that was not to be gone so quickly. The era is most aptly depicted by the various shantytowns, otherwise known as “Hobo Jungles” or “Hoovervilles” named after the President who believed the government need not become involved in the Depression and who initially refused to help. Veterans became a more visible subgroup in this

later population as popularized by reports from the "Bonus Army" during the 1930s, in which thousands of World War I veterans marched to Washington camping outside in such "Hoovervilles" until they were given their bonus payment for World War I military service. The presence of such "Hoovervilles" remained as large, impermanent, irregular housing facilities built largely out of scrap metal, tin, plywood, and other materials. A number of these units built within a small area near or in an urban area constituted a "shantytown" and became the dwelling place of large numbers of otherwise homeless men during the 1930s depression.

But as World War II began to take shape, the economy improved and men began being drafted into the military or simply enlisted. Increased wartime manufacturing meant that employment rates were high. During the post-Depression era, homelessness and Skid Row areas declined sharply when compared with the 1930s, but did not necessarily disappear (Rossi 27). Many of the transient workers found employment, riding the wave of economic prosperity that came with the war and with employment these men found reintegration. Many others were drafted into the military eliminating much of the homeless population, but still others were unable or unwilling to do either.

In a Chicago study performed during this time, researchers discovered that local homeless men were considerably older than their transient counterparts in other parts of the country; most were unmarried or had never been married, were undereducated and had been homeless significantly longer than the population of seasonal workers (Bogue 103). The composition of the homeless individual began to change considerably and homelessness no longer became a temporary phenomenon reserved for when there was no work – rather it now started to become a full time occupation. As mentioned previously, most of the younger homeless transient workers were taken in or drafted into the military for World War II and no

longer became counted in the homeless population. But the older homeless men who could not be drafted found themselves with few places to go and remained on the streets. These older men were often unemployed for much longer and had lived in the shelter considerably longer than their younger counterparts (Bogue 173). With shorter stints of employment and shorter durations of stable residence, the older men were significantly less *integrated* than their younger counterparts. In this sense, *age* became a prevailing factor correlated to homelessness in terms of interfering with or making more difficult integration with society. The theme of integration and obstacles to social inclusion were prevalent, and in this era related specifically to age.

The modernity and progress that began to increase after the war, also brought in larger populations of people that moved into the city. Increased urban populations inevitably increased the urban squalor and Skid Row areas found themselves becoming next-door neighbors to downtown stores and offices. “The physical distance between Chicago’s West Madison Street and the corner of State and Adams had not changed, but the commercial and administrative activities that were once concentrated at those crossroads spread west and south up to the borders of Skid Row…urban decay now rubbed elbows with the modernity and progress,” and given the new visibility of poverty, something had to be done, ushering in a new age of homelessness (Rossi 28).

The 1950s and 60s

A host of organizations like the Department of Housing and Urban Development were created and designed to deal with the problem of homelessness. Researchers in Chicago, Philadelphia and other urban areas began to take notice. The studies provided literature on the populations of homeless and emerged with findings that helped to determine the numbers of

homeless and accumulated demographic information; they also enumerated some of the potential causes for homelessness in this era. Social scientists who studied Skid Rows in the post-World War II period often remarked on the social isolation of the homeless: many were never married, or unmarried, had few close friends or family ties, and were homeless as a result of extreme poverty from low earning or benefit levels, alcoholism, mental or physical illness, and /or disaffiliation because of absent or weak kinship bonds with few or no friends (Rossi 31). These new homeless marked the nascent appearances of modern homelessness.

The 1950s and 60s showed strong signs that whatever social problems caused the emergence of Skid Row, they were slowly disappearing – many social scientists even predicated a decline in their relative size (Rossi 32). Researchers like Howard Bahr and Theodore Caplow were commissioned by organizations like the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Housing and Home Finance Agency to study Skid Row areas in the hopes that such areas might be replaced with the burgeoning business districts; they predicted a decline from 14,000 in 1949 to 8,000 in 1964 (Bahr 224). Other researchers cited high vacancy rates at the cubicle hotels to be evidence that Skid Row was declining and contended that its economic function was disappearing because as many low-skilled tasks were being mechanized, labor markets began to shrink (Rossi 32).

But the persistence of homelessness despite postwar economic expansion had not yet been explained and the question of how homelessness could still continue, notwithstanding the relative abundance of jobs, remained to be answered. Many researchers alluded to the possibility that homelessness was intertwined with living outside family units – definitions of homelessness during the 1950s and 60s often meant exactly that and began to include the element of residing without family. Fewer single males and females tended to live away from their immediate family

as we can arguably say is the norm today. In the mid-twentieth century, young males who lived outside of their homes or outside of their family units were now counted within the homeless population (Rossi 30). This indicates not only that the norm was to live with family, but more importantly that those who did reside outside their family units and were subsequently termed "homeless," perhaps did so for some particular reason that suggested a dissimilarity in family relationships as compared with similarly-aged non-homeless men. Indeed research from the era finds that, "virtually all the homeless men were unmarried…and although many had families, kinships ties were very tenuous, and few of the homeless maintained contact with family and kin" (Rossi 31). Homelessness began to relate more closely with themes of integration, isolation, and kinship bonds than as earlier with simply poverty.

Common findings in studies performed during the time all pointed presented a picture of the homeless individual and three basic conditions: extreme poverty, disability from advanced age, alcoholism and physical or mental illness, and from disaffiliation as related to the lack of kinship ties, immediate family or friends (Rossi 31). Thus homelessness in modern times began to emerge and the landscape of homelessness today began to take form.

The 1970s, 80s and Beyond: The Perfect Storm

The last two to three decades of the 20th century experienced an unprecedented rise in the homeless population that was brought upon by an almost countless number of events that continue to characterize the current conditions of homelessness. A number of changes occurring during the 1970s and 80s created a veritable "perfect storm" for homelessness. The appearance of homeless men was the result of a variety of these converging factors, at least two of which were caused by the social and economic policies of the period: "Reaganomics" or supply-side

economics, combined with the increase of gentrification or urban renewal projects in the 20th century whose goal it was to remove the eyesores of "shantytowns" and other squalid urban areas (Rossi 19). Such efforts sought to move middle class households into formerly dilapidated neighborhoods, theoretically in an effort to infuse the neighborhoods with capital, economic prosperity, and the eventual renovation of such areas. Simply put, such projects often caused a severe displacement of the poor and lower classes; "cheap hotels" with single room occupancies (SROs) and low-rent apartments that normally housed those who would otherwise be homeless, began to disappear as the numbers living in the streets or shelters conversely increased (Tull 30). In the years from 1970 to 1982, about 1,116,000 SRO units, roughly about half of the total, were lost due to various efforts at urban renewal, gentrification, and implementation of eminent domain – spilling countless numbers of homeless onto the street (Tull 30).

These projects accompanied drastic cuts of federal, state and local funds that provided affordable housing in urban areas. In the 1980s during his two-term presidency, President Reagan significantly reduced the budget for public and Section 8 housing (the government housing voucher subsidization program); the Department for Housing and Urban Development's budget went from $74 billion to a mere $19 billion, and was enacted partially in an effort to reduce exploitation of government subsidies and "Welfare Queens" or those who allegedly took advantage of government funds (Dreier 1). Numbers of new subsidized housing fell from 175,000 to 20,000 per year, as the number of homeless on any given night increased to 600,000 (Dreier 1).

The lack of inexpensive housing and government subsidies was followed by a changing perspective in law enforcement, tacitly allowing for the inundation of dislocated individuals onto American streets. In the earlier years, those who attempted to bed down or occupy public areas,

parks and vestibules were often arrested and brought to jail. The 1980s witnessed an informal decriminalization of many such status crimes as public inebriation, vagrancy, and loitering – a general decreased emphasis placed on such charges which correspondingly allowed for an enlargement of the area in which the homeless found themselves (Rossi 34). Police officers may have sympathized with such individuals or otherwise simply not warranted their presence as a direct threat to the public and turned a "blind eye" towards the men who slept out on the streets. Such an attitude is not unlike the one being fostered today; panhandlers and the homeless are for the most part, left alone by law enforcement officials. Unless they appear to have overstepped the unspoken agreement and committed a "real" crime, they are largely ignored.

This allowed the poor and homeless population one thing that it seldom had previously: *twenty-four-hour-a-day* visibility. The American people could actually see the unkempt hair and shabby, torn clothes on their way to work and not just at night. The responding "emergency shelters" that provided much of the assistance to the homeless today were a form of last resort accommodations providing alternatives to sleeping on the streets. Social organizations compared these shelters to "minimum-security prisons whose gates are open during the day" and later reports indicate that prisons were actually rated *superior* to shelters in terms of safety, cleanliness and food quality (Rossi 35). Not surprisingly, most men preferred to sleep under the stars rather than in these shelters. Despite the numbers of emergency shelters that did effectively remove some of the homeless from the streets, the fact that the majority of such shelters operated at night meant that the homeless were required to leave during the day, and allowed the general population to come into contact with this "other side," making it seem like the shelters simply were much less effective than they actually were. Many believed that the homeless were actually

better off in SROs and cheap hotels than they were at these shelters because such cheap accommodations at least allowed some sort of habitual residence and regularity.

The increasing "observability" of the homeless population in the 1980s led to the passing of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, providing federal monies for shelters, and eventually spawned a number of similar acts and projects at the state and local levels. The McKinney Act is the *only* piece of federal legislation regarding homelessness, though its precedence has led to things such as the Stabilization Services Project in Massachusetts, a three-year community demonstration project aimed at helping the homeless (Argeriou 460).

The 1970s, 80s and Beyond: Potential Numbers and Potential Causes

The landscape of homelessness remains varied today. Again, exact numbers of the homeless remain nearly impossible to estimate because of the "hidden homeless" and further adding to the difficulty in conceptualizing the very definition of homelessness itself. Shelter populations and those in transitional houses are easily identified but still do not represent others living on the streets. The last effort to count all the homeless nationwide was in 1990, and was administered by the Census Bureau which later disavowed its tally since the number obtained was so low that many began to question the validity of the counting method; it led to a nationwide count of 230,000 (Tull 26). In 1983, the Department of Health and Human Services gave an estimate of 2 million homeless meaning that the count made in 1990 would indicate a disappearance of over 1.6 million homeless occurred in less than a decade (Tull 26). The Census Bureau counts were never officially published.

The causes for homelessness have remained quite varied as well. To this day, many observers consider it a result of two primary problems: a) within the homeless themselves, from

drug and alcohol use, and mental illness to financial irresponsibility and divorce, and b) within society, for creating social structures and values that marginalize, oppress, or otherwise adversely effect certain subgroups of the population (Tull 27). Whatever the case may be, the issue of homelessness remains a contentious one and one that is increasingly significant given its peculiar relationship with veterans' status. It begs the question of what the link is between the two presumably unrelated topics.

Although homelessness has existed for centuries, homeless veterans in American history have not really been seen in large numbers until the 1980s when Vietnam veterans began to return home (Rosenheck, 1996:97). Researchers and VA administrators were at first stunned by the sudden outpouring of veterans onto the American streets, but regardless of specific cause, veterans were determined to be, "1.4 times more likely than nonveteran men to be homeless" (Rosenheck, 1996:98). Unlike the hundreds upon thousands of troops who fought in World War II and returned home with relatively few difficulties, Vietnam veterans faced an enormous amount of adversity in their homecoming.

The conclusion of the war in Vietnam was followed by a tremendous amount of turbulence for returning veterans, some of which can still be observed today. Whereas the proportion of adult male homeless veterans in the overall homeless population has been recorded as approximately 33% in the past decade, the overall proportion of veterans in the general population is only 28% (Gamache 481). This means that proportionally, there are more homeless veterans than non-homeless veterans. There remains an inexplicable link between an adult male's status as a veteran and their standing as a homeless individual, which may have its origins in the post-Vietnam era as characterized by the all-volunteer military.

The All – Volunteer Military

The military that is currently fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is often described as a professional and all-volunteer force. Unlike the military of World War II and Vietnam, a draft has not been employed to supply adequate numbers of men and women to serve in the armed forces. Currently all of the troops serving the country are volunteers who willingly joined the Armed Forces of the United States. This group of volunteers has staffed the ranks of the military for a number of decades following the war in Vietnam and continues to do so today. But the transition of the military into an all-volunteer force (AVF), brought about a subsequent change in the composition of the homeless veterans.

AVF-era Veterans vs. Draft-era Veterans

The Vietnam War was one of the most controversial wars in American history. The incursion into Southeast Asia is considered by many to be America's first modern military defeat and the horrors of Vietnam are well documented and have often been represented by disturbing or chaotic imagery in photographs. For reasons such as these, the landscape of homeless veterans as they exist today is often associated with Vietnam draft-era veterans who don their military garb and are assumed to still be troubled by the war.

But significant research is indicating that such presumptions, that most homeless veterans are drafted Vietnam-era vets, are incorrect and instead veterans from the all-volunteer military are in fact *more* at risk than their draft-era counterparts (Tessler, 2002:116). Homeless veterans from the AVF-era are more likely to be less white, less well-educated, unmarried, have drug problems, and more likely to have been treated in a mental hospital as compared with draft-era homeless veterans (Tessler, 2003: 516). AVF-era homeless veterans appeared to have had

significantly more risk factors in relation to integration, isolation, and social bonds as compared to draft-era veterans.

In the post-Vietnam era, when military service had become unpopular, it is reasonable to believe that fewer recruits opted to enlist into the military. The military could not be as selective and enlistees looked to military service not only as an opportunity for social and economic mobility but also as a form of last resort – the potential recruitment of "lower quality" enlistees during early AVF recruits is evidenced by significantly higher dishonorable discharge rates in this era than during the draft-era (Tessler, 2003:519). Furthermore, according to longitudinal comparisons of the standardized Armed Forces Qualifying Test (a test of verbal and quantitative aptitude used to screen out recruits with low potential success in the military) over 300,000 low-aptitude "potentially ineligibles" entered the AVF military between 1976 and 1980; "average AFQT scores among military recruits were lower than at any time since 1960" (Rosenheck, 1996:103). Simply put, "lower quality" recruits, who may have been more at-risk to homelessness, were entering the military in larger numbers during the AVF-era as compared to the draft-era military.

The veterans who served in Vietnam during the wind-down phase and the period immediately following Vietnam, in which an all-volunteer force was implemented, were observed to have consistently being at greater risk for homelessness than previous periods (Rosenheck, 1996:102). Similarly, data from interviews conducted on homeless veterans in 1996 confirms that veterans of the all-volunteer military were more likely to be homeless than those that were drafted (Tessler, 2003:519).

Perhaps the situation is one in which homeless veterans are those who were already in an economically unfavorable position and that because of this, were especially attracted to military

service and were left in the same position after their discharge. These assertions draw attention away from the causal links between mental illness, combat exposure, and homelessness, "a causal model of the genesis of homelessness among veterans found that while mental illnesses other than PTSD, substance abuse, and social isolation were significantly related to homelessness, combat exposure and PTSD were not major predictors" – and in fact the subgroup of veterans at greatest risk of homelessness compared to their non-veteran peers were those who had served *after* Vietnam, during the initial stages of the AVF, when the military service was unpopular, salaries were low, and when the military allowed the admission of poorly adjusted recruits (Rosenheck, 1998:1).

Homeless Veterans vs. the Non-Veteran Homeless

Even if a certain era of veterans are more at risk for homelessness than others, it still remains necessary to examine how homeless veterans in general compare with their non-veteran counterparts. This is necessary in determining whether risk factors present in AVF-era veterans were exclusive to that era of veterans or if they existed as exaggerated manifestations of risk factors similar to all veterans.

In one study, veterans between the ages of 20 to 34 and 45 to 54 were found to be significantly more likely to become homeless than non-veteran men (Rosenheck, 1994:467). "White veterans 20 to 34 years old were 4.8 times more likely to be homeless than their nonveteran counterparts in the general population" and this remained even as average personal incomes between White non-veterans and veterans remained the same at around $17,500 (Rosenheck, 1994:467). Since homeless veterans made roughly the same income as non-veteran

homeless men, the issue of poverty or lack of financial resources can be de-emphasized in this study in determining the *primary causes* for homelessness within veterans.

Among Caucasian homeless men between the ages of 20 to 34, rates of psychiatric disorder and substance abuse disorders were two to three times higher among veterans than non-veterans; antisocial personality disorder rates were five to six times as high (Rosenheck, 1994:467). The results are much more interesting when presented in context with the time period aforementioned veterans served: among those homeless veterans between the ages of 20 to 34, 79% of served in the post-Vietnam era as characterized by the all-volunteer force – only 7% served in combat (Rosenheck, 1994:467). Mental illness as resulting from involvement in combat was clearly not significantly correlated with homelessness within veterans of the sample, at least not in such a way that warranted it to be distinguished from the non-veteran homeless sample.

The most remarkable finding in the 1994 Rosenheck and 2003 Tessler studies is not only that Caucasian homeless veterans were so much more at risk than non-veterans, but also why they were this way. Homeless veterans were much more likely to have suffered from substance related or non-substance related psychiatric disorder – yet only a minority were of the actual Vietnam-era and an even smaller number had seen combat. Reports that substance abuse occurred regularly *in* Vietnam may in fact be true and reports of intense firefights occurring in the jungles of Southeast Asia are undeniably true. But for homeless veterans encountered in the sample, neither factors could be significantly correlated with homeless veterans (Tessler, 2003:516, Rosenheck, 1994:467). Since few had served *in* Vietnam, if they suffered from psychiatric disorder or drug abuse it was not from direct combat experience with Vietnam. Other possible causes had to be studied.

Economic disadvantage is traditionally perceived by many to be the major cause for homelessness in veterans and non-veterans, later studies that confirm that economic problems exist as the primary reason for homelessness in over half of their sample, in both veterans and non-veterans (Roth 216). But the question here is whether such economic disadvantage persisted because of military service or would have persisted regardless of enlistment. In recent years a multi-site, epidemiological and heath services research study was conducted at various sites around the country.

From Los Angeles to New Haven, researchers collected data on mental disorders and the use of mental health services. A large portion of the data collected concerned the demographic information of participates and results from the study indicate that mental illness and substance abuse were most strongly associated with homelessness in comparison to economic status or combat exposure (Roth 218). Previous studies also specify that a higher percentage of veterans have been psychiatrically hospitalized as compared to the non-veteran homeless population and this relates to another finding: that there is also a higher rate of alcohol problems among veterans (Roth 218). Economic disadvantage may be partially responsible and have existed prior to enlistment, but the prevalence of substance abuse and mental illness is incontestable and may even exist to strain kinship bonds or further aggravate the building of productive social bonds.

Furthermore, homeless veterans under the age of forty-five are better educated, less likely to be married but more likely to be suffering from drug problems and have received psychiatric treatment than their similarly-aged non-veteran cohorts (Tessler, 2003:516). They are much more dysfunctional in terms of drug abuse, psychiatric hospitalization, and have significantly weaker family ties than their non-veteran counterparts (Tessler, 2003:519). Military service requires the breaking of family ties to embark on active duty, returning veterans who become homeless may

come from disadvantaged backgrounds and subsequently may be unable to reestablish kinship ties and resume financial dependence on their family (Gamache 485). Already placed at a disadvantage, many of the veterans may be unable to additionally deal with the obstacles relating to reintegration that are common in a veteran's homecoming.

The overrepresentation of veterans in the population of the homeless is perhaps indicative of a "higher risk" veterans have to becoming homeless in comparison to non-veterans. The significant finding in Tessler's 2003 study is the explanatory factor, derived from a social selection perspective, that the personal characteristics which attract young recruits to the all-volunteer force are the same ones which put them at risk for homelessness after this subsequent separation from the military (Tessler, 2003:510). He further identifies that these same vulnerabilities may be a factor that cause adaptation to become even more difficult, as such individuals may have less family support, fewer strong family ties which may be compounded by the relocation often required by military service. In short, social selection may provide at least a *partial* explanation for the aforementioned overrepresentation and prolonged duration of homelessness among veterans.

Early Draft-era *Channeling* and the AVF

Much of what is thought about the homeless and veterans is contested when we look at the demographics of homeless veterans. Stereotypically, homelessness is often associated with a lack of education or a lack of ambition to pursue employment; the homeless man is often thought of as lazy or otherwise indolent, thus causing the circumstances leading to poverty. It is, after all, poverty that directly leads most men to become homeless. The attainment of income is typically achieved through finding gainful employment, something else that is traditionally accomplished

through education. But this logic does not necessarily apply as clearly as it does under normal circumstances and in the world of the homeless veteran, paradoxes become commonplace.

It is often believed that the poor, working class are those who are disproportionately found in the military, at least within the enlisted ranks because, "…the appeals of military service were falling to the point where only the most disadvantaged, undereducated, and poorest members of society seriously contemplated enlistment" (Helmer 4). The ubiquity of Army commercials that guarantee recruits substantial amounts of money for college and job skills serve to reinforce such preconceptions.

But this belief, that the poor working class may be especially attracted to the military, is perhaps not all untrue or at least based on some fact and also, may not limited to just the AVF – the phenomenon is partially the product of Vietnam *draft-era channeling*, a policy adopted during the early 1960s. For the first time in history of the draft, channeling allowed military service to not be universally obligatory for all males, and the most educated, best-trained and smartest men were seen as too valuable for military service. Those that did not meet such criteria were drafted, which produced an immediate consequence in furthering the widening gap between the social classes in society during that time (Helmer 6).

The rationale for the policy of allowing the "best and the brightest" to forego military service was that it would motivate young men into pursuing advanced education and other endeavors in order to defer military service. This would increase the number of men in various critical fields such as engineering and science. But as reports later verify, the policy was not always implemented fairly and in certain cases, researchers discovered bias in the selection process that favored the upper class while making exceptions to allow otherwise disqualified candidates from the lower classes to be drafted (Helmer 8). In other words, exceptions that were

made for the lower classes were those that allowed them to be *drafted*, rather than exceptions that allowed them to *defer* military service based on disqualification.

In essence, such programs allowed draftees to be plucked excessively from the lower echelons of society, lending at least some credibility to the belief that candidates into the armed forces were either undereducated or otherwise normally unfit for military service for mental or physical reasons. Men with such ailments may have often found readjustment into civilian society more difficult than their rarely drafted and better-educated counterparts in the upper classes, who were often older and held higher rank (Borus 106). These older men were also more clearly able to express their feelings about Vietnam without acting out and had significantly less difficulty in keeping family and Army roles in balance; they were less prone to violence, less likely to be on drugs, more likely to cope with their experiences and developed better plans for their future (Borus 106). In other words, before the employment of the lottery system to draft recruits and by *channeling* – dipping disproportionately into one stratum of society during the early Vietnam-era draft – the military constructed a phenomenon similar to what was occurring during the AVF-era: they recruited unqualified or under-qualified enlistees, allowing more qualified and perhaps less at-risk individuals, for whatever reason, to forego military service. Consequently, this practice may account for at least some of veterans found within the homeless population from the Vietnam-era.

To sum, the contradictory evidence laid forth is summarized: to a certain extent, convention has told us that the surge of urban homelessness in the 1970s and 80s was due to returning veterans from the highly controversial and violent war in Vietnam, that such social and political discord and intense warfare caused difficulty within returning veterans. Their varied array of mental illness, PTSD, substance abuse and disillusionment may have contributed to the

struggles in the civilian sphere and eventually their homelessness. But recent research has indicated that the risk of homelessness was, in fact, *not* higher than expected among Vietnam-era veterans and that, unexpectedly, it was veterans from the all-volunteer force, who were less likely to have served in combat or wartime, that were dramatically at higher risk for homelessness (Rosenheck, 1994,467). Vietnam-era veterans who did in fact appear in the homeless population may do so as a result of the AVF-like conditions created by pre-lottery channeling. Thus we are left again with the same question of what really causes veteran's homelessness and further questioning if there really is a significant connection between being a veteran and being homeless.

Qualitative Studies and the Exception to the Rule: Steps, Stages, and Coming Home

A possible but partial solution to this paradox may be found in one of the precious few qualitative studies performed during the immediate post-Vietnam era. Robert Faulkner's study on the stages of transition for Vietnam veterans is perhaps the most relevant to our current research in the sense that it focuses, to a large degree, on the experiences of veterans through in-depth interviews. Derived from an exploratory interactionist perspective, it concentrates on the manner in which individuals, "make meaningful the objects of their experience, including themselves, during the critical stages of reentry" (Faulkner 304).

Faulkner's delineation of the stages include: disengagement and moving from the war, moving back into the civilian world, and finally moving toward reintegration and social involvement. These stages become increasingly important to the overall transition for the veteran and involve the vital processes of "getting [their] head out of Nam," adjusting from the often forced integrated environment of the military to the more open civilian society, renewing their

sense of constitutional and civil rights, 'non-legitimizing' violence, and increasing expectations for control of their life (Faulkner 313). The realization of such things ultimately becomes a major factor in the overall journey throughout the critical stages of reentry.

Implicit in this overall journey towards reintegration is the importance of educational and occupational success in establishing a sense of stability and foundation for a veteran's civilian identity. Those who have "made it" in the civilian world are those veterans who have had fewer economic and educational "hassles" and cemented a certain level of occupational and financial stability. To this extent, success in reintegration is at least partially measured by level of education and occupation and in this sense becomes somewhat analogous to what society at large considers general success amongst civilians. Faulkner expands upon this subjective perception of success in recognizing that if, "a man's work is one of the most important parts of his social identity then important consequences for reintegration and building commitment ought to flow from fulfillment in that sector" (Faulkner 321).

Naturally, a soldier who later becomes involved in medicine or in a similar profession after his discharge may encounter fewer obstacles in transitioning into the civilian world than one who is employed in a minimum wage occupation. Jobs of the latter are typically less secure, have higher turnover rates, and are not considered vehicles for maintaining stable lifestyles, whereas careers of the former can include becoming a medical doctor, which arguably has "built-in" opportunities for integration at local hospitals, the AMA, and other organizations.

Work then, is extraordinarily important for reintegration and furthermore, this work must also be, to some degree, fulfilling. Veteran's vocational and occupational programs are specifically catered for the attainment of such work and so in most respects, reintegration for homeless veterans into the general population should be easier than for non-veteran homeless

men. As indicated earlier, homeless veterans are older, better educated, and more likely to be white, than their non-veteran counterparts (Tessler, 2002:110). Furthermore veterans have access to dramatically better social services because of their status as veterans, from educational assistance and home loan guarantees, to pension and disability benefits. The Department of Veterans Affairs has a number of programs targeted for transitional assistance, mental health help, and substance abuse rehabilitation programs. And so, another paradox of veterans' homelessness is discovered.

Theory

Goffman's dramaturgical model and theory is central in any study involving perceptions of self and notions of identity and is especially relevant to the transitioning of identity experienced by veterans. Asserting that the concept of self or identity is a socially constructed phenomenon formed through dramatic interaction, Goffman maintains that individuals, "live by inference", and through this insight the role of veterans in post-war society can be better understood (Goffman 3). Essentially, what others think of a person has a significant impact on an individual's perception of self, and such individuals are essentially actors playing a role for those around them. In this context, a veteran can be said to play their own role for the civilians around them, fulfilling preexisting expectations for how he should act.

As soldiers and Marines returning home from war face difficulties in discovering who they are and how they should act in the civilian world, many may find it convenient to play such preexisting and established roles of veterans depicted in films like the 1978 *Deer Hunter* mentally unstable, fanatical individuals. They may feign such problems even if he does not truly experience such illnesses simply because there are no other contemporary roles for veterans to

fill. The veteran may not know much about returning to the civilian sphere, but because of popular media, the news, and so forth, he may know enough to know that he is *supposed* to be mentally ill, crazy, or "messed up in the head" because this is what is expected of combat veterans.

Perhaps the alternative to this would a veteran who plays the role of a proud patriotic hero returning home from war and plays this front to those who observe his performance as he *hides* other aspects of himself in the backstage, things such as denying post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism, or other illnesses. This role can similarly be depicted by theatrical interpretations of veterans, as in the 1989 film *Born on the Fourth of July*. Many may feel the need to conceal such actions Goffman refers to as "dirty work" that may have included tasks that "were physically unclean, semi-legal, cruel, and degrading in other ways" (Goffman 44). The asymmetrical composition in the battlefield of Iraq and the counterinsurgent warfare have equivocated lines between combatant and noncombatant, and the occurrence of collateral damage and civilian deaths have become an integral part of this war. Troops may have felt the need to conceal such incidents in their performance, much to the detriment of their own mental health and overall sense of self.

Distancing

Goffman expounds upon his model by describing a mystification technique employed by performers, in which said actors tend to perpetuate an air of mystification by minimizing the contact between themselves and the audience, creating a "social distance" that separates audience and actor. In this manner, not only the actor, but also the audience, are involved in this process in order to maintain the credibility of the performance in this space. The distancing of veterans and the civilian sphere can be interpreted as a manifestation of this aspect of Goffman's

theory, in that veterans may believe that those around them cannot truly understand their experiences or may otherwise simply take their experiences at "face value" thereby diminishing their value. It is this distance that may aggravate feelings of alienation, anomie, or isolation that may increase susceptibility to negative consequences such mental illness or homelessness.

This notion of distancing between audience and actor can also be applicable to Goffman's concept of role distancing in which individuals attempt to separate themselves from other roles that they feel they do not wish to fulfill. For example, older children on the merry-go-round may be aware that they are really too old to enjoy such an experience and in order to cope with such feelings, they may demonstrate role distancing by exhibiting careless, lackadaisical and dangerous acts while on the merry-go-round (Ritzer 366). By doing this, the children are actually explaining to the audience they are not fully immersed in this experience by virtue of their special behavior. From their first day as new recruits in the military, troops are trained to become something more than simple civilians – it is the very foundation of basic training. Once released from military service, and stripped of their rank and status as soldiers and Marines, veterans may exhibit similar tendencies of role distancing towards their roles as new civilians as a means of coping with their return into the civilian world. This may be marked by behavior such as growing one's hair longer so as to differentiate themselves from others, by continuing to don forms of their military fatigues and medals, or by wearing other identifying apparel and/or tattoos.

Role distancing became utilized as a primary coping mechanism for upwardly mobile veterans on the new "battlefields" that serve as one of the major sources for "the development and perpetuation of popularly held negative stereotypes of Vietnam veterans that are associated with their general social estrangement," namely the college campus (Figley xxvii). The college

campus became a nucleus for much of the early opposition toward the Vietnam War in the 1960s landscape of the U.S. It was inevitable that it also became a battleground for returning veterans who hoped to attend college after the war. The G.I. Bill made possible the education of many veterans from working-class backgrounds, but their mere presence was a source of contention for the college students who so opposed the war. Veterans found themselves deployed to a new front line and arena of combat, one in which they were required to distance themselves to at least some degree from their previous roles as service members in order to find equilibrium on the college campus.

Not only was it difficult to avoid rejection by the colleges themselves, but the veterans also found it increasingly troublesome to also avoid rejection from their age peers who had successfully avoided the draft. In response to such antagonism, the veteran had only one viable option exercised by upwardly mobile minorities before them: “they disowned the war, disowned their veteran status, or both” and by doing so not only distanced themselves from their roles, but more importantly denied themselves a part of their own identity (Figley xxxviii).

Furthermore by hiding their identity and denying themselves their own sense of self, Vietnam veterans, since they trickled home as individuals instead as coherent units as in World War II, were unable to take collective action to institute change, socially and politically (Figley xvii). Organizations like the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) were important but short-lived as they were eventually infiltrated by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and destroyed. Vietnam veterans had an unwelcome reception even from other veteran groups like the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who blamed them for losing the war in Vietnam and conducting themselves dishonorably. Ultimately, the shunning of veterans

by their country, by other veterans, and by society at large immensely impacted their perceptions of self and their identities.

Perceptions of Self

The very notion of a self arises within the intricate framework of social experiences and any sense of self cannot arise in the absence of others. After Vietnam, veterans' parades were seldom if ever held, this was especially due to the controversial nature of the war itself but also the manner in which the loss of the war was in large part blamed on American soldiers. The veteran recognized that in a "no-win war" heroism is deprived of its moral meaning and socially symbolic purpose, and therefore opted to surreptitiously return home quietly; in essence, peace marches replaced victory parades (Figley xxv).

The manner in which the self is developed is as much a mental process as it is a social process in which "one does respond to that which he addresses to another and where that response of his own becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself…that we have behavior in which the individuals become objects to themselves" (Mead 139). In this respect, the "self is simply another aspect of the overall social process of which the individual is a part" (Ritzer 351). The notions of self that Vietnam veterans used to construct their identity were derived from the adverse political and social climate of the 1960s and 70s. If our perceptions of ourselves and how we make meaning of our own lives is an integral part of a social phenomenon which stipulates the inclusion of others around us, then how we are perceived by our peers and those around us will have an indelible impact on our sense of self.

Subsequently, Vietnam veterans existed to the public as vestiges of a war they would rather soon forget. They existed as living symbols of America's embarrassment, of the nation's military loss, of the country's political blunder, and of dishonor in Southeast Asia. Few Americans were able to separate their feelings of the war with those of the warriors. Veterans, as symbols of the war, became increasingly entangled in a web of ideological battles back home and became swallowed by the war back home (Figley xxvii).

The theories of Goffman and Mead become increasingly significant in considering the unique manner in which veterans construct their individual identities. Since Mead asserts that the *self* arises out of social experiences, it must be conceded that these experiences are objects of socially symbolic gestures and interactions. As human beings, we understand ourselves and the social world through different interactions, from "playing" as children to more meaningful observations as adults. But from these experiences, we additionally are able to understand our own identities and the worlds we inhabit. For example, as a child plays a game of kickball, he understands the game, the rules of the game, and his own role in relation to others in the game. There are certain behaviors within this game that are acceptable and unacceptable and it is the child's first encounter with the "generalized other."

Adolescence is a particularly turbulent period for males and females alike, and becomes an important bridge from childhood to adulthood. The average age of the enlisted male coincides with this delicate time; enlisted recruits are often between the ages of seventeen and nineteen, at which age, studies indicate, they are much easier to mold into effective soldiers than their older counterparts. The military affords a unique realm and context to work out such questions of identity and personality, and many may enlist in order to gain a sense of self from service. This

time period becomes the point at which civilians and veterans construct distinctive notions of self.

Ordinary civilian settings allow for the a typical forging of identities by adolescents, in which self-discoveries occur as different forms of behavior are tried out, new social relations developed, and different physical and mental tasks are engaged (Wikler 89). High school students and college age males and females figure out who they are through their various experiences: by leaving home and finding their own place in society by starting to answer the question of "who am I?" and by testing themselves in various settings and learning about their own identities through these experiences. But this fundamental issue of identity and meaning of one's self is, in the civilian sphere, not likely to lead to startling or unexpected insights dissonant from previously held self-perceptions, and they will not discover anything about themselves that are extremely unexpected (Wikler 89).

In contrast to the civilian setting, in the highly extraordinary situation of the military, war, and combat there is a great probability that the individual will discover things about himself that will severely challenge his preconceived notions of himself; in civilian life and in the context of war, the *process* of self-discovery is the same; it is the *conditions* that provide the concrete experience through which discoveries of self are made, that are so drastically different in the civilian and military worlds (Wikler 89). Soldiers gain knowledge of themselves through their highly abnormal experiences that may give them an unprecedented insight into their own lives and selves. In the social setting and environment of combat, they may be pushed to perform extraordinary deeds that will enable them to tap into the depths of who they really are, exploring emotions such as hate, courage, terror, and suffering that can never be explained or imagined, only experienced; once they are experienced they become a part of one's self-concept (Wikler

89). They learn about themselves in this unique context and subsequently construct the raw materials of their identities from inherently different sources than their civilian counterparts.

The extremely political nature of the both the Vietnam and Iraq War have served to polarize a large portion of the population. Although treatment of Iraq veterans is ostensibly better than those of their Vietnam counterparts, many may see such movements as "Support the Troops" simply a matter of lip service, a convenient fad of bumper stickers and yellow ribbons. Either way, how the American public at large views terrorism, the war, and those that fight it, will have an impact on the lives of veterans and their construction of self since the "individual experiences himself…only indirectly, from particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs" (Mead 138). To sum, how we treat our veterans will invariably impact not only how they will construct their own identities after the war, but more importantly, it will influence their overall homecoming as well.

RESEARCH METHODS

The primary unit of analysis in this study was the individual homeless veteran. But by utilizing a variation of the case study approach and employing a multi-perspective analysis, the voices and experiences of the homeless veterans were considered in addition to the perspectives of the institutions involved in homelessness in the Boston area. Six interviews were performed with administrators, caregivers, psychologists, and other personnel within the shelters and veterans' services organizations. Eighty-seven hours were also spent performing ethnography at the various organizations in which interviews were also conducted. Altogether, a dozen interviews were conducted with homeless veterans in Boston and the surrounding area.

Research Problem

The presence of veterans among the homeless population has consistently and proportionally been higher than in the general population. What, if any, causal links exist between the veteran's experience and the phenomenon of homelessness? What causes such a disproportionate presence of veterans among the nation's homeless population? Is there

something in military service that contributes to an individual's susceptibility or are individuals who are especially prone to homelessness more likely to enlist in the first place? By conducting in-depth interviews and ethnography of veterans from various eras of American history, an intimate qualitative depiction of the experiences of such individuals can be appreciated in the larger context of homelessness.

Towards a Definition for Homelessness

It becomes essential in any study of homelessness to properly demarcate the various categorical definitions of homelessness in order to avoid later equivocations within the study. Such confusion could result in, among other things, difficulties in measurements and subsequent obscurities in interpreting results.

Most simply, dictionaries tend to utilize the most literal definitions of homelessness as, in essence, the state of being without a home or roof over one's head. Many sociologists, social workers, and the homeless themselves tend to disagree with such a description, partly because the language of "home" implies a level of sentimentality and proximity to kinship that does not fit with the simple definition of having a roof over one's head and that the literal definition of "homelessness" indicates is a simple collection of lumber and nails in which "houselessness" might be more appropriate. Furthermore, cheap rooming houses and hotels similar to Depression-era "flophouses" offer extremely inexpensive, semi-temporary housing to those who would normally be homeless, meaning that such individuals would not be included if such a literal definition were employed.

Nevertheless, a broader definition of homelessness may become overly inclusive in the sense that it would greatly enlarge the size and composition of the homeless population,

complicating the task of research and sampling, setting up fuzzy and unclear boundaries for homelessness, allowing guesstimates to range more widely, and ultimately muddying the clarity of the research (Rossi 48). To invoke a restrictive definition, though possibly simplifying tasks for the researcher, would be considered inappropriate if it too narrowly focuses the issue and scope of the subject at study.

In the scope of this study, a balanced definition was utilized that most aptly encompassed the population sampled. More specifically, it included persons residing at traditional shelters, transitional homes or halfway houses, and out on the streets of the greater metropolitan area of Boston. With one exception, those living at a relative's house or as non-permanent inhabitants in an established dwelling were generally not included in this study, since access and identification of such individuals would have been quite difficult. They are often regarded, as the "hidden homeless" since they are not necessarily conspicuous, but in terms of the definition employed, would still be considered homeless under certain conditions. A local community pastor identified the participant of this hidden population and the exception was made because, although he lived with his daughter, it was clear that both were among the "precariously housed." Others who were "precariously housed" as living in a rooming house, transitional house, or in a traditional shelter, were interviewed as well as those who had been formerly homeless.

Veterans were more broadly defined in respect to homelessness. Individuals, who served in the U.S. Armed Forces at any point, during time of war or peace, were included without regard to branch, occupation, or duration of service. This approach was taken after a significant amount of deliberation and research, as it became apparent that locating an adequate sample of active duty homeless Iraq War veterans would be problematic. Furthermore, the effect of

peacetime-era service and the inception AVF became of central concern as many of the participants interviewed identified themselves as non-combat veterans.

Sampling

It should be noted that there could never be a single, all-encompassing description of the veteran experience. Due to the variety of worldwide conflicts, the inherent dissimilarities in each of these conflicts, the durations of deployments, the basic changes in the fabric and feelings of American society towards war and the troops, the vast dissimilarities in the military branches and also of the different units in the same branch, each veteran is almost guaranteed to have experienced a distinct slice of war (Borus 110).

An airman from a logistics squadron in Vietnam during 1974 is sure to have a different experience of war, the military, and on being a veteran in comparison to an Army infantry officer in Iraq during 2003. Even members of the same unit, deployed to the same area of operation, with the same job can have vastly diverse experiences and understandings of the war. The experiences of similar troops in the same conflict during slightly different times may also result in divergent experiences, as Vietnam in September 1967 may not have much resemblance to Vietnam in February 1968, especially in the context of the Tet offensive launched a month earlier. To characterize all veterans in the aggregate without a correspondingly large sample size containing sub-samples of many types of veterans is scientifically unsound. Instead this study aims to capture the sociologically rich experiences of the veterans and give voice to those homeless veterans, from the viewpoint of the powerless, the marginalized, and the stigmatized.

Snowball sampling was implemented due to the nature of the interviews and of homelessness general. Many were apprehensive about the presence of a researcher and were

more willing to participate when referred to by someone they knew creating a situation in which snowball sampling was not only preferred but also required.

Interview Sources

Sampling for participant interviews was performed from four primary sources within the greater Boston metropolitan area. With the exception of the more informal interviews conducted with participants from in Lawrence, MA, all interviewees were from shelters or other organizations that were involved with the care of homeless veterans: The New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans (herein referred to as the "NESHV") in downtown Boston, the Veterans Upward Bound Program (herein referred to as the "VUB") at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the Veterans' Benefits Clearinghouse (herein referred to as the "VBC") in Roxbury.

The New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans opened its doors in 1990, becoming one of the largest and most prominent veterans' homeless shelters in the country. Located in the heart of Boston, Massachusetts, the NESHV boasts a wide range of services, from emergency housing to single room apartments, offering everything from health care to vocational training. The ten-story shelter was one of the first veteran-specific homeless shelters in the nation and continues to be so. Due to these circumstances, the NESHV was an excellent, albeit limited, source for participants in the scope of this study. Shelter rules allowed only one interview to be conducted at the NESHV but the majority, about sixty hours, of participant observation was conducted at the shelter.

The Veterans' Benefits Clearinghouse is a not-for-profit organization aimed at "improving the quality of life for residents of Greater Boston, with a special focus on…veterans and their families to ensure that they become and remain productive members of society" (VBC

Pamphlet). Although not all of their services are limited to veterans, many of their clients are in fact still veterans. They maintain three to four offices in the Roxbury and Dorchester areas of Boston, and two to three of these locations also serve as transitional houses. Actual day-to-day operations of staff are similar to those of social workers as they offer services including general counseling, HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and their most popular program, the Food Pantry, which distributes emergency food supplies to impoverished individuals and families in the Boston area. Two interviews were conducted with residents of the VBC at their Roxbury transitional home.

The Veterans' Upward Bound Program is a not-for-profit, non-residential, pre-collegiate program aimed specifically at veterans whose goal it is to begin their vocational or college education. Held at the University of Massachusetts, the VUB is a federal trio program and has sister programs in various other states. The Boston VUB program remains one of the largest in the country, graduating anywhere from fifty to one hundred veterans per semester. Though the courses are taken at the University of Massachusetts campus, they are not for credit and are instead designed to prepare veterans for collegiate lifestyles and assist the veterans in the college application process. In this application, the VUB has had tremendous success, helping otherwise unable veterans to pursue a variety of academic endeavors. A total of four interviews and twenty-seven hours of participant observation was conducted with members of the VUB program.

Many of the veterans complete the program to move on to the surrounding community colleges; a growing number of graduates of the program have matriculated into the University of Massachusetts. The participants of the VUB program are *not* exclusively homeless and the VUB is not aimed necessarily at homeless veterans. Many of the veterans maintain regular outside residences. But a number of the participants of the VUB are in fact, "precariously housed" and

reside at one of the many local homeless shelters in the Boston area, including the Chelsea Soldier's Home in Chelsea, MA and the NESHV.

Additionally, four interviews were conducted at a local Protestant Church in Lawrence, MA during the weekly food pantry program and one took place at a rooming house nearby. With a fifteen percent unemployment rate, Lawrence was cited as the 23rd poorest city in the nation in 1997, and is generally known as the poorest city in Massachusetts ("EPA National Brownsfield Assessment Plot"). The majority of participants interviewed in Lawrence were residents of a local rooming house, offering housing in SROs and one was temporarily housed with a family member. Interviews at this location were obtained with help from the church pastor, a former Boston College adjunct professor, and unlike other interviews, were not conducted under the auspices of any official organization. Since interviewees in Lawrence were not a part of any official organization, permission was not required to perform interviews, and as such, remains among the richest sources of sociological data, since data was collected "directly" from the community. The majority of interviews for this study were conducted with the veterans in Lawrence.

Access

Generally the process in which interviews were gathered was similar at each location. Initially, contact was established with the director or senior officer within each organization, and a request was submitted to meet with them individually and in person. By way of introduction, a brief biography and explanation was given, and in some cases, access was granted with the subtle expectation that a certain portion of time would be spent volunteering at the organization. This process of "exchange" facilitated access to the respective organization and additionally

offered some exposure to the environment and to the veterans before actual interviews were conducted, enhancing not only the quality of the interviews in terms of the more relevant questions asked, but also supplementing the ethnographic component set forth in this study.

By starting out "at the top" with the director, more latitude within the organization was achieved since the imprimatur of a higher-level staff member was obtained at the outset. This method, although quite effective, was considerably time consuming since it required multiple meetings and establishment of various liaisons throughout the course of study at a particular location. For instance, access to the transitional houses at the Veterans' Benefits Clearinghouse was ultimately obtained only after four different meetings that occurred over the course of over six weeks. Although complete access had been granted at the first meeting, it took over a month from the time of initial contact with a staff member to an actual interview with a veteran participant. This process included initially meeting with one of the caseworkers, then being directed to the supervisor of the transitional housing program. A significant amount of time had elapsed before the supervisor actually introduced the possibility of the presence of an outside researcher to the veterans at a weekly house meeting. After this, a third meeting was arranged with the manager of the transitional house.

Upon introduction to the manager of the transitional house, an invitation was then extended to join in one of the Thursday night "house meetings" to sit in and observe. It was at this point where interviews could finally just *begin*. At approximately sixty minutes each, the interviews were lengthy and only one could be performed per night. Several trips were eventually required to fully complete interviews.

Access at the NESHV was granted by registering in three of the vocational and skill-building classes with the initial possibility of later developing a course of instruction. Due to

scheduling concerns at the shelter, classroom instruction, and an action research component that was originally designed, would be no longer be possible. It was instead determined more beneficial to observe the classes rather than making formal introductions as a researcher.

Once initial rapport had been established with the “clients” of the NESHV, an introduction was given and interviews were requested as part of an ongoing study on veterans. Full access to the shelter had been granted in the sense that admission to any number of classes and to the monthly “Town Hall” meetings was approved. But the request for conducting outside research in the form of in-depth interviews was not approved by the Director of Clinical Services at the shelter because of reported “confidentially issues.” In order to abide by shelter policy but still retrieve sociological data for the study, interviews at the NESHV were classified as more informal and conversational in nature, but still yielded data as rich as the other interviews conducted.

Subsequently, as a number of veterans at the NESHV attended the VUB program, interviews with these individuals on the University of Massachusetts campus as VUB students could be conducted, since they were technically outside of the NESHV and being interviewed as VUB students and not NESHV clients. As an academically oriented program, the director of the VUB was more than accommodating and permitted full access to its classes, students, and program. Since the majority of the tutors were former students of the program, a number of them were formerly homeless, and thus provided another good source for interviews. Furthermore, as a number of the veterans had matriculated into the University of Massachusetts, many of them spoke at the VUB orientation, giving in-depth information about their personal biographies. Since they had talked openly and publicly about their former involvement in various homeless shelters or as being homeless, these individuals were later contacted for interviews.

In Lawrence, interviews were conducted with veterans from the local community who took part in a weekly food pantry program. Since they were not a part of any official organization, no formal requests for access needed to be made. The local church pastor provided the use of the church for interviews, which additionally served as the location for the food pantry and attracted additional veterans. An interview was also conducted at the boarding house in Lawrence, MA, in the room of an interviewee.

Prefacing the Samples

It is important to note that there exists a special concern regarding many of the sources of data collected in the scope of this study. Located in organizations that seek to improve the quality of life for homeless veterans, many of the men at these were in all probability more upwardly mobile than their counterparts. The most salient example exists in the sample taken from the VUB program.

As a college prep program, the VUB attracts veterans who have taken the steps to improve their lives in pursuit of higher education. Unlike some of the vocational programs at the NESHV, the students of the VUB were not required to be present and needed to be adequately motivated in order to complete the intense classroom instruction which lasted for sixteen weeks, at about four hours a night for four nights a week. Due to these circumstances, it can be said that veterans of the program were those who were exceptionally motivated and perhaps represent the more positively inclined portion of the population.

Furthermore, a similar phenomenon can be seen at the NESHV. As a “dry” shelter, the NESHV also required strict adherence to a number of other rules; breaking any of these regulations could lead to dismissal from the shelter for a specified number of days. Drugs and

alcohol were sternly forbidden and clients were assigned caseworkers who required them to take courses at the shelter's vocational programs. Those veterans attempting to enter the shelter while inebriated or otherwise under the influence were promptly turned away and told to return in forty-eight hours, once they had become sober. Therefore, those found at the NESHV were veterans who had been able to maintain at least a minimal level of abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

In other words, many of the veterans interviewed may be those who are working towards a more positive change in their lives. A major limitation of this study is the inability to conduct interviews with homeless veterans living directly "on the streets" of Boston. With the exception of those in Lawrence, interviews were performed through liaison with shelters or other veterans' organizations. Upon closer examination, such a task would be increasingly problematic, as it would be difficult to distinguish veterans and non-veterans, and interviews would have to be conducted based upon the participant's self reported status as a veteran.

This became an issue for participants in Lawrence. Since interviews were conducted without any official organization to verify an individual's status as a veteran, the participant's self reported status as a veteran was utilized to determine veteran's status. Even so, other informal methods were employed to subtly authenticate veteran's status. As a veteran, it was possible to identify inconsistencies in the interviewee's story in relation to military occupational specialty (MOS), operations deployed, dates and areas of assignment, and other details in military history.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF VARIABLES

The concepts and variables in this research design are all threaded together with a common theme revolving around how the individual veteran adjusts in returning to civilian society. These variables include but are not limited to marginalization, isolation, reintegration, alienation and expectations/struggle for recognition.

Marginalization

Marginalization can best be described as a phenomenon in which a certain subset or group in society is identified as lacking certain traits or exhibiting deviant behavior from group norms and may be ostracized or treated differently by society because of this (Faulkner 310). A socially marginalized person is one who sits between two cultures, essentially straddling between the margins of two societies; historically marginalization has often been applicable to gay lesbian and minority communities (Tyson 383). In the case of veterans, this concept becomes especially significant, as veterans can be characterized by no longer belonging to a society of which they were once a part and simultaneously attempting to leave the world of the military.

The veteran becomes no longer part of the military and not yet a part of the civilian world. It is almost a crisis in searching for his identity, as the disparity between the military culture and society collides with the civilian sphere into which he is now thrown. As soldiers and Marines, veterans have experienced a part of life that few others have, and the memories of combat and war often mean that they have different perceptions of norms and values that set them apart from the rest of society. Therefore, marginalization in the scope of my research was centered on how veterans seem "stuck" in transitioning between these two societies or cultures and how they are ultimately affected by this difficulty in identity. Many times they can be subsequently discriminated against or otherwise treated differently. They inhabit a marginal area or situation that many veterans described as being "in limbo," having had no time to transition because the modern use of jet planes, instead of the more traditional ships, brought them from the jungles of Vietnam to the streets of New York City in less than a day (Faulkner 310).

Some interview questions that measure marginalization are: Have you ever felt like you were never quite fully a civilian and/or fully a soldier? If so, please describe. Do you now consider yourself a more of Marine/soldier or a civilian? Why?

Isolation and Loneliness

Simply put, isolation is the lack of social contact with others in society; loneliness can be described as a general lack of close interpersonal relationships and/or an absence of a primary romantic relationship (Rokach, 2005:103). It may occur for a variety of reasons, but in the context of the proposed research, isolation is present when there is a lack of this social contact between a veteran and others in society on an intimate emotional, physical, financial and/or mental level, leading to feelings of loneliness or seclusion (Marano 1). This phenomenon is

distinguished from the other variables and concepts in the study because a person can have a strong, healthy social network and still suffer from feelings of isolation.

Servicemen often describe their relationships with their comrades as being akin to a sense of brotherhood, in that they have built a significant level of camaraderie with their peers. A primary reason for the creation of such platonic, intimate relationships between males is the shared experiences of hardship and wartime experiences that tend to bond men together. The fact that tight, cohesive units function much more efficiently in combat only confirms the need to create strong links between men and such high levels of rapport are often common within frontline military units. Women are excluded from this discussion because they are restricted from serving in frontline combat arms units.

Unfortunately, there are fewer analogous situations in which such relationships are developed in the civilian sphere, meaning that veterans who have become accustomed to building these strong bonds have to contend with the superficiality of the civilian world. They may become lonely because of this inability to create such bonds or make such connections and make meaningful contact with others. A large proportion of the population frequently feel lonely, but it stands to reason that the homeless experience loneliness in different ways than the rest of society because of the fact that loneliness may be present in individuals who are not necessarily physically isolated (Rokach, 2005:101). Isolation may be the physical or emotional distance between a person and others but is closely tied to feelings of loneliness. Homeless veterans can be said to suffer from both of instances of physical and emotional isolation and from loneliness. Therefore, how such loneliness and isolation effects the veteran population becomes a central issue related to this study.

Examples of questions that measure isolation and loneliness are: Would you say that you have as many close friends as you did in the service? How do you feel about this? Do you miss the level of camaraderie you had in the service? Why? How often do you socialize every month? Do you sometimes feel lonely?

Social Reintegration

One of the most important variables is reintegration because it ultimately implies the consolidation of social involvement in civilian society, disengagement from the war, and successful transition into society at large (Faulkner 305). The success or failure to do any number of the aforementioned things will have a great impact in the overall well being of the veteran.

The concept of reintegration is a crucial theme in the veterans' journeys to return home psychologically. To be integrated then is to become a *functioning* part of a whole and to be reintegrated implies that a person or object that has been previously removed from the whole is attempting to return and reconnect with that from which he has been detached (Faulkner 320). Whether voluntarily or involuntarily, the veteran has been removed from society both physically and psychologically. Returning to life where he left off is never as easy as simply physically "being back." For example, if a person were to dig a large hole, removing mounds of earth to create a large opening in the earth, only to later attempt to refill the hole to find out that the mound of dirt just doesn't seem to fit in. As the dirt was removed, it was sifted and changed, the way in which it was packed was significantly altered, and it may fill back in the whole, but it'll never fit back exactly the same as before it was removed. A veteran who returns home may come back to the same country and to the same city. He may even return to the same neighborhood, but nonetheless like the sifted soil, he will have been changed.

Increasingly important in the relative success of reintegration becomes the overcoming of obstacles in transitioning and recovering a sense of relative social autonomy. Reestablishing the fundamental relational dimensions – social relationships, social ties, formal and informal networks – becomes the bases for material and emotional support vital to the reintegration process and finding equilibrium within the civilian world (Tosi 188). Furthermore, the attainment of gainful employment becomes a crucial part of such reintegration, both in its source of income to sustain basic needs and also in the meaning derived from such work in personal achievement, normality, and emancipation (Tosi 189).

Interview questions measuring reintegration may be readily operationalized: How many community/vocational/social groups are you a part of? How often would you say you think about the war? Are you currently employed? If so please describe the employment. How long have you been employed? Please give a brief employment history. Are you a part of any veterans groups like the VFW?

Struggle for Recognition and Expectations

The wars in Vietnam and Iraq are unique in that they both incorporate a conceptual struggle for recognition by the veteran. G.W.F. Hegel's theoretical concept of a "struggle for his recognition" concerns one's exclusion resulting from the deprivation from social recognition and value. He raises this issue of recognition in the context of self-consciousness (Crossley 257). For Hegel, desire becomes a more appropriate starting point for explaining self-consciousness than does perception; when we perceive, we become aware of those things that are around us as objects of our perception but, "we do not become aware of our perception as such nor of ourselves as perceiving subjects – at least not in any conscious sense" (Crossley 257). With

desire, one can discover its association with a “lack” in the sense that a desire for one thing corresponds to a lack of such a thing, as the desire for food is essentially a lack of food, and this experience of lacking involves some degree of self-reference and thus self-consciousness (Crossley 257). Hegel’s assertion is that self-consciousness is exclusive to humans and originates from another desire restricted to humans, the desire for recognition. The desire for recognition is a desire to be desired, one that is of a higher order than the desire for food as material and organic beings, the desire for recognition elevates humans into the realm of culture and history and becomes a vital component for the construction of self (Crossley 257).

For the returning troops of Iraq and Vietnam, they struggled and continue to struggle for recognition of their actions overseas. The paradox of supporting the troops while criticizing their mission becomes a focal concern in this concept, as society deprives veterans of the recognition of their deeds and sacrifices in war.

While troops from World War II typically returned home at a common time, V-E or V-J day, to ticker tape parades and cheering crowds, veterans of Vietnam generally returned home in sporadic rotations to quiet receptions of family and friends. They were deprived of this experience and irrevocably denied society’s recognition that their sacrifices and hardships were for a greater good, that they fought well, did a good job, and performed a noble task. The disparity in the expectations of what home should be and what it truly turns out to be, becomes a major point of contention complicating the veteran’s ability to reintegrate. As Mead asserts that the self arises in part because of social experiences, the importance of these experiences within civilian society come to play an integral role in how the veteran makes sense of his “new” self.

The soldier in war wants nothing more than to return home, it becomes a delusional fantasy and the end to all endeavors, as every day is just another day closer to being home

(Faulkner 310). In respect to this, he creates certain expectations of what home will be like, as he raises it up to a pedestal, he creates an unrealistic expectation of what home *should* be like which contrasts sharply to what it actually *is* like. He may expect to be welcomed home, receiving the traditional or cinematically depicted homecomings of a hero returning from saving the world or perhaps expecting a just simple ride back from the airport, and what actually occurs may be a completely different scenario. Without the necessary social experiences of homecoming, gratitude, and welcoming, veterans are instead faced with ambivalence or apathy concerning their sacrifices, eventually constructing their sense of self within such public sentiments.

Such expectations are not simply limited to the first few days of returning home, but also for the long term as well. Many veterans anticipate that after the war, returning home will simply be the end of this fantasy, as if everything will be fine after this. Such expectations can be characterized as the “riding off into the sunset” or “Sleeping Beauty” effect, in that people expect that once the hero rides off into the sunset at the conclusion of the film or when the prince kisses the princess, everyone will live “happily ever after.” For the veteran, returning home was supposed to be the end of the story, the hero returns home and lives his dream, and few ever expected to encounter another chapter of obstacles.

The returning veteran feels a need to fulfill social expectations of his role at differing periods in his homecoming. Society has its own set of expectations for how different people should respond to different situations depending on what role they fulfill. For example, we expect our surgeons to be well-spoken, somewhat stoic and respectful, and intelligent by the very nature of their occupation and hence role within society. For a person to observe a surgeon utilizing poor grammar and being inappropriately jovial, it would take them by surprise because such behavior is contrary to the expectations we have for such individuals. To this degree, a

service member is expected to be patriotic perhaps to the point of being jingoistic and to be proud of his country and his unit

To this end, the soldier is *supposed* to be strong, patriotic, masculine, and fearless and even female soldiers are expected to embody traditionally masculine traits. But as the reality of combat sets in, such expectations are not always reasonable. In such situations, the soldiers may be akin to actors, who hide certain things from their audiences and present an idealized picture of themselves in such "front-stage" performances." A random interview by a reporter of a soldier in Iraq will probably not depict him as weak or critical of the war he is currently fighting. Social pressures both by civilian society and the military brass may be a factor in this response and if one were to listen carefully to what they had to say, all of them say essentially the exact same thing. It isn't because they are mindless, uneducated warriors with nothing important to say, but rather that for a soldier there is a role they are expected to play in front of the camera and all those watching from home.

In light of this, a consideration in this research was to observe the extent to which these social expectations and pressures for such appearances dictate or otherwise affect the experiences of a veteran returning home. The increasing awareness of mental illnesses, alcoholism, and post-traumatic stress disorder have lead to a higher level of anticipation by such organizations as the Veterans Administration and the military, and what later becomes significant is how these expectations may or may not have led to the actors fulfilling their roles.

Questions measuring these expectations were: What did you feel about home when you were deployed in country? What was the environment of your community upon returning? Was it hostile, were people apathetic towards your role, or were they appreciative? When you returned, were there any ceremonial events that took place, in terms of parades or homecomings?

How did you feel about this? How did you feel about people's reactions when they learned you were a veteran? Did you think that they 'cared' and if they didn't, how did this make you feel? What was your experience as far as how people treated veterans? How do you think veterans *should* be treated, especially in context to unpopular conflicts? Was home what you expected it to be when you were deployed? Did you ever feel compelled to act a certain way because you were a service member? In what way did you talk about the war (or president, government) with other soldiers? In what way or how did you talk about it when talking with civilians? In other words, what were your opinions about the war depending on whom you were talking to?

Alienation

The experiences of war make veterans inherently different from their civilian counterparts. Many describe it as if they aged many years in the span of a short time, as if perhaps there was a loss of innocence that has forced them to grow up faster than their contemporaries who were not in the military. These situations are tied to the more general concept of alienation as a separation of human beings either from each other, or from their own life, self, or from society itself (Crossley 3). Veterans may suffer from one or *all* of these, and their removal from civilian society also means that they have been living an entirely different life from the one that they will be continuing once back in society. Furthermore, their abrupt departure from the civilian world and sudden return could lead to a loss of social support systems and contact with others. Although veterans return home and expect things to be the same, life may not necessarily be what they have anticipated. It is possible that their friends and family have moved on and there now exists a certain estrangement between them. The fact that veterans may have experienced the deaths of friends during the war may make them less willing to

become attached to people for fear of losing them. This eventually translates into a weaker social network that is available to veterans, as they struggle to reconnect with the world they left behind and they do not have the same resources to fall back on when they encounter financial or social difficulties.

To a certain extent, the veterans' inability to adjust is a result of larger injustices of social oppression imposed upon the differences in the civil military relations. Stigmatized by society's perception of them as mentally unstable, shell shocked, and otherwise adversely affected by the war, veterans exhibit a certain level of role distance from their civilian lives. As homeless veterans, they may be unable to secure such basic needs or depend on their social support systems. Their feelings of alienation become further exacerbated as they cannot converse with the rest of society thus feeling victimized as if, "no one will take the time to acknowledge them" (Rokach, 2005:108). The very act of passersby refusing to recognize their presence or to engage in conversation, perhaps for fear of them panhandling or otherwise being as a nuisance, leads the homeless to feel as if they are not even human, thus feeling the full effect of such alienation.

Alienation was identified by posing such question as: Do you feel as if you are different from those around you? Why and how does this affect your life? Do you feel somewhat separated emotionally, psychologically, or otherwise from your peers/co-workers/classmates? Do you feel as though you are different from when you left for the military as compared to when returned?

Anomie

The highly disparate nature of the military world and that of the civilian world becomes a major concern for returning veterans because of the different norms and morality between such

different worlds. Durkheim describes the concept of anomie as stemming from the problems that arise from “a weakened common morality” resulting in a breakdown in normative systems (Ritzer 82). This phenomenon appeared as a result of the increasing division of labor in modern society created a weakened collective sense of norms and morality; the modern division of labor reduced people to isolated tasks and positions.

Few tasks and jobs in the civilian world can truly translate into those of an infantryman in the military. Midnight reconnaissance patrols and rifle ranges are unlike anything else in the world and servicemen often find that they do not share similar lifestyles, values, or ethics with their civilian peers. Behavior such as physical violence, yelling, and cursing are not acceptable in the civilian world the veterans now inhabit, and as they cannot make sense of their new realities, norms, and values, a certain degree of anomie occurs (Crossley 8). As veterans return to a home that seems vaguely familiar, frustration may occur, as they may not be able to reconnect to the world they once belonged, to a world that they may no longer feel connected with all as a result of their experiences abroad.

In Durkheimian terms, since norms as “social facts” arise out of collective life, the isolated individual will not be able to generate or conform to such a system of norms when being exposed to the rest of society (Crossley 8). Although the veteran can be said to have once existed in such a society, his experiences in the military have largely “reset” his system of morals and values; the entire concept of basic training or boot camp is predicated on the ability of such training to psychologically strip recruits of all previous perceptions of values and norms, instilling in them what the military deems as acceptable modes of behavior. This lack of “normlessness” upon returning from combat can often cause the veteran to feel as if he has engaged in deviant behavior when performing acts that were previously accepted.

Examples of questions that measure anomie are: Do you feel as if there was a difference between the military and the civilian sphere in terms of what you could or could not do? What were some of the things that you could do in the civilian world that you couldn't do in the military (and vice versa)? What do you feel accounted for such differences? Did you ever feel like you performed a "faux pas" without knowing it? What happened and why do you think it happened?

Strength and Presence of Kinship Bonds

The lack of social bonds and the phenomenon of homelessness are powerfully correlated with one another. In this vein, a monograph entitled *Disaffiliated Man* included a definition of homelessness as, "a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures" (Rossi 166). Since kinship bonds are typically among the strongest and most committed bonds between two persons, it becomes a crucial point of concern in examining homelessness. For most people, reliance on such kinship bonds remains the first line of defense from poverty or homelessness when facing financial, emotional, or medical difficulties (Rossi 166).

The disposition, frequency of contact, and level of maintenance of such kinship bonds becomes especially significant in light of the composition of the AVF and the potential prevalence of recruits that may be lacking of such bonds. The issue becomes whether, "the unraveling of kinship bonds is in itself a risk factor for homelessness and how the strength of those bonds may be affected or unaffected by the military and post-discharge experience" (Tessler, 2007:1).

Questions in this domain in the interview protocol are: Are you married? Describe your relationship with your family and the family you grew up with? Do they currently reside in Boston? Do you keep in contact with your parents and/or siblings? How often do you speak with them? Is it via telephone, Internet, in person? Who, if any, would you say is your closest family member and why?

RESULTS

Altogether twelve interviews were conducted with homeless veterans from November 2006 to April 2007. Five were from the boarding house in Lawrence, four from the Veterans Upward Bound Program, two from the Veterans Benefits Clearinghouse, and one participant was from the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans. It should be noted that some of the participants from the VUB were actually residents of the NESHV who simply attended the VUB courses. All branches of the military were represented, with the exception of the U.S. Navy. The ages of the participants interviewed ranged from 39 to 77, all were male, and all were of the enlisted ranks. The median age was fifty.

The majority of participants were single and unmarried. A very small minority had previously been married but most had been on their own for a significant amount of time. Only one reported residence with a significant other in his room at a boarding house but a few reported occasionally seeing a female companion. Overall, the presence of kinship bonds was either very weak or almost non-existent. Although only one veteran openly reported having strained familial

relationships during his “bad” years, many others implied a similar phenomenon occurring throughout their years of substance abuse.

Length of service varied from two to ten years and all participants had spent at least some time on active duty. None had made a career out of the military. The veteran who served ten years did so in the form of mixed service, in the active, reserve, and individual ready reserve components of the U.S. military. The median length of service was approximately four years.

A majority of the participants had reported being honorably discharged from the service, but almost half, five, had medical discharges, whether for physical or mental illnesses. Only one veteran received a General Discharge, but this was under honorable conditions.

The number of medical discharges is substantial, and the majority of these discharges were from service-connected physical conditions or otherwise service-connected. Of those discharged for psychiatric reasons, one veteran reported to have been medically discharged after exhibiting schizophrenic behavior but admitted that he was actually using LSD at the time and chose not to fight the discharge in order to partake in a “Veterans-Tech” program, allowing him to attend vocational training. Another participant reported being diagnosed as bipolar prior to entering the service and was still permitted to join the service despite the fact that his recruiter was aware of his condition.

The majority of veterans were from the peacetime era or of the all-volunteer force. There were three Vietnam-era veterans, one Gulf War veteran, and one Korean-era veteran. Only one had actually been drafted involuntarily into the military, but two others claimed to have enlisted on the assumption that they would be drafted in order to have some control over their branch and station.

Of the participants interviewed, few had deployed out of the country for wartime operations. Only four had left the country as part of service-related obligations. One was deployed aboard a naval vessel off the coast of Korea, but never disembarked from the ship into Korea. Another had served in Southeast Asia and was stationed with the Air Force on their airbases in Thailand. The last veteran who reported being deployed was involved with the efforts in the Persian Gulf during the 1991 Iraq conflict, serving as a truck driver, presumably with a logistics supply unit.

None of the participants interviewed had served in *direct* combat as evidenced by possession of the U.S. Army Combat Infantryman Badge or U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Combat Action Ribbon. Combat service is defined as having participated competently in “bona fide” ground or surface combat. Regardless of possessing such decoration for verification, no participants claimed to have been in combat under any other circumstances.

With one exception, *all* participants reported heavy alcohol and substance abuse at some point in their life. One veteran summed up his use of substances and alcohol by saying, “[I had] a big addiction problem… I was drinking all the time and doing drugs all the time, *all* the time” (Marine Veteran, aged 42) [emphasis in original]. The exception was the one Korean-era veteran who served in the early 1950s, decades before the inundation of drugs on American soil, which may account for this anomaly.

Ethnography

While sifting through literature on homelessness, it occurred to me that it would be rather difficult to write about homeless veterans without ever having been one. I sat reading dozens of books and journal articles about homelessness in a climate-controlled room at the fifth floor of

my library, a multi-million dollar facility, built of lavish stone and marble. No doubt much important research is undertaken within those walls, intellectually invaluable studies that have surely been produced by the use of such faculties. But homelessness just did not seem to be one of these things; it was like trying to explain to someone the awe and majestic beauty of the Grand Canyon with words – sometimes you just have to see it for yourself. Although I am a veteran and work at a number of the shelters in and around Boston, I have myself never been "homeless." The opportunity to engage in participant observation was a vital experience to this research allowing my immersion into the day-to-day activities of the people whom I attempted to understand (May 148). I decided to escape from my ivory tower at least for a few days (and nights), spending them as a homeless veteran in the city of Boston.

The ethnography would also be a method to gain some insight that normal interviewing simply could not provide. Although interviews were more like guided conversations, I knew that there was something to be lost in speaking directly to a person, perhaps to the degree that I felt that participants sometimes said what I wanted to hear. Furthermore, at the onset of my research I feared that I would not be able to perform the requisite number of interviews. But in fact, the very notion of a mandatory number of interviews is quite misleading, as sociologists typically recommend conducting such interviews until the point of "saturation" when there is almost nothing new being said – whether that point is attained at the fifth or fifteenth interview is irrelevant. In any case, even when a degree of saturation was eventually achieved, I continued to pursue an ethnographic component to my research, one that I believed would serve as a valuable supplement to my research on homeless veterans.

A Night Out

I picked up some secondhand clothing at the local Goodwill and thrift stores and brought with me only a pad of paper, my DD-Form 214 to verify my veteran status, and a letter from my thesis advisor confirming my research in case anything unexpected developed. Out of habit, I grabbed my messenger bag and began to cram my few belongings into it, but stopped midway and instead opted for a plain plastic bag, as even the campus bookstore bags seemed too luxurious with its reinforced handles and thick gauge plastic. (I later found out that the plastic bags I was using were also fashionably popular at the shelter). With my ill-fitting clothes and disheveled hair I took off towards the city.

My role as an ethnographer was that of a *complete participant*. My intentions were never articulated and I found this to aid in engaging completely with the other veterans and shelter staff. My previous request to perform in-depth interviews with the veterans was denied, as some of the clinical staff did not want their clients available to outside researchers. Therefore the information collected at the shelter during the participant observation was not available through any other means.

The man at the front desk immediately picked up on my presence; with much of the population at the shelter being much older than my own twenty-four years, I was a bit conspicuous in the crowd. This became more apparent as I noticed most of the veterans were also predominantly white and much better dressed than I was. I was also the only Asian American veteran in the shelter that night, but it was the appearance of the other veterans that I found the especially significant.

The "Dirty" Ones

Mainstream perspective and even modern sociology typically illustrates the homeless man as an outwardly messy and unkempt individual. A Google image search will bring up pictures of men with thick scruffy beards, dirty clothes, and cardboard signs and such images tend to infiltrate people's minds and reinforce preconceptions as they pass by the homeless in subways and alleys. But entering the cafeteria of the shelter in thrift store clothing, my own appearance and attire was noticeably more sullied and disordered. Donning a blazer with patches over my elbows and corduroy trousers, I was also guilty of having a stereotypical Charlie Chaplain-esque hobo-like view of the homeless. Many of the men were dressed normally, in brand name clothing in good condition. Most did not smell or appear with untidy amounts of facial hair.

Certainly perceptions of homeless men as appearing as dirty or otherwise unclean cannot be considered as simple hyperbole, since the very nature of living without a stable home or on the streets is most likely correlated with an inability or "deprioritization" of maintenance of one's personal hygiene. American mainstream culture tends to stress outward appearance as a manifestation of our identity: we spend countless hours carefully selecting our clothing, styling our hair, creating an "image" of ourselves from a combination of choices that include our footwear, attire, choice of vehicle and so forth. The homeless subculture tends to de-emphasize the importance of such things – Maslow's hierarchy of needs stipulates that physiological necessities tend to overshadow needs of esteem. But this is certainly not to say that such concerns do not have their place in the subculture of the homeless.

A Three-Piece Suit

Jose was a mainstay in Roxbury. A gentleman, Jose often wore a three-piece suit complete with a full-length overcoat and black loafers. When I first saw him walking around the shelter I thought he might be on the board of directors at the shelter or at least a volunteer. Later when he approached me, I quickly realized that this was not the case. Upon closer inspection, I observed that his suit was tattered and worn. He spoke to me rather gregariously and talked about his appearance. Although he lived out on the streets, Jose expressed that he was still concerned about his appearance and liked to dress as well as he could. It served as a coping mechanism of sorts.

For Jose, dressing in such clothes allowed him to manage the larger realities of homelessness, perhaps even allowing him to embrace a different identity during the day. By appearing like a "normal" man to passersby, Jose began to adopt certain characteristics of normalcy. He tended not to engage in behavior and actions expected of homeless men during this time when he was "nicely dressed," refraining from lying down on benches or soliciting certain areas for prolonged amounts of time so as to arouse suspicion. By being cognizant of both his appearance and manner, Jose was able to control his impression and thereby maintain his "front," "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman 22).

In respect to this, the public's overall perception of the homeless is somewhat skewed or has otherwise been mislead. In the wet shelters of Boston and perhaps even more so in the dry shelters, the men have appeared, in large part, very unlike their stereotypical perception in terms of their outward appearance. One reasonable explanation for this may be the nature of the dry shelter itself. As a shelter that provides housing and care only for individuals who have been

sober for forty-eight hours, the individuals that enter such a facility may be those of a more stable temperament. Strict rules are enforced within the shelter and noncompliance with such rules leads to almost immediate removal from the building. Many of the veterans, who had been on the street for various lengths of time, were aware of the different rules of the shelters and knew where they could or could not go if they had been drinking or using drugs.

Certainly Jose can attest to the extent to which even wet shelters may contain individuals who would not be identified as homeless based solely on appearance. There is quite a distinction between the wet and dry shelters, in that those checking into the latter will on average appear much more lucid and maintain a much more stable outward appearance than those of the former. But the overall indication is that society's perception of the appearance of homeless men is one based on exaggeration and the unfair caricature of the homeless man.

Masculinity

After I had checked in for the night, the man at the front desk instructed me to return to the lobby at a quarter before eight to help take out the day's trash. It was another one of the rules: to have all the members of the "cot squad" assist in disposing of the trash and in the general cleanup of the area. I had arrived at the shelter at about six or so in the evening and I wandered about, waiting for the time to come. As I made my way back to the front desk, I heard what sounded like an argument developing.

Amidst a few conversations, one voice stood out as using excessive profane language in a sharp and malicious tone. As I got closer, I realized it was only one man speaking, and rather than an argument between two people, the man appeared to be talking to no one in particular. I presumed that he was commenting, rather irately, about having to take out the trash or about

something else and most of the other men seemed to ignore him. The man, Jerry, was young, in his mid-twenties, Caucasian with short, cropped brown hair. He wore a “float jacket” a varsity-like wool and leather jacket typically given to sailors and Marines after an overseas deployment. Written on the back of the jacket were the various stations and countries visited, indicating that Jerry was a former sailor and probably recently discharged from the Navy. He became more aggravated after we had been issued our sheets, and as we began to set up our sleeping areas and cots, his foul language grew louder and consistent.

The disturbing part was that Jerry was not talking to anyone in particular. For the most part, he was just talking to himself. The other men around him had long decided they were going to keep their distance and Jerry sat up on his cot in an empty section of the cafeteria. As I carefully inched closer to him, I began to understand what he was saying. Jerry was upset over having to spend the night at the shelter. He very visibly made this evident by conveying an utter aversion to being there; his complaints were about everything from the quality of the cots to the men around him. As Jerry talked to himself, he referred to the others in the room as, “losers” and griped over having to be placed with such individuals. For him, it was a way to distance himself from those around him, a mechanism by which Jerry could dissociate himself from the “homeless losers” around him and avoid the fact that he was one of them.

Jerry’s behavior was a manifestation of Goffman’s generation of social distance, in which the actor attempts to restrict contact between themselves and the audience (Ritzer 365). But instead of necessarily trying to create a sense of awe within the audience, Jerry was instead attempting to construct a more masculine role for himself while concurrently detaching himself from those around him. Being at the shelter most likely meant that Jerry did not have adequate means to provide housing for himself and perhaps felt this to be a threat to his own masculine

identity. In our culture, men are expected to be reasonably self-sufficient and even more so, become providers of their family; the masculine identity is created, in part, by the retention of gainful employment, of basic possessions, and of adequate housing. Veterans are less likely to seek out shelters and programs for the homeless for precisely this reason. Among other things, the combat-oriented nature of the military produces a subculture of hyper masculinity, one that may not be readily abandoned in the mind of the veteran once he is discharged.

A Separate Subculture

Jerry's angry behavior escalated as he continued "put down" everyone around him. As he paced back and forth in the cafeteria, he eventually began to direct his comments to specific individuals and confronted a gentleman named Charlie.

Every subculture has its own set of rules and norms, in which certain behaviors and actions tolerated in one culture may not be in others. As a culture that exists on the margins of mainstream society, the subculture of the homeless can be said to be separate from the majority culture, both physically and psychologically. In other words, the men living at the shelter are not only physically disconnected from the rest of the Bostonians, but this "disconnectivity" applies also to their psychological and psychosocial development as well, leading to the emergence of a somewhat varied sense of norms and mores.

Charlie was one of the older veterans at the shelter. A former Army cook, he worked in the kitchen at the shelter and lived on one of the upper floors in the transitional housing. Charlie was Caucasian and only in his late fifties, but appeared much older. He was tall, had white hair and glasses, and for these reasons reminded me of Santiago, Hemingway's "Old Man." There

was a gentleness about him, and I feared for him as he and Jerry found themselves staring at each other face to face.

Strangely, Charlie actually went from peaceably disregarding Jerry, as the rest of us had been doing, to actively objecting to Jerry's deviant behavior. The shelter's residents tolerate a certain level of irregular behavior, though extreme deviance stemming from mental illness is rare. The men at the shelter were willing to allow Jerry's outbursts up to the point where they came to openly threaten another individual. To my surprise, Charlie handled the incident quite gracefully: he stood up to confront Jerry then broke away and gestured for Jerry to follow him to the front desk. As a cook in the kitchen, Charlie was considered to a certain extent to be an employee or volunteer and cautioned Jerry about being "written up." After a few minutes, Jerry returned to the back of the sleeping area, noticeably calmer but still a bit disgruntled. What happened afterwards is of particular importance.

Once Jerry had settled in, still speaking to himself, but in a quieter voice, Charlie made his way back next to my cot. I was positioned towards the middle of the area, next to a large table that served as an ad hoc meeting place for some of the older veterans to chat idly before they went to bed. Jerry's performance was the topic of conversation and the old veterans began to speak openly about what their thoughts concerning him. Many expressed their desire to have absolutely nothing to do with the young man, that they had enough problems in their own lives without the addition of another. One of the older gentlemen was recently out on parole and mentioned that he could not afford an altercation with Jerry. Charlie and the others candidly condemned Jerry's behavior and all agreed to keep their distance and avoid contact with him. The significance of this was that there was no doubt that Jerry heard this entire conversation transpire.

A few minutes after hearing the discussion about himself, Jerry made his way over to Charlie and held his hand out and apologized. He went on to apologize to the gentlemen next to Charlie as well. By speaking *about* Jerry instead of *to* him, the men were able to collectively express their denouncement of his actions without directly confronting Jerry. Since this occurred in the context of a group setting, it offered a protected environment to voice their reproof of Jerry, without explicitly antagonizing him. Furthermore, their consensus to avoid and keep away from him, intimated to Jerry that his continued hostile behavior would lead to further isolation and segregation from the collective group and additional imposition of certain sanctions.

The separate nature of the homeless subculture means that there are distinctive procedures in dealing with deviant behavior – even the very definition of deviance is interpreted differently.

Talk to Me

In many of the studies on the homeless from the 1950s onward, the homeless male has been said to suffer from, *inter alia*, loneliness and social isolation. Homelessness has often aptly been described as not only a state of financial poverty, but a poverty of relationships as well. The lack of social resources and strong kinship bonds seem to have been major factors in the sequence of events leading to the lack of adequate housing for most of the veterans.

One veteran named Mike, seemed especially extroverted, almost to the point of restlessness. After speaking for five or so minutes with some of the older veterans, he made his way over to one of the newer and younger veterans on my side of the sleeping area. They talked at length about the shelter and its rules and regulations, about where to get free food, and where to best spend the daytime hours when they were required to leave the shelter. Once the younger

man decided to turn in for the night, Mike returned to his cot and began to do the same. But soon after, Mike started making the first of numerous visits to the restroom and around different parts of the shelter. Initially, I was confused by his peculiar behavior and thought that perhaps that he simply needed to make multiple trips in order to take care of his personal hygiene. After all, given the uncommon circumstances of living at a homeless shelter, the otherwise usual act of going to sleep requires a number of unusual acts, from waiting on line for linen to setting up your own cot. It was not until his fifth visit to the restroom that I realized what he was doing.

Mike was a Caucasian male of about forty years, but looked younger than he was. His hair was gelled and with his jeans, belt and other clothing, he appeared quite stylish. Out on the street, he probably would not be mistaken as one of the homeless. It is clear that a certain sense of "otherness" is applied to the homeless, one that the previous statement evokes. That is, as individuals without a stable domicile, men who live out on the street or in the shelter are thus distinguished from the rest of the population, that because of this, they are inherently different from everyday Americans. They are *the* homeless; in the mind of Americans the word functions more as a noun even when used as an adjective. Unlike individuals of the working class or minority groups, mainstream America typically does not come in contact with this group of society. If they do, it is for brief moments in the urban landscape, in subways stations or by street corners.

Although Mike did not appear homeless, he craved human interaction and conversation at the shelter. Few Americans engage in interaction with the homeless, but even so, America, as a developed and highly advanced nation, is one that is increasingly disconnecting people from themselves and others around them. For Mike, the fact that human relationships in our country typically do not arise from situations outside a few specific environments (such as the workplace,

the home, or direct social networks) means that since homeless men traditionally do not have access to such relationships, they find it increasingly difficult to form these bonds and therefore Mike's isolation persisted regardless of his "non-homeless" appearance.

Therefore his status as a homeless individual, although not obvious by his appearance, does however affect Mike since he does have admission into such spheres where more than superficial human relationships usually develop. As such, given Mike's disposition as a particularly sociable individual, he felt the need to engage in such social activities in the one of the few forums available to him, the shelter. Mike sought to fulfill the needs of any social animal, to engage in meaningful interaction with those around him. By wandering around, Mike was checking to see who else was awake so that he could converse with them, not unlike a partygoer who drifts around to see who else showed up.

In his web blog, "The Homeless Guy," Kevin Barbieux writes about his experiences as homeless man living on and off the streets since the early 1980s. Barbieux speaks of how to best help the homeless, not necessarily with money or food, but for everyday men and women to simply, "Talk to him…[and] get to know him for who he is…that being a real friend fulfills his biggest needs – the need to be known, the need to belong, the need to be accepted" (Barbieux 1).

Symbols

At one point in Mike's conversation with a younger African American veteran, the topic of family came up. Jake, the man Mike was speaking with, mentioned that he needed to talk to one of his family members but was unable to because of the lack of adequate means to do so. Without a calling card or access to a regular telephone, Jake could find no way to talk with this

person. At this point Mike pulled out something from his pocket as he donned a big smile on his face. It was a cellular phone.

Within the walls of the shelter, certain items carry with them symbolic meaning that they do not bear in the outside world. A key ring with numerous keys attached to one's belt signifies a level of responsibility, of trustworthiness and accountability. It suggests to others that the carrier of such keys is employed or otherwise "in charge" of some part of the building. As most shelters are less than optimally funded, it is not unusual for many of the larger shelters to utilize some of the clients to perform certain functions. Each floor of the transitional housing center is staffed with "deck commanders" who are tasked with the daily maintenance of their respective areas. Deck commanders are typically clients who have been at the shelter for some time and exhibited some sort of consistency and dependability. Keys in the traditional sense represent access to certain areas or things not available to others and the very notion of a key implies some type of lock or measure of security. You and I most likely have keys to gain entry to our apartment, our car, or a locker at the gym. But for a man without such possessions, keys have no value, but rather become a symbol of responsibility within the homeless subculture.

In this sense, Mike's cellular phone carries a larger meaning. Most cell phones are fairly expensive and therefore require some sort of income to sustain service. Furthermore, the contract to obtain such cellular service usually necessitates the maintenance of an address and typical contains provisions regarding the stability of one's credit. Even modern prepaid cellular service also includes some sort of stipulation regarding payment for credits, and such service generally becomes even more expensive than the usual monthly-billed service.

In any case, the cellular phone implies a certain level of fiscal stability or at least ability to manipulate corporations and/or bureaucracies to engender desired effects. In other words, by

having a cell phone, Mike is demonstrating to Jake, not only his compassion by allowing Jake to use his phone and thus perhaps developing a more than superficial bond, but he is also displaying to Jake and others a certain level of competence in the ways of the world. He continues on to tell Jake that he has managed to obtain a plan that allows him virtually unlimited minutes at night and to take as long as he need needs, then continues to boast about the other features and perks he received with his cellular service. In this way, Mike is able to fulfill his need for social interaction and also express to Jake that he is reliable, and dependable and perhaps worthy of what Mike craves so much: friendship.

Going Home

Early the next morning, shelter staff began turning on lights and waking the tired residents. Since it was Sunday, we were allowed to "sleep in" until 6 am – although it did not feel like it at all. I had barely slept and spent most of the night tossing and turning, unable to fall asleep. The night before I had wondered why most of veterans opted for the folding style cots that stood a good three feet from the ground. Too lazy to construct the easily made apparatus, I selected the flat-style cots which more resembled military medical litters and stood about three inches from the floor. A few hours had passed when an immense feeling of regret overcame me as I noticed a few furry brown creatures heading towards me.

After the lights were turned out and most of the men were fast asleep, a legion of tiny, brown mice overran the cafeteria nibbling at the tiny morsels of food that littered the floor. With only those three inches between my body and the floor, I heard the unmistakable pitter-patter of scurrying feet and felt the small breezes of wind created by the little mice. In the dark, my eyes caught sight of small figures darting across the floor – often only a few inches from where I lay.

The constant vigilance I devoted to ensuring none of the mice would crawl upon me, as I imagined they had on some of the other veterans who slept with *no* cot, kept me awake for most of the night. I was clearly in the minority, as most of the others were fast asleep. The few that noticed appeared to be unfazed by the tiny rodents that scampered across the floor.

The only thing that kept me going was the thought that within a few hours, after the sun had risen and the night was over, I would be back on campus eating an omelet at the campus dining hall and sleeping on clean sheets in the dorms. I would be able to shed my ill-fitting blazer with the patches over the elbows and the oversized hooded sweatshirt bought for only three dollars. I would be able to take a hot shower and wash away my night at the shelter. But I realized that none of the others I slept next to in the mice-infested cafeteria would be able to do so. I wondered what kept them going.

DISCUSSION

The most significant finding from this study is the frequency and severity of substance abuse, and this was initially unexpected. In this context, vocational and education programs aimed at facilitating the upward social mobility of veterans seem to be purposed at the "wrong side" in terms of ameliorating homelessness. Results from the sample indicate that the preponderance of veterans are, in fact, homeless because of substance abuse issues and/or from conditions that existed prior to a person's entrance into military service, conditions that may in fact have contributed to a potential recruit's desire to enlist in the service. The importance in identifying such issues *before* they become problems and taking a more proactive stance to address such ailments becomes apparent. But since a number of veterans were of the Vietnam-era and because many veterans did identify having feelings relating to loneliness and isolation, it is important to understand the dynamics involved holistically.

Home is a Dream

It should be noted that while none of the veterans served in *direct* combat, this did not preclude the fact that military service had nonetheless disrupted the lives of many of the veterans interviewed. One veteran still seemed enormously affected by the traumas of wartime experiences or from being deployed. After serving in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, he was still aware of the violence around him and reported elevated emotions of shock and distress, sentiments that were brought by reading a newspaper article about an American news anchor committing suicide on network television,

> I remember looking at the paper…saying 'What the fuck is going on? What's going on'…it was very disquieting, very disturbing and I felt probably an inner panic. I was just real concerned with the state of affairs. It's like I'm not there but it sounds like the country is going to hell in a hand basket and it's insane here (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The veteran's expression, although not directly related to combat, is related to his deployment into an area that he viewed as chaotic, and upon hearing that violent episodes had occurred stateside, he was increasingly troubled. The disturbance came from the feeling that the world around him, to include not only the area of operations in which he was deployed, but also the world back home, was coming apart at the seams.

For the troops deployed in far off lands or at least away from the towns in which they grew up, "home" becomes as a place that has virtually monopolized their minds everyday since they have been away. It symbolizes a utopia that exists outside the realm of the military, the war, and the turmoil experienced in such places. The home becomes glorified, idealized, and romanticized. Many Marines are known to keep "EAS clocks" (timers that count down their expiration of active service) waiting for the time until they can return to their "normal" lives. For

this veteran, the impact of hearing about the disturbances back home resulted in a profound feeling of shock and devastation, continuing on until he returned home.

> We couldn't wait to come home and in coming home it was this huge culture shock. I remember thinking that the morals, that Satan had taken over the country and I didn't know where that came from but I was super paranoid and couldn't … be around people. I couldn't, I didn't talk…umm. I had serious attitude (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Part of the reason for this feeling of anomie came from the sense that the world that they had left was not the world to which they had returned. It is difficult for the service members to determine whether they themselves had been significantly changed or if the texture of the world as they knew it had been distorted, or if both had actually occurred. Seeing their homes in such an altered state leads to the collapsing of the bedrock which they so heavily depended upon.

Home also becomes a mechanism for survival. The reality of a service member's situation, whether it be in Southeast Asia or in Fort Benning, GA is one wrought with adversity; military life is characteristically arduous, dangerous, and physical demanding – a lifestyle not for the timid. Although veterans may look back fondly at their service, many will admit to the difficulty experienced while in the military.

> *I didn't like it* [the service]. They *flammed* me, they said they was going to make me a mechanic and then they threw me this thing [being a combat engineer] (Army veteran, aged 44) [emphasis in original].

Whether a soldier enjoys his life in the service or not, the truth remains that few would consider it an easy life, especially in light of the extremely physical nature of the work and the prolonged amount of time away from home that is often required. When a soldier knows that he will be home in a specified amount of time or at least eventually, it allows him to deal with the harshness of his realities by reminding himself that he will be back "home" soon and that eventually, there will be a return to reality. Such sentiments are evidenced in military "leave"

days and the extent to which they are held almost to a sacred status, especially for younger enlisted service members, most of whom are unmarried and who reside as single males in the barracks. Living alone, without family or other relatives, a young soldier's home is usually where he was raised or where parents and other family or close friends reside. Leave days are not simply vacation days as they are in the civilian world or for older, married servicemen rather they are opportunities to return home and live a normal life for a short period of time.

Inevitably, the preconceptions of home, held so unrealistically high, will fall short of what they truly provide. The disenchantment comes as friends may have moved on, as jobs that may have once promised are no longer be available and the great *fantasy* of home ultimately becomes just that, a castle in the sky that can never be attained outside of one's mind. One veteran found that home, "…was the same. They [his friends] asked some questions and everything and that's it. It wasn't like they was [sic] in love with me. Friends are not friends, you know?" (Army veteran, aged 44). The disappointment of the fantasy, coupled with the stress of the military caused many veterans to search for alternate sources of escape or relief.

> Back then, I was a teenager, I was a pothead. So I was smoking marijuana and drinking and going back and forth… and getting drugs… I didn't like it; I just didn't like [being in the military] (Army veteran, aged 44).

The use of drugs, which may not have necessarily begun while in the military, was nonetheless in many cases, exacerbated by the strenuous nature of the military and its tendency to station military recruits far away from their homes. The combined effect led to feelings of frustration, helplessness and powerlessness.

> I remember feeling [*laughs*] wanting to leave there [Southeast Asia], and … it was 8,000 miles of water between me and home and I remember feeling *powerless* I have never felt so powerless in my life. Was sitting there wanting to leave and knowing that the only way I could leave was handcuffs, court martial (Air Force veteran, aged 55) (emphasis added).

The lack of home and its being unable to fulfill its expectations becomes monumental in the life of the returning veteran. It is, in essence, the destruction of the fantasy that has in many cases sustained their will to survive; it becomes a source correlated to all other obstacles faced by the veteran. The exodus of friends denotes the diminishment of social resources and networks, and is a potential source for loneliness and isolation. The use of drugs becomes a means for sustaining themselves in the absence of the fantasies and perhaps as a means to control one aspect in a life in which they feel so powerless.

The Prevalence of Substance Abuse

The frequency of participants who reported having severe substance abuse problems is significant and especially alarming. With the exception of the Korean-era veteran, *all* participants reported considerable drug use. For the majority of veterans interviewed, the use of such substances began more recreationally and then came to take over their lives – precipitating their entrance into the shelter or a similar boarding house. One participant described his own observations about other veterans found in homeless shelters,

> I bounced around all kinds of homeless places from '83 until just a little while ago actually, when I left Court Street (NESHV)…98% of the guys who wind up in homeless shelters are there because of drug abuse or substance abuse. So if you're tying in homelessness to veterans you're going to also see a lot of substance abuse I would presume. But in '93 the catalyst [to homelessness] was addiction to cocaine (Army veteran, aged 50).

After using alcohol and marijuana for some time, this veteran was able to maintain a relatively stable lifestyle, managing to pay his bills and retain his apartment. But after becoming involved in more illicit drugs, he was unable to cope with his addiction and was incapable of maintaining a stable lifestyle.

Others found drug use to be a means for escaping their unfortunate realities or to otherwise cope with the difficulties associated with military service. Even if not serving in direct combat, service members can still feel vulnerable, frightened, or fearful of the potential for bodily injury. Reports of violent encounters with the enemy, deaths caused by massive carpet-bombing campaigns, and the inherent hostility of war itself leaves the average soldier in fear for his own life. Drugs can serve as a powerful vehicle for coping with such feelings.

> And I remember saying, 'I can't do this, I can't do this.' And within a couple days… guys…took me back to the hootches and rolled plastic up or fixed up bongs and [a] guy loaded cigarette up with heroine… it [the drugs] allowed me to set the fear aside. It was as much maintenance as it was anything…but I was, I guess I was numb. All I did (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Leaving the immediate environment that required the use of drugs to assuage his fears did not result in a corresponding relinquishment of drug use. He reports using,

> …massive amount of alcohol, weed, we [*laughs*] were going South of the Border, were going down to Nogales. There were several people there, had been there for a few years to party, they had a little lane going. We were buying marijuana from Mexico and we were buying so much volume, we were getting it for 40 dollars a pound. I remember getting onto flights, this was '74, '75 with duffle bags, bricks stuffed in duffle bags, I remember specifically going to Salt Lake City, going Baltimore, Maryland dropping weed off. Umm… peyote buttons, cyclical island, acid, mescaline, PCP, angel dust, chesta (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

After being inducted into the lifestyle of using drugs, the veteran finds it difficult to leave it. The use of drugs evolves from simply treating fears and for "maintenance" into becoming a negative source that bleeds into every aspect of their life. It becomes the lubricant and apparatus that initiates descension into a downward spiral that begins to consume every part of their lives. Substance abuse becomes a caustic chemical that eats away at social relationships and resources, straining kinship bonds, physically and mentally devastating the veteran and his perception of life itself. In extreme cases, severe substance abuse can relate to attempts at suicide and other self-destructive behaviors.

> I tried suicide a couple of times in the 90s. Serious attempts. I severed multiple tendons; still have nerve damage in my wrists. Overdosed on some medication. Almost died, stomach pump, the whole nine. Shot myself with a pistol [*laughs*] and I remember being just tired, wanting to die, again… I remember 9/11… in a crack basement [*laughs*]. People are crying... they were showing the twin towers over and over and over and I remember standing there…people were distraught and I was nothing. I felt absolutely zero. And I remember later that day the next few days that something was seriously wrong with me…I remember stealing people's dope while they were crying [about 9/11] (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The veteran, who may have served during the Vietnam-era or the decade following the conclusion of the war, did so before the introduction of stricter drug laws. After being exposed to drugs in the military or using drugs and alcohol to a much greater degree after enlistment, a veteran may be unable or unwilling to discontinue the use of such substances. One veteran puts it plainly:

> I got busted for smoking pot, man. I had a [sic] hot urine, I didn't know nothing about no AA or ANA, nothing, they didn't give me no trade book, nothing for that. But I still got General Discharge under Honorable conditions but they should've… put me in mandatory drug treatment or something (Army veteran, aged 44).

After using drugs in the military, he felt it necessary for the military, knowing that he had a problem with such substances, to offer him help. In this situation, the veteran expressed his dissatisfaction over the military culture that encouraged him to use drugs, then punished him for it, later discharging him for the same act.

The dependence on drugs and alcohol varied throughout the years following the military. The use of drugs became associated with a means for coping through difficult times; in essence, it became accepted as a normalized method for dealing with mental illness, and later the agent that prompted entrance into the homeless shelter.

> I was depressed. I was depressed and I picked up. I picked up and I was severely depressed and I just lost faith and then I quit my job and I didn't have no income so I come here [to the shelter] and get housed (Army veteran, aged 41).

The stories of the veterans had a remarkable consistency in regards to the events that precipitated their departure from residential stability and their subsequent induction into the shelter. Regardless of whether the use of drugs began in the military or not, it was *always* present immediately before the loss of their job and became correlated with their ultimate decline into homelessness.

Substance Abuse and Employment

The link between homelessness and employment becomes increasingly relevant in this discussion since the ability to maintain gainful employment is often of the first factors involved in deterring one's entrance into the shelter. Having a job and receiving a steady wage means being able to afford the cost associated with housing and thus not being forced to check into a shelter. Conversely, the loss of such employment and means of paying for room and board becomes a risk factor for homelessness.

For the veteran, loss of employment was not brought upon by downsizing, layoffs, or the changing of careers, as it sometimes is in the non-veteran population. Rather, the termination of employment was often linked to an almost cyclical series of substance abuse episodes, checking into shelters and rehabilitations facilities and then relapsing back into drug use. Veteran's education benefits obtained to support attendance in higher education or vocational schools would be lost or have to be repaid due to the withdrawing of courses caused by drug addiction.

> Oblivious. I tried to stay blasted all the time… it was such a hazy foggy period. During that interim I worked for Goodyear Aerospace. I worked Motorola Research and Development, I worked for IT & T, I worked for MYCORP. All electronic bench tech or research type positions. And I always quit or I just stopped showing up because it was getting in the way of my partying. Tried going back to school, lasted a semester or two. Couldn't do that (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Many times, substance abuse causes the loss of employment. As individuals are unable to maintain both their obligations to the job and to the active involvement with using drugs, one sphere must compensate for the other. It is often the job that suffers as a result of the "partying." But on certain occasions, the loss of employment may cause the emergence or reemergence into drugs and the veteran may relapse into the lifestyle he had prior to military service.

> [After being fired] I got really, really depressed. I ended up doing a lot of drinking, doing a lot of drugs. It got so bad that I was basically bedridden from the depression and I was out running out with the wrong crowds again. I grew up in a rough neighborhood and I was fucking running with all the crazies again and running with my old friends (Army veteran, aged 39).

A veteran might find employment and perhaps even excel in the position because of values learned in the military, but such upward mobility was often short-lived as the use of drugs and alcohol increased along with the inability or unwillingness to maintain employment. One veteran alludes to the causes for relapsing.

> I would say 'Well, now what?' I had no long-range goal; I had nothing else to strive for. And eventually…boredom would set in. I'd have some extra money and put those two together for this, recovered addict, and I was off and running, boredom and money, I'd be out playing, I'd be out looking for some excitement. So I didn't set any long goals, I didn't set anything that was going to give me a sense for me. Who I am. A sense of satisfaction (Army veteran, aged 50).

The lack of long-term goals and of a viable plan for the future became coupled with the peculiar sense of "boredom."

> I used the word 'boredom' but it's more like boredom/loneliness, it's more like living alone wanting female company all that and the way I knew to go about that, what I have learned was…through drinking and drugging. It's just, the only thing I knew (Army veteran, aged 50).

Boredom, loneliness, and the lack of practical ambition existed as powerful mechanisms that perpetuated the cycle of rehabilitation and relapse. The cycle endures until it hemorrhages and can no longer be maintained. Physically and psychologically the toll exacted by the abuse of

substances take effect and the veteran is unable to sustain the upward motions of the cycle and recover. Cycles become shorter, employment opportunities diminish, and the situation culminates with the "revolving door" of the shelter becoming a one-way entrance.

> And it was progressively shorter time periods that I could maintain gainful employment and the last 5, 10 years it was I would go to work through a temp agency usually and I was skilled I was good at what I did and I had 2 or 3 companies buy out my contract from the temp service and hire me on and I was getting more money and I would last 3 or 4 months, 6 months and I would just burn out. And I ended up finally just doing day labor for the last 4 or 5 years. I don't know, [went to] 15 or 16 rehab[s], drug rehab facilities (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The majority of veterans who reported heavy substance abuse subsequently recounted incidents in which a climaxing series of events occurred in this cycle, which, after bringing them into a number of shelters for a substantial period of time, also forced them to re-evaluate their circumstances. Three of the veterans interviewed were able to conclude the cycle of events and effect productive change in their lives. At the time of this writing they were only months away from completing their bachelor's degrees.

Vietnam and the Culture of Drugs in the Military

Currently the military has adopted a "zero tolerance" for service members who use illegal drugs or substances. Active-duty and reserve members of the military are often drug tested to ensure that the population of men and women serving our country are not doing so under the influence of drugs. Recruits can be sent home from basic training if they fail drug tests taken at the commencement of such training. Non-commissioned officers and officers alike can loose rank, pay, and even be discharged from the military if any illegal drug use is discovered.

With the introduction of tightened drug laws beginning in the late 20th century, the use of drugs has garnered an increased degree of criminality. The government's "war on drugs" has

further amplified penalties for not only drug dealers, but casual users as well. The military has come to adopt society's standpoint concerning the use of illegal drugs and maintains the zero tolerance policy to this day.

A majority of participants described the military as a place where their nascent usage of drugs increased dramatically, and although they may have used such substances casually prior to entering the military, the time they had spent in the service contributed to their use of drugs afterwards.

> When I went to the service, it was part of [it]. You drank or you doped and that's… I mean if you didn't, there was something wrong with you. So, I smoked a lot of reefer and drank a lot of wine, clubbed a lot (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Often times there existed a virtual trichotomy between service members in the military, between those who used alcohol, those who used other illicit substances, and those who simply did not use any drugs.

> There was one end of the barracks was all the 'oilers'… the drinkers. And on the other end…there were guys that didn't do anything but smoke pot and there were guys that didn't do anything but smoke heroine… I did it all. There was speed there that was wicked, wicked powerful that I fell in love with. Started speedballing with heroine and speed (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

With the influx of substance abuse present within the military, abstinence from such use would warrant suspicion or estrangement from the group dynamics. Substance abuse had become so commonplace that the stigma of deviance became placed upon those who did not use such substances.

> I remember there being 2 guys out of 20 in my shop that didn't drink or use drugs, and this guy was… he made jewelry…and he was the oddball, there was something really wrong with that guy. Why? Because he doesn't do anything but jewelry and work (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

In order to avoid such labels associated with abnormality and noncompliance to social norms with the group, many veterans felt the need to use such drugs in order to simply assimilate.

Drugs simply became *normalized* to such an extreme degree within both the military and civilian spheres. Popular media contributed to the normalization of drugs through television programs such as *Cheech and Chong*, which not only normalized the drug culture but also made it humorous. One can observe the powerful nature of group dynamics by simply observing adolescents and the pressures associated with tobacco, alcohol, and drug use. The influence of others formed in a unified collection or unit can place an enormous amount of stress on a single individual to conform to group behavior. "Thus in large crowds, horrendous crimes can occur… [Groups] enable individuals in mobs and soldiers in military units to commit acts that they would never dream of doing as individuals" (Grossman 150). The power of the group is thus recognized.

> Everybody was smoking pot; everybody was doing mushrooms, hallucinogens, wine. Just about everybody in my company was doing drugs of one kind or another…it was a lot of heaving drinking and that kind of behavior (Army veteran, aged 50).

The military actually prides itself on its ability to take men off the street and mold them through intense indoctrination, training, and instruction, into finely tuned soldiers who have been assimilated into the culture of the military. Since most branches, such as the Army and the Marines, operate in small, tight units, the cohesiveness of the squad or team is vital to mission accomplishment and to the security of the country. Disintegrated groups make combat-ineffective units and threaten the success of any operation. Commanding officers place this cohesion at a premium when fielding and training their units, and it ultimately becomes the major factor in determining the norms and regulations for a group. They will often emphasize the importance of unit integration. As such, it is often in the best interests of a commanding officer to ensure group consistency and solidarity. Despite being assigned in the same area of operations and having the same job requirements, enlisted men can have vastly dissimilar experiences

because commanding officers are given a significant amount of latitude in directing and managing their units. In some cases the approval of one commanding officer can spell an easy entrance to using illegal substances.

> I remember when I first reported for duty out in Hawaii I walked into the CO's [commanding officer's] office and he said to me, 'Hey I know you don't smoke pot' which the way I heard it and I think the way he meant it was, 'Don't worry about smoking pot cause everybody was doing it' (Army veteran, aged 50).

The tacit consent of a commissioned officer was enough for the veteran to understand that such behaviors was not only approved but also perhaps even endorsed in order to gain approval by peers. Pressure to be accepted, endorsements by commanding officers, and the culture of the military proved to be an appealing argument for many to start or increase their drug use. The greatest factor that can be identified as the initial cause is often recognized as the culture that existed at the time that the prevailing social attitude in the immediate post-Vietnam years in America led to open acceptance of the drug culture.

Participants professed that the use of drugs was almost engrained into the landscape of the military while they were in the service, ranging between the 1960s to the 80s.

> I didn't *turn* to drugs. For somebody who grew up in the era that I grew up in, during the counterculture years of late sixties, 'flower power'… There was this whole drug counter culture thing going on, the anti-Vietnam thing going on, and it was kinda normal. I don't know of anybody in my generation, that didn't smoke pot…it was a normal thing to do and I think I just kinda got caught up into that (Army veteran, aged 50) [emphasis in original].

The use of drugs had become so prevalent outside the military that it gained normalcy within the military as well. Part of the tolerance for drug use stemmed from the Vietnam War itself and continued well after the war. As one of the most controversial conflicts in American history, Vietnam was a place of great complexity and a source of much discord. Drug use in-country during Vietnam by American troops was uncharacteristically high as compared to other conflicts

like the police action in Korea or the current war in Iraq; twenty-six percent of returning Vietnam veterans used drugs after the war; 7 percent had problems concerning addiction to more illicit drugs like cocaine or heroine (Schutt 5). But the ramifications of such drug use by Vietnam veterans extended far past the actual years of the war itself.

> We'd do it [drugs] in our rooms. I think the military has since changed its attitude about that but back in late 70s that wasn't the case…all of the non coms [non-commissioned officers] and officers that I interacted with were all Vietnam veterans so they were all fucked up in their own right anyways…regardless of where my head was at. I was interacting with all these people that had been through hell and lots of…drug addiction comes from Vietnam (Army veteran, aged 50).

An additional concern would be the preexisting culture of the military itself, even prior to the Vietnam War. As a combat-oriented organization, the military is composed of an extremely high proportion of young, aggressive males who place an emphasis on masculine ideals. This results in a creation of a unique hyper masculine culture in which certain behaviors are embraced, this includes behavior involving the glorification of female conquest, the achievement of difficult physical deeds, and also the ability to consume and successfully retain alcohol in excess. A well-known Marine proverb confirms this.

> We stole the eagle from the Air Force, the anchor from the Navy, and the rope from the Army. On the 7th day, while God rested, we overran his perimeter and stole the globe, and we've been running the show ever since. We live like soldiers and talk like sailors and slap the hell out of both of them. Soldier by day, lover by night, drunkard by choice, MARINE BY GOD! [emphasis in original].

The military often recruits its personnel from high school or from other areas in which young men often congregate. These areas include malls, fairs, and after-school programs. Such a tactic is far from coincidence. Young males are especially attractive to all militaries not only because of their physical prowess in comparison to middle-aged males, but also in terms of their cognitive development. Older men are more set in their ways, they are more experienced with

life, and generally more difficult to mold into fine soldiers; older men would not so easily absorb military training, instruction, and the ability to take order without question. Young males in their more nascent stages of manhood make more docile subjects. At seventeen or eighteen, these men are at their physical prime but still in the developing stages of their identities and constructions of masculinity and what it means to be a man in our society. They will form the identity exposed to them by the military in their adolescence and will retain this perception long afterwards and unfortunately for many, this idealization of masculine roles may include the use of drugs and alcohol.

> I would even attribute it [drug and alcohol use] to the army, the military. All that time from '77 right until '93, it was a lot of heavy drinking. When I think that really heavy drinking started, [was] in the military. We'd come back from the field…and it'd be four or five, 55-gallon drums filled with ice and beer. The whole company would pretty much get wasted drunk together (Army veteran, aged 50).

Regardless of previous usage, the military becomes the milieu in which masculinity is tied into alcohol consumption and drug use. Perhaps this is why homeless veterans were more likely to have drinking problems as compared to non-veteran homeless men (Schutt 17).

> More, more, more after. A lot more after. During the military, before the military very rare. Marijuana. Drink, puffed a cigarette. I was an athlete. During the military is when I really got into that shit actually (Army veteran, aged 51).

The significance is that such lessons learned in the military do not dissipate so quickly. Norms, roles, and ideals discovered in the early stages of development are much more difficult to change after they have become internalized. Lessons are more easily learned by children than habits are unlearned by adults. Substance abuse learned or otherwise amplified in the military is tough to curtail once released from the military and can lead to subsequent problems even decades after the service.

> When I got overseas, I welcomed anything that would numb me. I didn't understand the nature of the beast and I was totally addicted by the time I left there. [*laughs*] It was only after drinking after fifth of liquor which I could never [before]… that I knew that I had a serious problem…Somewhere in the late '70s, '77, '78, I uh… I shut down; I ended up spending 30 days in a locked facility. Spent 30 days in a phoenix VA in a locked ward, just shut down (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Lessons or habits concerning substance abuse picked up or exacerbated during an individual's service in the military can and often do lead to the precipitous conditions resulting in the large figures of homeless veterans. The tenuous connection between veteran's status and homelessness becomes elucidated in light of its link with substance abuse. Coupled together, such dynamics constitute the most salient risk factors for homelessness encountered in the sample.

Kinship Bonds

For many men and women across the country, the existence of kinship bonds becomes one of the most relevant factors in preventing homelessness and one of the most central issues of concern in assessing risk factors for homelessness. With the loss of employment, which typically constitutes one's ability to retain stable residence, the strength of kinship bonds will in part determine the path of an individual. Many times what keeps an "average" person from checking into a shelter after a devastating loss of financial resources or other traumatic event is the ability to depend on social resources to include kinship bonds. The absence of such bonds can act as a precipice for homelessness, especially in the context of a veteran, who has just been discharged from the service with few places to go.

> I just got out on my own. My parents was passed… I just had to make it out on my own I was homeless for a while. … got on a bus to Boston looking for opportunities. It was hard to find regular work, only work I could get was like dish washing work…low level jobs (Army veteran, aged 45).

The lack of adequate job training and skills meant that the number of opportunities available to this veteran would be limited. But the added stress of having to seek housing during this time emphasizes the need to depend on social resources. With his parents both deceased, the veteran above describes a world in which he had few places to turn and literally, nowhere to stay. With limited social networks, he was unable to find employment that would sustain him or even house him. The weak kinship bonds that existed between his siblings further complicated the situation.

> She [participant's sister] had her own way of life… she didn't want to accept me for her own personal reasons…she didn't trust me …She would let me come there sometimes, spend a little time with her but she didn't really let me sleep there overnight (Army veteran, aged 45).

Often, the tenuous kinship bonds existed prior to military service and simply remained in such a state. Siblings and parents perhaps never had a close or strong relationship to the veteran and this lack of rapport may simply have been perpetuated throughout adulthood.

> My family's not like that…my family does not put forth a collaborative effort to help everyone in the family. It's very individualized… I've got wealthy people in my family that wouldn't fuckin, if I was out here with no food, even if it was not my fault, would still not feed me. That type of shit, that's what I'm faced with in my family (Army veteran, aged 39).

Returning to civilian life directly from the military and without a stable network of friends or family to depend on, a veteran may find himself disconnected or disengaged from society at large. Family members act as crucial gatekeepers to the "real world" and may or may not be depended on to act as bridges into the civilian sphere. Feelings of disassociation may arise, and they can be correlated to occurrences of substance abuse.

> I got strung out on opium and heroine and didn't even understand… came back totally uh… disenfranchised…I remember feeling like I didn't belong when I came [home]…I'm surprised, hindsight, that I actually finished my ten months

> and got an honorable [discharge] because my whole military bearing, my attitude, was real bad (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Substance abuse can also act as a cause and effect of diminishing kinship bonds. The weakening of kinship bonds and the realization of deteriorating relationships with family may lead veterans to seek solace in using drugs and alcohol. As they may have learned in the service, such behavior has become an accepted method for dealing with emotional and/or physical pain.

> I was stressed out man, his mother was gone, she disappeared…and I had to take care of my son and I was mad. I used to drink, I didn't really drink, but that's when I really started drinking. I was, I was in pain (Army veteran, aged 44).

The loss of family, in this case the departure of his wife, had compelled the veteran to begin drinking again as a means to cope with his loss. Drugs and alcohol have remained a feasible means of escape or handling with the loss of kinship bonds; declining or lost kinship bonds can cause the veteran to relapse into using substances.

Other times, and perhaps more common, is that substance abuse can act as the *cause* for the straining kinship bonds and the possible loss of family support systems. The duration, severity, and nature of the drug abuse can vary and depending on such factors, are often responsible for damaging already tenuous bonds with kin. Relationships are symbiotic in nature, requiring the contribution and commitment of two persons to sustain. Depending on the degree of abuse, users of such substances are many times unable to maintain basic relationships with friends or family members.

> And the drugs. I couldn't hold a relationship, I couldn't hold a job. I couldn't, I couldn't do anything… for any sustained period of time. Broken promises, broken promises, broken promises, broken promises. 'Get the hell outta here and get the hell away from me' (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The kinship bonds that exist for a returning veteran may be strong at first arrival, but after numerous, frivolous attempts at helping their son, husband, or brother, family members may no

longer be able or willing to provide support. The condition of users may become increasingly difficult and their temperaments increasingly unpleasant to deal with until they simply become *persona non grata* by family members who may have tried so assiduously to help their veteran.

> My parents gave up their bedroom for me and my wife, and I have no recollection. I remember the day after maybe a day after I went back, sitting down with a fifth of Smirnoff vodka and some orange juice and I drank the whole fifth….I woke up over in the park about a mile from the house, my old man kicking me, telling me to wake up… [I had] a really, really bad 'give a shit' factor. Disrespectful (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

Ultimately the kinship bonds and the dynamics involved in such relationships may involve larger themes or preexisting dispositions between persons.

> My father was hard to be around. I remember I would have to get drunk, I always wanted to tell my father that I loved him…and that wasn't him…he wasn't capable of expressing that. And I remember us getting into a verbal, almost physical fights, from me wanting to express my affection and he was like having none of it. And then he came down with Alzheimer's, so the last five, six years of his life he didn't know who I was (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The status of such kinship bonds for veterans returning from the military remains a central concern in homelessness. Often the incidences of rich social resources available to the veteran will accompany the presence of strong kinship bonds. Close friends and family can act as a vital link to the civilian world and deter the inimical consequences associated with the lack of such resources. They can sometimes act as a safety net for a veteran walking the tightrope back into civilian society and be instrumental in the success of the veteran. But another interesting aspect in the existence of kinship bonds is the discussion of such bonds, as they existed *before* entrance into the military and how they will interact with conditions leading to homelessness.

Preexisting Conditions

The difficulty in determining the extent to which risk factors for homelessness existed *prior* to an individual's enlistment in the military becomes increasingly apparent in reference to kinship bonds and the manner in which such individuals were socialized as individuals. As was pointed out earlier, perhaps the same conditions that led an individual to enlist in the military were the *same* ones that led to the circumstances leading to homelessness.

During the Vietnam War, a strain was placed on the military to enlist recruits to meet manpower requirements for waging the war in Southeast Asia. Even after the employment of the draft and subsequent lottery systems, reports indicate that, "A disproportionate number of people from ghettos and poor regions fought in the war… and many of them started off at a disadvantage before going into the service" (Burkett 311).

> I came up here [Boston] started clowning around and shit, got kicked out of school….never bothered to go back to school, bummed around for a little while got into some trouble and judge says, 'You either go into the military or go to jail.' I went into the military, of course (Army veteran, aged 51).

Although actual instances of the legal system imposing such an ultimatum to potential criminals remains a phenomenon elaborated upon more by hyperbole than fact, such situations were still encountered in the sample. This indicates that recruits into the military may have otherwise been incarcerated had they not enlisted in the military. Even today it is not uncommon for recruiters, under pressure to meet strict recruiting quotas, to assist potential enlistees with vacating criminal charges in order to pursue service in the military. Understandably, judges and other court officials may be predisposed to allowing the dismissal or mitigation of charges for such individuals in hopes that the military will help "straighten up" young juvenile offenders. They may act more favorably in cases where official military personnel, in the form of recruiters, come to advocate for adolescents in these circumstances.

> I was on probation in about four different courts in different parts of the city and none of them knew about each other. I was a teenager and this recruiter went downtown Tremont Street…he took me around to each one of those court houses, took me before the judge and had all my cases dismissed (Air Force veteran, aged 51).

Faced with the prospect of potential jail time service in the military, a young man may find the decision relatively easy to make.

But the issue of such preexisting risk factors may involve the lack of adequate kinship bonds prior to military service, where individuals who have enlisted in the military and who additionally have had difficult childhoods may be especially susceptible to homelessness resulting from weak social support systems available after discharge.

> I never had nobody tell me they love me, nobody teach me how to tie my shoe, I was sexually abused at the age of four years old…My father shot and killed my mother when I was one. He shot her seven times in the head with .25 automatic, it only holds six bullets in the clip, if he had one in the chamber. He meant to kill her, in the head. So I never had a mother or a father… I had no upbringing (Air Force veteran, aged 51).

Exiting the military with a history of adolescent issues will inevitably put him at an immediate disadvantage. The veteran is virtually alone, without financial, social, or familial resources and arguably with a penchant for deviant behavior. In extreme cases, he may come from highly adverse childhood circumstances that include severe physical, psychological, and emotional abuse, explaining such deviant behavior.

> I was raised in foster care, I was physically abused, I had sex at the age of four. I can vividly remember at least by the time I was five, I was sexually abused, physically abused and psychologically abused. I was *told* I was going to be a killer like my father. I wasn't *told* I was going to live past the age of sixteen, when I reached sixteen they said I wasn't going to live past eighteen. And I was beat, almost everyday up to the age of nine or ten. I'm considered a "triple-abuse case" by my psychiatrist, I'm certified 'mentally ill' (Air Force veteran, aged 51) [emphasis added].

In such cases, the military may even be fully aware of such preexisting disorders and still be willing to recruit these enlistees.

> I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when I was twelve and I have type one bipolar disorder…and they still let me into the military, they waived me in (Army veteran, aged 39).

Sometimes the deviant behavior may result from the physical, psychological or emotional disorder and perhaps even engaged in under honorable intentions but will nonetheless elicit strict punitive punishments.

> [After I was laid off]… I opened up a claim on unemployment and I started doing criminal stuff… I started doing robberies, property crimes, and dealing drugs, anything I could do to make sure my family had what they needed and I ended up consequently in jail… I got a two-year sentence…(Army veteran, aged 39).

As a result of wartime service, Vietnam veterans were often depicted as being overly violent and having a natural disposition for aggressive or pugnacious behavior because of combat exposure. But the sample indicates that these things may have been present in the individuals prior to combat, that veterans did not become a certain way after the military, but rather that these individuals had a predisposition to enlist in the military to begin with.

> I was in Philadelphia for foster care; I came back at the age of thirteen to come back to high school… I got my violence from Philadelphia and that's why I started carrying guns at 10, because I was in Philadelphia and I was a 'Pee Wee.' There was a lot of gangs in Philadelphia. I was called a 'Pee Wee.' So I had, did I tell you what my first gun was?… My first gun was a .25 automatic. That's the gun my father shot my mother with [*silence, pauses*] The gun that my father shot and killed my mother was the first gun I carried (Air Force veteran, aged 51).

Although a significant correlation was found between homeless Vietnam veterans and PTSD in previous studies, an interesting point to note is that "premilitary experiences [have] the strongest relationship to homelessness," antisocial, delinquent behavior, and/or social isolation, being unmarried or having no one to talk to, had a stronger relationship with homelessness than did psychiatric disorder, PTSD, and substance abuse (Rosenheck, 1996:100). In other words, the

risk factors that existed prior to an individual's entry into the military may account for the most significant risk factors for homelessness among veterans.

It is a discussion that at least introduces the possibility that the manner in which society views veterans is flawed in that perhaps part of this error in observing directionality of symptoms. Veterans may not have an increased susceptibility to being homeless by virtue of veteran's status alone, rather risk factors for homelessness may be the same preexisting factors that entice an individual to join the military in the first place and in many cases, this may have to do with leaving one's home or environment.

Escape

Ben was a soldier in the U.S. Army from 1977 to 1979. At fifty, he was just below the median age of veterans encountered in the sample, but he looked much younger. He wore a baseball cap and was clean in appearance and was on his way to finishing his undergraduate degree. Despite initially agreeing to being interviewed, Ben found it exceptionally difficult to speak about his experiences as a homeless veteran, mostly because it had not been ten or fifteen years since his last relapse into drug use. Rather, it was only a few years since these tumultuous events had last occurred.

Ben spoke of his exceptionally heavy drug use, of his constant return to various homeless shelters, and of the life that he lived only a short time ago. But he also kept alluding to parts of his life he that he refused to speak of, "There's more to this that I'm not telling you, that I won't tell you…[that] there was something else going on there that…I mean…it would skew your report, there was other problem[s] there that I had" (Ben, aged 50).

This factor that he was reluctant to speak of was ultimately related to his initial desire to join the military and came to shape his entire life afterwards. It was a situation that came to indelibly impact how Ben would be socialized and how he would live his life and although the specific condition was not encountered in any other of the participants, the feelings associated with his circumstances were detected in almost every other veteran in the sample.

> Since I was nine years old I had alopecia areata [a condition causing bald spots] my whole head was…bald spots…my parents decided wearing a wig would be a good idea. And when I went to college the first time, I went and lived in the dormitory and tried to wear a wig twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, that's why I dropped out of school (Ben, aged 50).

Alopecia areata is a condition that that affects the growth of a person's hair, causing bald spots typically on one's the head. Although it is not necessarily physically harmful, the appearance of bald growth spots often has irreparable psychological damages on a person's self image and psychosocial development.

Alopecia areata became easily identified as a preexisting condition that greatly influenced Ben's formative years and altered his process of normative socialization. It interfered with or otherwise stunted social experiences often requisite for appropriate identity development and psychosocial acclimatization. Most simply, he was deprived of experiences typically encountered in adolescence that later becomes correlated with his substance abuse.

> I'm wearing a wig in those years where you learn how to date girls…I didn't learn any of that in a healthy way because of wearing a wig. So I didn't learn… the asking the girl out, the kiss…that most adolescents are going through learn…[I] started chasing women in night clubs in a really unhealthy way (Ben, aged 50).

The attainment of female companionship or conversation at adolescence was made more difficult by Ben's alopecia areata. But once in the Army and as an adult, he had learned that such things could be achieved in conjunction with substance use, in nightclubs or at similar settings. Eventually, the desire for socialization mandated or otherwise became associated with the other

and becomes especially relevant in later discussions of loneliness and of risk factors for homelessness.

At the heart of this discussion is how deep the condition had impaired normal socialization or even normal living. Given his condition and the use of a wig, Ben was profoundly disturbed by his alopecia areata. It indoctrinated him into a life filled with trepidation, anxiety, and self-consciousness. At a young age, he learned to suffer.

> I learned…fear. I was afraid everyday because… thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old is like a major deal right, your self-consciousness, what I learned was complete and total fear because everyday I mean I had, I had the wig knocked off… in front of classmates [but] how do you recover from that? So what I learned was fear, I lived in complete fear for six years. Nothing but fear. Fear of having the wig blown, fear of windy days… fear (Ben, aged 50).

Such difficulties inevitably became manifested in familial relationships and altered the dynamic of kinship bonds.

> For my family, I was their patient…with the alopecia areata and the wig, it was like, 'You're not okay, the way you are, you gotta wear this wig' it was really weird dynamic there. My father said to me at one point, 'I gave up on you when you were thirteen years old.' I think what he meant he gave up on my hair. That's when they decided here's a wig…and he…really did give up on me at thirteen years old, he didn't try to help from that point on (Ben, aged 50).

For Ben, alopecia areata became a reoccurring catalyst for a number of difficulties in his life, starting off with his enlistment into the Army; it was, for him, the ultimate *escape.*

> That's probably why I joined the Army, was to get rid of the wig cause there I was nineteen years old, still wearing a wig…the main reason why I joined the Army was to get rid of the fucking wig…you go in, they shave your head, everybody's a shaved head and… that was, that was really the [draw] for me (Ben, aged 50).

The Army provided Ben with a gift that he was unable to receive in other segments of civilian society; it gave him the opportunity to *fit in*. This was achieved most notably through the

physical conformation required by all new male recruits upon indoctrination into the Army and was a vehicle for Ben to attain acceptance and the prospect of donning a "social camouflage."

Escape becomes such a powerful lure almost unique to the military. Advertisement campaigns launched by the various services typically mention the opportunity to embark on a great journey filled with excitement and anticipation. Recruits on active duty are almost guaranteed placement outside their hometowns and if they wish can be stationed overseas. Few other opportunities in life can promise such possibilities, especially for young teenage males without college degrees. For many, military service can serve as an optimal chance for success in an otherwise negative situation.

> I joined the military because I got kicked out of high school and I had no job. I was running around, I was picking pockets; I stole a car… break into a house. I was a really, really bad kid (Air Force veteran, aged 51).

Thus veterans may have already been predisposed for homelessness in later years for precisely the same reasons that may have caused them to join military service and that part of this may relate to the need to escape, to deviate from one's current life path in pursuit of another. This may be from trouble with the law, difficulties with family, or in the case of Ben, from the socially significant impact of a physical condition. Regardless of specific circumstance, a veteran may simply find the need to *escape*, and this will become considerably important in later determinants of risk factors for homelessness.

The central issue involved in the act of "escaping to join the military" is the component involving retreat or withdrawal. It is the departure from a previous way of life, the voluntary withdrawal from civilian society at large and this may intimate larger implications about the individual who endeavors for such a thing to occur.

I Only Get Lonely When I'm Around People

Open any book about Skid Row, any piece of literature about homelessness, any text on vagrancy and one theme will reoccur: loneliness. As much as homelessness is linked to financial poverty it has often aptly been described as a "poverty of relationships" as well. But feelings of loneliness and of isolation are most difficult to identify in participants partly because of the extent to which it evokes negative impressions about the individual. A palpable air of stigma surrounds loneliness, partly because it implies that there is something wrong or amiss with the individual who suffers from such feelings and as such few individuals openly admit to it.

During one interview, a participant, Spencer, appeared reluctant to give any indication that he spends most days lonely, isolated, or otherwise alone. At first he immediately denied any feelings of the sort, then later stated that if he had them, it "wasn't for long" and then was quick to normalize the experiences of loneliness, by saying, "Everybody has a part when life gets the best of you and you feel kind of lonely" (Army veteran, aged 51). Initially, the veteran was unwilling to directly admit his feelings of loneliness, but after normalizing the emotion he partially admits to it.

> Now that I think about it, I guess I did feel it [loneliness] a couple of times, but it wasn't one of those things where I was gonna actually go out and do anything to anybody or hurt myself…(Army veteran, aged 51).

Spencer's disinclination for expressing feelings of loneliness or isolation, no matter how transient they were, is partially rooted in a man's perception of his own manliness and masculinity in general. As pointed out earlier, if a, " man's work is one of the most important parts of his social identity" then the hesitance on the part of Spencer to explain in detail his own feelings of loneliness is later obvious when he is asked to describe an average day and week (Faulkner 321). Without a steady job, Spencer may be hesitant to admit that he has little to do in

the way of work since it adversely effects his creation of identity. Spencer's masculine identity is rooted in his work and his ability to retain gainful employment and the lack of regular work threatens his personal sense of masculinity. In responding to an inquiry measuring loneliness and isolation, Spencer draws on memories of exceptional experiences or atypical days in order to deter the impression that he lived without any family or felt lonely. The reluctance of individuals, especially veterans who may be more prideful than others, to talk freely about feelings of loneliness or isolation becomes one of the major obstacles in effecting successful transition into civilian life and ultimately a primary risk factor in homelessness.

A major obstacle in treating or preventing homelessness is the difficulty in identifying the risk factors relating to feelings of loneliness. Like many other mental illnesses, the stigma that accompanies admissions of loneliness and isolation may inhibit the very thing that an individual needs to overcome such obstacles – other people. Many feel that it implies that there is something inherently wrong with the individual that experiences such feelings. The fear is that such emotions indicate that others do not want to associate themselves with the individual, and that it means socially, he is incompetent. A veteran may cope with this feeling by enacting a mechanism in which he convinces himself to believe that such socialization is unnecessary.

> I don't associate with [people]… I speak to people; I don't buddy up around nobody. I don't need that... I don't have time; I don't have time…to hear their secular views. I'm not concerned with that [socializing]. I don't get entangled in that stuff (Army veteran, aged 41).

Unlike other segments of society, veterans are especially vulnerable to feelings of loneliness; they can arise out of suffering from alienation and of not being able to find their place in society, of feeling disconnected from civilian society and simply feeling different from those around them.

> It [being different] put me in an area of being lonely all the time. I have a problem with actually loving and laughing, and caring about people. It puts me on a stage where I'm by myself. Even where I am now, I just come and go, I go canning [picking up recycled cans] by myself. Basically everything I do, I just do by myself (Army veteran, aged 45).

Such emotions may eventually lead to declining conditions in a veteran's construction identity, sense of self-worth, and sense of belonging. Loneliness is often related to emotions concerning alienation and are often most apparent during transitional periods. "For the longest time I never felt like I fit in. Alienated, … [this] was very, very, very strong. Probably for a couple years after I came back" (Air Force veteran, aged 55).

The loneliness causes veterans to feel disconnected from larger society, and relates to the lowered social resources available to individuals at risk of becoming homeless. Isolation may cause him to engage in deviant behavior, but difficulties in socialization may have had their origins elsewhere and may simply have been exacerbated by the veteran-specific circumstance of having to return to civilian society.

> My problem with relationships…is not being able to be in a relationship, I don't know how. I have no experience from family… my entire life mismanagement problems have been trying to balance [it] (Air Force veteran, aged 51).

This inability to productively integrate within a community and find one's place may also be related to phenomena that occurred prior to an individual's enlistment into the military and may simply be the natural disposition of the individual. Perhaps he is just naturally a loner.

Nevertheless, loneliness and isolation are the most salient causes *and* effects of homelessness. They are the most relevant factors involved in any individual who suffers from homelessness and the most difficult aspect of being homeless. To be homeless is to live without stable residence, to be isolated and lonely is to be severely cut off from society and social

interaction. Sometimes the need for human interaction becomes so compelling that extreme measures are taken to mollify such intense needs.

Abuse, Loneliness and the Need for 'FX'

A common thread in all participants encountered in the sample is the extent to which all of the veterans interviewed displayed at least some level of loneliness. It is an aspect that can certainly be considered applicable to the larger homeless veteran population, and perhaps also to the non-veteran homeless population. Loneliness is a theme that appeared with relative frequency in the sample but varied in terms of degree. Some were almost always by themselves, living and eating alone. Others maintained tenuous ties with former wives or siblings. Although some were more open than others in discussions of loneliness, one interviewee was particularly candid in describing his experiences.

Loneliness is a difficult obstacle to overcome. Modern society is already structured in such a way that people are increasingly disconnected from one another because of highly specialized jobs and skill sets. Sprawling urban areas add to the anonymity of city life. But whether in the city, suburbs or countryside, children are typically under the care of their parents. Even away from their parents, a teacher, sibling, or other person almost constantly accompanies children and in this sense, they are rarely alone. But some may still find it necessary to create an imaginary friend and often times this behavior is not deterred by parents simply because it is seen as resultant from a child's overactive imagination. So although it is not uncommon for children to create fictitious characters, it is significant that at forty-five years old, Harold's imaginary friend is still around. Moreover, Harold's character has the ability to direct him to engage in certain types of behavior or perform actions.

> This cat, there was this guy who I created name "FX", this was a character I created when I was little and that's the problem since I had as a child, this character would tell me to do things I'd be doing one thing and then something telling me to drop completely what I'm doing and start doing something else (Army veteran, aged 45).

Many would say Harold was particularly vulnerable to difficulties later in life by virtue of his irregular childhood, but more important is why FX is still around. At an early age he claims to have been put up for adoption and that after he was adopted, he was often severely mistreated by his foster parents. They had abused him so profoundly that it severely influenced his social development because part of the abuse included intentional isolation from other similarly aged children, prompting Harold to create an imaginary friend. Extreme deprivation from social interaction at an early age forced Harold to socially subsist utilizing conjured personalities.

> They used to beat me a lot…keep me in rooms and closets and stuff like that …in order for me to make it I had to create another character in my life which is still with me today (Army veteran, aged 45).

The combined impact of physical abuse with deliberate attempts to physically separate Harold from his peers produced a broadening fissure between him and the world, one that eventually developed into a social chasm. It was made worse by the fact that Harold could see the other children playing but could not go out to join them.

> I would play with this other character, it was just an imaginary kind of thing… because I would spend a lot of time alone, they [participant's parents] would isolate me or make me stay in the corner for a long time…they would hit me a lot beat me a lot…keep me where I couldn't play with other kids. The only thing I could do was stay on the porch and look. I could never go down to the sidewalk and stuff like that (Army veteran, aged 45).

Eventually the need for interaction became so great that the imaginary character began to come into existence and eventually fill the role of normal social development. Friends, relationships, and kinship bonds soon came to be replaced by his fictitious friend and his isolation began to increase exponentially. As long as FX was around, Harold did not need

anyone else and did not go out to seek anyone else, leading him to feel even more lonely and unhappy.

> It's just was someone to talk to in my life. I think I started depending on him so much, it's like I didn't have a need to have real friends. So that's why I recognized in my life now, I had this isolation, I had to overcome that. Because I had gotten so used to living on my own in my own mind and my character that it isolated me from actually going out and talking to real people. Which I know I should do, sometimes I'm very depressed about that (Army veteran, aged 45).

It is not that Harold is necessarily delusional; he is quick to recognize that his imaginary friend is just that, imaginary. He also realizes that having this "friend" around inhibits real social interaction and relationship development, it is simply that Harold realizes that he is unable to have such relationships and does the only thing he can – he copes. Coping is achieved by utilizing a mechanism in which Harold convinces himself that FX can adequately the fulfill roles typically filled by real people in the social world. This results in at least temporary relief from social needs.

> I remember [thinking] 'Why don't I have friends? And a girlfriend or something like that?' But then after I go through those thoughts, he'll come and say, 'Well you have me!' And that'll go away. And I began to get satisfied with that for a while (Army veteran, aged 45).

Although Harold sees other people at the rooming house or the food pantry, he still does not engage in frequent social interaction with them. Part of this is from the fulfillment attained by FX, but at the core, this satisfaction comes from Harold's tendency to live vicariously through his own imagination.

> I don't socialize with people too much. I mean I see people at places like this [the food pantry], but I don't really have close friends. I basically live on my own. I have neighbors but I don't really interact with them. I find it kind of satisfying mentally I kind of live in my mind, basically, I just live in my dreams. I sit there and then I create things…that kind of satisfies me. Even though I live life, I create other images, even as I walking through my life, I know I'm living life but I basically I liked how I live in an imaginary world (Army veteran, aged 45).

This can be interpreted as resultant from mental illness, but clearly the correlation with loneliness is apparent. Furthermore, its connection to homelessness, to poverty and to employment is also evident.

The creation and subsequent relationship with FX eventually came to hinder attempts at social integration and at gainful employment. The lack of proper socialization can be held responsible for much of Harold's employment woes and leading to his eventual homelessness.

> I didn't have any no other outlets. I did try to make efforts to apply for work. But I noticed I had problems. I would get a job, like dishwashing and janitor jobs. But I could never hold it. It was like I would go there and then there was something in me that always made me …. I noticed I would go get a job and but then there was a problem within myself and something inside me would say don't go to work. I go one day show up… next day show up late then I started noticing the deterioration every time I got a job… things just went down hill… so I lost a lot of jobs that way (Army veteran, aged 45).

Eventually he later explains that FX would not allow him to go to work on certain occasions, that it would hold him back from doing so for some inexplicable reason. This would result in simply not showing up for work and bringing the eventual termination of employment and hence, the perpetuation of homelessness. Simply put, FX made Harold lose his job. The extent to which this character manipulates Harold is later frighteningly described.

> FX is my soldier. He gets me in trouble sometimes, [*laughs*] yes he does… he makes me do mean things or he gives me bad thoughts… wrongful thoughts… horrible like, if somebody bothers you or you don't along with somebody, he just gives me thoughts, ugly thoughts [telling me] 'You know you could do this. You know how to make bombs… you know you could kill this guy in a minute.' He tries to tell me things, talks to me about these things (Army veteran, aged 45).

That it could force him to engage in behavior that he did not want to or otherwise become violent is alarming, but perhaps can be interpreted as violent tendencies that have their origin in Harold but are manifested through FX.

The connection to service is perhaps to blame for this, in the sense that the military gave Harold a way to operationalize his violence. Rather than identify Harold's psychological difficulties, the military recruited him "as is" and his imaginary character followed him into the service until it came to cause trouble within the Army.

> And that [FX] extended on when I went into the service… they was like said I had problems, I was kinda too serious…with my weapons... I had gotten in trouble one time, threatened to kill one my Sergeants…they didn't really trust me too much or something (Army veteran, aged 45).

In this scenario, the veteran's propensity for homelessness can be said to have arisen from severe psychological difficulties originating from adolescence. It is difficult to specifically ascertain what impact military service had on his psychosocial development and relapse into homelessness, but it can at least be said that Harold suffered from preexisting risk factors for homelessness prior to joining the military and that after enlisting, it made reintegrating with the civilian world almost impossible for an individual who was not integrated to begin with. With loneliness, isolation, and social exclusion already there, homelessness was not far away.

The Pretenders

In the late nineties, an American television series ran on NBC. It was about a genius who roamed the country and helped people by way of his ability to assume any identity. Called *The Pretender*, the main character could take on any role he wished and essentially pretended to be anyone he wanted, taking on a variety of different personas throughout the duration of the program's run.

In one episode the protagonist, Jarod, impersonates an elite Army Ranger to clear the name of a deceased Vietnam veteran wrongly accused of treason. By virtue of his intellectual aptitude, Jarod quickly learns the military lingo and the customs and courtesies of the Army, as

he seamlessly travels in and out of the military world. But as he dons the uniform of an Army officer, several discrepancies become apparent. He wears the combat patch of the 25th Infantry Division and the Combat Infantryman Badge. But the only military conflict Jarod could have received these badges would be from the Gulf War, yet he wears none of the campaign medals associated with the 1991 conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Most soldiers on active-duty will be able to spot a fake fairly easily. The military is an organization built upon a very strict chain of command and few outsiders are able to penetrate inside without someone noticing. Television being what it is, no one on the show noticed our main character, but the notion of impersonating a military officer, veteran, or otherwise embellishing one's own military record is not limited to television and for veterans living out in the civilian world, "pretenders" are much less conspicuous.

Ken Smith and the Phony Vets

Senator Joseph McCarthy is often remembered as one of the most outspoken politicians in recent time. Often accusing high-level government officials of being communists engaged in espionage, McCarthy rose to his position in politics partly by virtue of his service with the United State Marine Corps during World War II. Reportedly, McCarthy specifically chose to join the Marines on the advice of a friend who informed him that the tough reputation of the Marines would be beneficial to his political career, and McCarthy later claimed to have been a "buck private" though his status as a judge meant that he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the officer corps and not the private that he claimed to be (Herman 30).

McCarthy also later claimed to have been a tail gunner on dive bombers during the war, gaining the nickname "Tail Gunner Joe." He went on to say that he had been wounded in action,

carried "ten pounds of shrapnel" in his leg and reported to have been commended by his commanding officer in a letter countersigned by Admiral Chester Nimitz, receiving a the Distinguished Flying Cross for these same efforts (Herman 30). It was later revealed that Senator McCarthy had written the letter himself, and instead of being a "buck private" and tail gunner, instead served behind a desk as the unit intelligence officer (Burkett 168). In fact he was never wounded in war; his war wound was actually from sustaining a broken leg as part of a "shellback" ceremony, the initiation rite for sailors who cross the equator for the first time (Burkett 168). Furthermore, the Distinguished Flying Cross was never awarded to him until later in 1952 when the Department of Defense added it to his records for "obvious political reasons" (Herman 30). McCarthy's elaborate exaggerations of his own military record seem bizarre and peculiar, and many may wonder why a man who served his country would still find the need to falsely adorn his own military service, especially at the risk of such dishonorable scrutiny. But McCarthy's misdeeds are far from exceptional.

In a similar episode, the charismatic founder of the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans in Boston, Ken Smith, was reported to have falsely embellished on his own military record. The NESHV, from which research for this study was conducted, was founded by Smith in the early 1990s and was later inundated with accusations that Smith had utilized state and federal funds on bills for utilities and meals that were being donated by a local Boston restaurant ("Veterans Shelter Under Question"). Furthermore, Smith was, "seen in public wearing a Combat Infantry Badge… [yet] there are no records of the decoration" and he later admits that no such badge existed in his record but insists that he received one; 23 years later he applied to have the badge added to his record (Mooney 1). The controversy took place amid reports that the shelter had filed thousands of dollars in false invoices and mismanaged the budget to the point

where state officials began to cut off funds to the shelter due to "gross mismanagement" (Gelzinis; Abel). In the end, Smith was replaced for mismanagement of the shelter and over reports that he had, "embellished his war record, telling stores of a battle in which military records show he didn't participate and wearing a combat decoration he never received ("Veterans Shelter Under Question").

The "phony veteran" phenomenon exists not as an isolated incident, but rather as an indication of the growing trend among veterans who feel the need to enhance, elaborate, or otherwise embellish on their own military experiences, or even fabricate military records that simply do not exist. A cursory review of B.G. Burkett's 1998 *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation War Robbed of its Heroes and its History*, reveals countless stories of men who either have greatly exaggerated their own peacetime military service or otherwise falsely claimed military service.

Because I'm a Vet

Leo was a frequent member of the Food Pantry Program held at a church in Lawrence, MA. As one of the poorest cities in New England, a variety of community development programs have been in effect to assist local members in attaining basic food items. Held every week at the South Congregational Church, the private non-profit agency, Neighbors in Need, run the pantry in an effort to help the people of Greater Lawrence.

As one of the few younger males at the pantry, Leo stood out from the crowd. Often he also had a number of different canine companions with him, though none belonged to him, Leo volunteered to walk a number of the neighborhood dogs but was unable to own one, presumably because the rooming house would not allow pets.

A friend of one of the veterans interviewed, Leo reported that he was also a veteran and would allow himself to be interviewed. The interview began quite normally, but when asked about his years of service and of other information, he was a constantly forgetful of basic facts and information. It was oddly difficult for Leo to recall dates with any sort of accurate estimation. When asked about his dates of service, he stated that he served from approximately 1972 to 1980, and since his date of birth was reported as 1962, this would indicate that Leo was only ten years old at his date of enlistment.

Similarly, when asked about his military service, Leo claimed that he had enlisted in both the Army and the Marine Corps. At this point I had already mentioned my own enlistment in the Marines, and as a Marine, I was curious to know where he was stationed, his unit, his military skill set, and so forth. But it seemed clear to me as we went on that he was confusing or perhaps even fabricating some of the broader facts about his time in the Marine Corps.

He could recall basic things about the military and the Marines: that we had an infantry, that we had bases in South Carolina, and Virginia, but could not recall what unit he was in, the names of major bases, or anything that one would expect a U.S. Marine to know. When pressed, Leo began to confuse details of his own story, claiming to have first been discharged from the Marine Corps out of Quantico, VA only to claim later to have discharged out of Fort Polk, LA.

It later became quite obvious that Leo had in fact fictionalized his military service, at least the time he spent in Marine Corps. Leo’s behavior, in pretending to be a Marine veteran, is not all that uncommon. Many homeless men will claim to be veterans, having served their country and perhaps even being injured while in the line of duty, when in fact they have never served at all. Yet others will in fact be true veterans and have honorably served their country, but will lavishly exaggerate their tour of duty, alleging to have received combat medals or performed

wartime deeds that cannot be verified by military records. By doing so, they are actually utilizing a mechanism in which they are able to offer explanation of their current situation by claiming it to be resultant of their service, effectively blaming their homelessness on the military (Burkett 175). In essence, it is the admission that "Yes, I am homeless, but *because I'm a veteran.*" It provides the rationale for being homeless, instead of resulting from an inability to find gainful employment, support one's self, or "make it", by being a veteran their homelessness is instead a repercussion of their military service to the country, thus alleviating any blame on themselves. It serves as a means for restoring self-respect, since everyone "knows" war veterans are broken and have difficulty functioning in civilian society, the war, "persuasively explains their inability to function in society" (Burkett 175).

With the preponderance of studies focusing on post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues resulting from combat exposure, the temptation to shift culpability of their current disposition as a repercussion of having served "in the 'Nam" or "in the sandbox" becomes alluring. It allows an individual to absolve himself from the blame and negative social stigma of being homeless. In the eyes of mainstream society, being a homeless veteran is better than being just homeless.

The homeless men who have actually served their country and are real veterans and who feel the need to conjure up elaborate tales or awards may do so because many of them may be peacetime era veterans or veterans who never served in direct combat roles. "Being a homeless veteran doesn't count unless you're a combat veteran" is the underlying reasoning that becomes apparent, since mental illness and obstacles in reintegration are typically correlated with combat exposure and viewed as being limited to those deployed to combat arenas. The traditional image of a military service member is that of a young soldier ''fashioning a rifle and crouched in a

foxhole, not of an airman perched behind a desk with an IBM laptop. But the phenomenon of "pretenders" is far from ending anytime soon, since despite the Army's latest advertisement campaigns depicting the high-tech jobs, larger society still characteristically associates service members with direct combat and since combat exposure is the factor that is often correlated with difficulties in adjustment and things such as homelessness, the "pretenders" will continue to surface.

The tragedy in this situation is that those homeless veterans who have truly served their country in combat and have suffered from mental illness arising from this experience are ultimately the ones who are negatively affected by the efforts of "pretenders." Their experiences and memories are trivialized, demeaned, and otherwise made cheap by those who attempt to falsely portray themselves. The "pretenders" may not seek to do any harm, but by virtue of their behavior, they alienate those who have truly been wounded by the war's memories.

Crazy Veterans, PTSD, and Stereotypes

The stereotype of large numbers of homeless veterans as being "crazy" or otherwise suffering from severe mental illness also seems to have been one that appears to be somewhat exaggerated, though like many stereotypes, this also appears to have been rooted in some truth. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that 45% of homeless veterans suffer from some sort of mental illness and that 50% suffer from problems with substance abuse (NCHV). At the shelters, it is difficult to distinguish the ones who suffer from less than severe mental illnesses.

On any one of the given days I spent at the shelter or on the "cot squad" at night, few veterans seemed to suffer from severe enough psychological difficulty or mental illness that were

discernible through normal human interaction. Most veterans seemed at ease in the shelter and many of them engaged in conversation with each other.

The subject of mental illness brings us to a central issue in veterans and homelessness. As discussed above, many reports and organizations have been increasingly identifying the connection between mental illness, especially post-traumatic stress disorder, and homelessness. But beyond such correlations, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much the two are actually related in terms of definitive causal relationships. Of those interviewed, only one of veterans had actually served in direct combat. Many had served in either in peacetime or in indirect support roles during a wartime era, meaning that mental illness in the form of PTSD was certainly far from the predominant cause for homelessness in my sample.

CONCLUSION

Why do veterans become homeless? What is this inexplicable link between being a veteran and becoming homeless and what can be done to improve conditions that may aggravate the situation?

Veterans' homelessness is not a phenomenon all too different from non-veteran homelessness. That is to say that the causes for homelessness in the general population are similar to those which contribute to homelessness in the veteran population. Veteran status is not *the* cause for homelessness; rather it is *a* cause. Nothing in the data directly correlated instances of combat exposure with homelessness, but this is not to say that combat exposure is not related to homelessness among veterans. Data from this study did not identify this connection, not necessarily because these variables are not correlated, but more probably because of this study's small sample size. In any case, having to deal with a veteran's homecoming was simply the tipping point in a life otherwise exhibiting other risk factors for homelessness.

Connecting the Dots: Privates, Captains, and Colonels

The fact that none of the participants had served in direct combat is particularly interesting considering recent research that has linked mental illness and PTSD to combat stress and trauma (Hoge 16). Although PTSD affects a portion of the veteran population, and although some homeless veterans suffer from it, homelessness among veterans is not clearly related to military experience. Rather it is the result of the same interrelated economic and personal factors that cause homelessness in the civilian population" (Rosenheck, 1996:107). A second study confirms this: that the emerging overall picture of homeless veterans does not differ greatly from that of non-veteran homeless males (Roth 218).

This is a perhaps an explanation for why so few officers are found in the general homeless population of veterans and why they are so underrepresented in the shelters in Boston and in the sample. Most branches of the military maintain commissioning programs for enlisted men, but the vast majority of military officers are those from traditional backgrounds, in the sense that they are usually university educated and therefore relatively upwardly mobile individuals.

If homelessness among veterans were predominantly caused by war stress and combat exposure then one would expect to find a significantly higher proportion of officers in the homeless population. To be fair, the number of officers who see combat while serving in the military is far lower than their enlisted counterparts, but the fact is that there are a significant number of officers who have seen combat. After all, there would be no one to command the enlisted men in combat scenarios if all the officers remained behind.

The individuals who serve as commissioned officers of the United States military, especially as infantry commanders who are those most likely to see combat, are often selected

within a competitive group of candidates. Officer candidate school is often viewed more aptly as "selection" rather than training. Marine officers assigned to recruit possible candidates are not considered recruiters and are instead called "officer selection officers." This is the concession that military officers are selected based in part on their natural ability to lead, their aptitude to excel, and a propensity for success. Unlike enlisted recruit training whose emphasis is on transformation and molding fine soldiers, officer candidate schools are viewed as more of a process to "weed" out the weak and select those capable of leading soldiers into battle. Whatever bravado, strength, and drive the individual possessed existed prior to their entrance into the military; officer training school seeks to sharpen and develop these skills.

In essence, the reason why so few commissioned officers are seen on the streets of cities is simple and relates to why so many enlisted men are found on the streets. The prevalence of traits and tendencies which preceded an individual's military service has much to do with their disposition afterward and their initial entrance into the service. For commissioned officers, the opportunity to lead men into battle is an immense responsibility, one in which a significant screening process is utilized to ensure the best candidates. On the enlisted side, military service is not necessarily viewed as glamorous work, especially not for a private first class in a rifle battalion. Few college educated males would opt for such a position, and the individuals most likely to fill the vacancies may be those who have few other vehicles for upward social mobility.

Recruits who are especially attracted to military service are perhaps those who are more at risk for homelessness upon discharge, because such risk factors may precede military service. After the completion of military duty, the transitional period associated with the discharge from military service may put an already at risk individual in an already precarious situation. Military service may not be *the* cause, but it certainly can exacerbate conditions towards homelessness.

Leaving the military puts an individual in a vulnerable position, a situation in which an enormous amount of pressure is placed on the veteran to integrate into the civilian sphere. If he is unable to take the steps in transition by gaining employment, regenerating social bonds and abstaining from substance abuse, he becomes particularly susceptible to the risk factors involved with homelessness. Failure in achieving reentry is correlated with feelings of isolation, loneliness, poverty, and unemployment. Add to this the culture of drugs in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam eras and the recipe for homelessness in the sample is reproduced.

Why Homelessness Is Not Going Away Anytime Soon

At the NESHV in downtown Boston, there exists a comprehensive set of programs, classes, clinics, vocational training courses, and housing assistance efforts. Although the shelter could certainly use an influx of capital, the list of resources available is extensive. But the shelter's academic classes are often almost empty, and the library is used for anything but reading. Few clients at the shelter take advantage of the programs available to them and shelter administrators attribute this behavior to one thing: apathy.

Homelessness is not a problem that can be improved with the mere influx of funding or addition of programs. The phenomenon has been around long enough for us to know that there are already a number of programs available for homeless men, especially ones that are geared towards veterans and that tap into the significant financial resources available for veterans. The problem lies not only in the overall amount of funding but also in the structuring of such programs – there are simply not enough resources going to the right types of places and not enough effective people to help do the job.

Furthermore, many veterans who find themselves in difficult situations find the veterans disability and benefits systems daunting to say the least. Participants often identified the Kafka-esque nature of the Veteran's Affairs bureaucracies and the complexity involving simple tasks. A phone call made during the course of this study to speak to a nurse at the Veteran's Hospital in Jamaica Plain took over fifteen minutes and required speaking to three different hospital employees. The system needs to be streamlined, overhauled, or at least reevaluated. More financial resources need to be devoted to the veterans' healthcare system. "Support the troops" should not end as a bumper sticker; it applies to veterans as much as it does to active duty members.

Part of the indifference to attempting to succeed is the difficulty to see a clear path to success. A significant number of veterans at the various shelters have criminal records and the introduction of new and tighter criminal background checks like the Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) make it almost impossible for them to find jobs and gain any type of long term employment.

> I went to school …came out with a job… I went right to work at Waltham Western Hospital and I got *fucked* because eighty seven days after I started working there I got called…by Human Resources and they fired me 'cause they found out I had been in fuckin prison (Army veteran, aged 39) [emphasis in original].

Knowing that job offers for criminal offenders are rare, a veteran may not find the vocational or educational classes as beneficial. There is no point in devoting countless hours to security officer training or business classes if no security company or business firm will hire you. Most of the veterans with criminal records simply apply for government subsidies and wait for the funds to arrive.

VA bureaucracies are often blamed for creating long, obstructed paths to attain benefits and many veterans simply reside at the shelter until their benefits or Section 8 housing application are approved at which point they simply plan on living off such funds.

In any case, the more prominent issue with veterans' homelessness is that it is from larger social dynamics at play, that it is not simply an issue involving mental illness and combat exposure. It is a multifaceted crisis underscored by such issues as class, socioeconomic status, culture and substance abuse, ideals of masculinity and simple apathy, part of which are all correlated to larger society's own myopia.

How to Help: Get Them Before

Veterans from the all-volunteer era will often cite "money for college" when asked about their intentions for enlistment. A cursory investigation of advertising campaigns by most branches of the military will reveal that the lure of "money for college" is in fact genuine, even if the actual payment for such promises is not.

Further scrutiny will expose the paradox: the military attracts young males, luring them in behind a veneer of pamphlets promulgating education benefits, job training, and the opportunity for international travel, but then asks them to fight bravely for their country. We beguile recruits to enlist based on a virtual cornucopia of benefits, appealing to a person's self-interest while we put them in a situation based almost entirely on a system of self-sacrifice (Spinney). The price tag of the ramifications from this dissonant dynamic is in the form of things like our homeless veterans, who line the streets of our cities every night.

The obvious point to be made is that recruiters need to reevaluate the method of recruiting that is currently being employed. Baiting recruits to enlist based on financial reward in

the form of education benefits or job training will inevitably attract individuals who might otherwise be unable to attain such things without the aid of the military. The children of the country's wealthiest families are probably not the ones enlisting in the U.S. military; only a handful of sons and daughters of politicians in Congress serve within the *enlisted* ranks.

Individuals who are most enticed to enlist into the military are those with lesser means, from the lower socioeconomic strata, and who might otherwise be unable to use such opportunities that the military can provide. This may be for a variety of reasons, and in the sample, it ranged from having abusive foster parents who abandoned their son at eighteen or from having the ultimatum of jail or the Army. The common theme is that the recruit who is most likely to join the military may also be the one who is most likely to be at risk for homelessness later on.

Recruiters will often spend more time working class neighborhoods, high schools, and malls, rather than wasting their time recruiting from prestigious private high schools or areas of the upper classes. Furthermore, the enormous pressure placed upon military recruiters to meet monthly quotas often forces them to engage in unscrupulous behavior. In one instance, a participant in the sample with bipolar disorder was allowed to enlist in the Army despite having been disqualified from another branch of service due to his medical condition. Furthermore, questionable recruiting practices are often the norm for military recruiters with such strenuous monthly enlistment quotas.

> I was going go in with the Marines and then there was big problem with the Marine recruiting station out in Malden, they were being investigated for falsifying information. They were fudging the paperwork to get people in and they got caught and I got caught up in the middle of that… it was such a scandal that they shut the office down (Army veteran, aged 39).

The difficulty in remedying the situation is apparent: with the Iraq War and future manpower-intensive counterinsurgency operations, the need for troops in the military is greater than ever. To ask recruiters to adopt a more stringent criterion for potential recruits would inevitably lead to decreased recruiting numbers in an already dangerously overburdened military. For this, there is no easy answer – as long as Americans want to enjoy their freedom, someone will have to pay the price.

The key is to require more rigorous qualifying criteria for potential recruits. The saying that, "in the military, there's a waiver for everything" has been too widely utilized for recruiters who waive criminal records, low entrance exam scores, and drug use. This has lead to an inordinate number of under qualified recruits. At the expense of drastically reducing military manpower levels, recruiters should be more sensitive to risk factors relating potential homelessness, such as weak kinship bonds, lack of social networks, and extreme poverty.

Unreasonable quotas placed on recruiters to deliver a set number of recruits need to be re-examined, and the bottom line mentality of simply getting "warm bodies" signed up must be discontinued. A significant amount of social responsibility needs to be applied not only in policymaking but also all the way down at the ground level, in recruiters exercising socially responsible recruiting practices. Such recommendations are only the first few steps at ensuring the enlistment of optimally qualified recruits who will not be left "out to dry" after discharge, who will not be solicited by unfair and unscrupulous recruitment tactics, and who will truly understand the nature of their decision. We owe our men and women in uniform at least that much.

Keep It Simple and Show Me the Money

Someone tells him where to get a job and then another person tells him there are no more available. Someone else feeds him at the soup kitchen and then someone else arrests him and yet another person imprisons him. Someone else will sentence him, but no one really knows him or cares about him.

In the United States no single authority truly has clear overall responsibility for the nation's homeless veterans. By default, the burden is often placed on the Department of Veterans Affairs but the VA does not "run" most veterans homeless shelters. Rather they are given funds to disseminate and delegate accountability to independent area shelters and non-profit organizations aimed at helping homeless veterans. While this allows more regional shelters to cater to their specific areas, it results in a dire lack in the continuity of care for veterans. There is simply no centralized oversight and the system remains fragmented and disjointed at best. Funds meant for the Department of Veterans Affairs should be increased by the government and funds already appropriated for the VA should be utilized more efficiently.

For many homeless men who remain a part of the transient population, this means that the care they receive will be disintegrated, incompatible, or just otherwise ill conceived. Programs aimed at the homeless typically require the progression through steps or phases; veterans who suffer from substance abuse will also depend on staged treatment plans. The lack of continuity of care for the homeless means that such programs will be largely ineffective.

A standardized approach to treatment for homeless veterans would go a long way in ensuring stability of care. Since it would be almost unfeasible to have one organization connect all the shelters and their personnel together, a more pragmatic approach might be to have the VA institute certain stipulations for all shelters in terms of treatment and programs, provisions more

rigorous than those currently in place to secure funding. Standardized requirements such as these will go a long way in regulating treatment plans and providing the stability so desperately needed by homeless veterans.

Sick Bay Commandos

I recall when I was first sent into the infantry. Most of my peers were giants compared to my diminutive, but otherwise average, height of just under six feet. I was being introduced to the rest of my rifle platoon when we came across one individual who seemed to be on the outside of what was going on within the platoon, as if we were sitting a tight circle and he was simply not allowed inside. Few spoke to him and if they did, it was to harass or ridicule him. Initially, I did not understand why he was being "outed" so aggressively by the rest of the Marines and presumed that he had done something to separate himself from the group. No one had even bothered to introduce him to me.

It was not until later that I discovered why others had treated him in such a way and I was actually not surprised when I heard why. At this point, I had been in the Marines for a few months, but already, even in my relatively nascent understanding of the culture, I understood why the Marine, whom we will call Private Smith, was being singled out.

Smith was an otherwise good Marine. He scored well on the rifle range, was reasonably experienced in our field maneuvers, and was respectful of the non-commissioned officers in charge of him. But what made Smith so despicable, what made the other Marines poke fun at him, and what made him so different from the group, was the fact that Smith had sought medical attention for what was viewed as a negligible injury; he was known as simply as "broke." He had developed shin splints, a painful condition in the shins that is often caused by excessive running

or jumping, something almost ensured by our daily regimen of three to eight mile runs through the desert. More specifically, it was not that Smith just had bad legs, it was that he frequently went to the aid station to receive medical attention for this relatively minor injury.

Marines were expected to work through the pain. In effect, "pain was weakness leaving the body" and as men we were expected not to cry or complain. By going to see the medical doctor, Smith had broken this tacit decree and received a chit that allowed him to avoid physical training for a period of time, and instead he watched his comrades endure the grueling run. This earned Smith nicknames like "Sick Bay Commando" and "Skater" to denote that he had successfully avoided the required physical training by "skating" to the aid station or "sick bay." Nonetheless, by seeking medical attention for a legitimate injury, Smith had made himself an outsider in an otherwise tightly knit, cohesive unit and by doing so, was forced to endure a number of insults, sneers, and other forms of negative behavior.

By stigmatizing the act of seeking medical attention for seemingly minor wounds, the military instills in its troops a tendency to avoid medical attention, even for more serious injuries. The hyper masculine culture of the Army and the Marines create an atmosphere in which the seeking of attention for medical, mental, or psychological difficulties is extremely discouraged and is often viewed as a sign of weakness in the individual. Service members are often harshly reminded of penalties under the Uniform Code of Military Justice for malingering and feigning an injury, this may dissuade those with legitimate injuries from obtaining health services.

Troops who have been indoctrinated to think that receiving medical attention is wrong become veterans who may be less likely to look for help in dealing with possible mental illnesses. By disregarding an injury, the hope is that it will eventually remedy itself or later simply disappear.

The prevailing research clearly shows that there is a stigma associated with obtaining transitional or mental health assistance, and this is related to how the individual soldier or Marine will be perceived by peers and the leadership. In the case of veterans, this stigma may manifest itself in the unwillingness of veterans to seek help despite the fact that because they are no longer in the military and no harm will come to them.

Though not necessarily observed in the sample, the correlation between combat exposure and mental illness does in fact exist. Mental illness is further identified as a possible risk factor for homelessness, so the dynamic between them is still being further explored. It is important to understand such dynamics and how to best deal with treating mental illness in anticipation of more Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In doing so, understanding the military culture is imperative; younger veterans have a higher risk of homelessness than older veterans (Rosenheck, 1996:100).

Those who cannot live up to certain ideals are constantly harassed or otherwise meant to feel emasculated and as such, few will voluntarily seek medical attention when necessary. This will inevitably lead to injuries that will be left untreated and that will worsen because of untimely treatment. Soldiers with psychological wounds, because of their inherently internal and less conspicuous manifestation, will be among those inexorably suffering from such masculine expectations.

In the overall context the military's perception and embodiment of hyper masculine ideals cannot be changed, at least not easily. It could be said that such idealistic espousals are valuable in the business of saving lives, and in the distinctively peculiar arena of mortal combat it is essential.

Certainly the military is changing in terms of its perception of post-traumatic stress disorder and the treating of mental illness, but nonetheless policies can be rather ineffective if they are discordant with larger systems of values. The pen can change policy more quickly than does the mindset of generations of soldiers. As long as Marines, soldiers, airman, and sailors look at mental health treatment or any other treatment as something negative, little can be done in increasing the efficacy of transitional and mental health programs.

More needs to be done to change this mindset and stigma not only at division levels or at the strategic levels but down to battalion and platoon levels as well. Often times policies enacted behind the desk of the Secretary of the Navy become tremendously watered down as they travel from divisions to the regiments and down through the battalions, and by the time they reach the sergeants, the message becomes diluted and useless and is often discarded. Policies of politicians mean nothing to the privates unless they have the backing of the enlisted rank structure and the non-commissioned officers. A concerted effort must be taken to allow individuals to seek mental health assistance and any sort of medical attention without harassment, threat, or fear for doing so.

How To Help: Symbols, Policemen and Saying "Please"

The civilian world is somehow different for the veteran in terms of what it means to him and how he processes his new reality. Buildings, streets, stores, and neighborhoods may seem similar in appearance and ostensibly it may be as if little has changed, that things are how they have always been. But somehow, the veteran feels out of the loop, outside of the activities of every day life. This feeling may be caused by how others in society treat him or how he treats others individuals because after years of military service, *he* has changed so much. He may not

be familiar with the customs and courtesies of the civilian world, with saying things like, "thank you" and with engaging in social pleasantries. Marine drill instructors strictly forbid smiling and laughter; saying "please" and "thank you" are similarly prohibited. Failure to comply often results in severe punishment.

Marines and soldiers do not use the word "please" or other formalities to indicate politeness, the use of such words would imply a component of "optionality" in orders or otherwise indicate a sign of weakness in the speaker of such words (Waller 20). To hear these words and be engaged in customs that are seemingly so familiar but simultaneously foreign to him may be one of the underlying sources that cause feelings of estrangement. But perhaps these feelings and difficulties have their origins in other areas as well, more specifically perhaps there exists a more profound association between military service and homelessness besides simply forgetting to say "please."

The issue ultimately becomes centered on the specific aspects of military service that may cause men to be more susceptible to homelessness, things such as combat exposure, mental health, and the drastically different military lifestyle. Soldiers who serve in combat become exposed to circumstances and situations that few others in the population can even imagine and through this, "[they] have learned to hate and to kill. They have been shot over. They have lost reverence for many of the word symbols that formerly controlled their behavior" more specifically, "that eye that has looked at death will not quail at the sight of a policeman" (Waller 13, 111).

Things that were once important in the civilian world loose their significance once a man has been in the lawless depths of war. The example of the policeman encapsulates perfectly the dilemma. For most, the law enforcement officer represents the law and the order that comes with

it. His authority comes from not only his badge, but more importantly from the pistol that he carries on his belt. It denotes the fact that he is special in some way, that he has the authority and the ability to employ deadly force and to take life and by virtue of this. He is unique and demands respect. The same level of reverence is typically not paid to security officers, who although have similar responsibilities and don a similar badge, do not carry the same holster and weapon.

After having carried his rifle and been sent to war, the soldier has been bestowed with the same authority to utilize deadly force but with one difference. Few police officers will ever un-holster their firearms in the line of duty and rarely will they be required to discharge them in the performance of their duties.

The frontline infantry soldier or Marine, having been deployed to war, will more often than not have to at some point, engage in opposition with the enemy. Perhaps he may not fire a direct round at the enemy, but he will nevertheless have been involved in one of the things that many people talk about, watch in movies, and read about but that precious few will every experience: combat. From this experience with combat, the veteran looses his deference to the policeman and his gun, for in his eyes, he is above the man that simply carries a small-caliber pistol and a cheap tin badge. But this loss of symbolic appreciation leads to a loss of respect for other aspects of the civilian world and creates a situation in which the veteran will become even more isolated and estranged. This merges with the shedding of civilian identity required by the military.

As discussed earlier, the military prides itself on being able to take ordinary young men and build them into well-trained soldiers capable of defending our nation. Part of this conditioning is the emphasis on tight, cohesive teams and stressing the notion that the strength of

the Army lies in the unity of action that ultimately requires the breakdown of individual identities (Waller 19). The very attire of our armed forces is indicative of this ideal, that men are to some degree depersonalized, and that there must be uniformity both physically through dress and otherwise in order to achieve mission success. Soldiers are taught to salute the uniform, regardless of their opinions of the respective man, and eventually, individual identities begin to become a less prominent feature than in civilian society. While individual identity is prized in the civilian sphere and expressed through dress and manner, the sense of self is de-emphasized in the military and personalized dress is replaced with uniforms, personalized manners are replaced with the standardized customs and courtesies of the military.

For this, new and more focused transitional programs are needed to aid in the realignment of such symbolic appreciation. Current transitional assistance programs (TAPS) classes, which last about five days, are largely ineffective and seen simply as, "a check in the box" by the soldiers going through the discharge process. These programs need to include such basic things as learning to say, "please" but should also be comprised of systematic stages of training, all aimed at reintegration, the reestablishment of a sense of self, the reorientation with personal identity, and the reemphasis of individuality and civilian personality development.

Such re-socialization will inevitably be difficult but as much attention needs to be placed on transitional training is placed on "boot camp" and basic training. Marine recruits are put through a grueling series of training evolutions that include rifle ranges, obstacles courses, martial arts training, and physical conditioning. After completion of these basic tasks, they are put through a punishing fifty-four hour rite of passage nicknamed, "The Crucible." Then and *only* then are recruits allowed to claim the title of "United States Marine." Our military spend up to thirteen weeks and tens of thousands of dollars transforming civilians into professional

warriors. Should not we at least spend three weeks and a few thousand dollars to transform them back?

How to Help: Give Them a Home

A central tenet in understanding the underlying causes of homelessness involves the loss of social support systems but also its association with loneliness and the ramifications of such feelings. Policy recommendations in any study of homelessness need to highlight the importance of allowing the homeless to feel as if they *belong* and are *accepted*, emotions that can be achieved only through social integration.

To feel as if one belongs or is part of larger society in an intricate manner plays an important role in one feeling a sense of inclusion and is one of the major steps described in Faulkner's qualitative study on the stages of reentry. The reintegration of the homeless population and its relationship with re-housing becomes a significant issue in terms of averting feelings of isolation, mainly in that re-housing is an important step towards feelings of social reintegration. Reintegration within society hinges on having 'normal' housing of relative quality and cost, enjoying the benefits associated with a home and thereby gaining a sense of being a part of the community through the experience of residence and of a sense of private space (Tosi 199).

Therefore housing becomes a basic component on which survival, equilibrium, and economic sustenance depends, not only for its obvious physical advantage, but for the psychosocial benefits as well. The lack of such housing is a platform for the negative effects to begin, a path for feelings of isolation and economic struggle to manifest themselves.

The fundamental role of social relations is emphasized as a means of achieving reintegration and a sense of equilibrium within normal life. Friends, brothers, and loved ones were identified in the interviews as an indispensable factor in engendering feelings of inclusion and ultimately reintegration for those who moved on past their bouts with homelessness. The sense of inclusion within a social network, informal and/or formal, would allow homeless individuals to feel less isolated and perhaps less lonely, gaining a sense of appreciation for meaningful relationships and people, and ultimately becoming more integrated within social systems.

Section 8 housing vouchers, subsidized housing, and SROs are merely band-aids on homelessness. They may put a roof over a homeless veteran but do little in terms of attaining true reintegration with community. Government programs aimed at housing the homeless veterans need to take into account that physical housing is only one aspect relating to homelessness. They should include elements that aid in efforts to repair social relations, kinship bonds, and other societal bonds.

Coming Home

Iraq veterans are already coming home with their own saying, “We are the underpaid, who work for the under-qualified, who do the unnecessary for the ungrateful.” Our country owes our fighting men and women the decency of a proper homecoming, regardless of where they were stationed. We need to start by being grateful – and showing it.

To see men and women who have served our country so honorably living on the streets of America is to find ourselves on the precipice of a very dangerous slope. Homeless veterans deserve more than a few hot meals and a cot to sleep on – they deserve the full support of the American people. If we begin to undercut, undervalue, or fail to appreciate the sacrifice made by

the nation's troops by failing to help our homeless veterans we will find ourselves without any nation at all.

For those who so bravely served our country and were lucky enough to survive, they quickly came to realize that the war was not really over. They had shed their heavy rucksacks from their shoulders, returned their rifle to the armory, and peeled their camouflage uniform from their backs – but the experiences and repercussions of their service were not as easily removed. It followed them home, alienated their former lives, manifesting itself in every facet of their lives, as they sat in the movie theater, as they applied for jobs, the effects of the military became inescapable. Whether they lived long and prosperous lives or suffered from psychological demons, every veteran came home *different*.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Interview Schedule: Veteran Participants

The interview component of this study will be completed with the aid of the following questions. In the context of this proposal, it is important to preface this appendix, that they function more as interview guideline rather than a detailed interview schedule, which will accompany the final work.

1. What was the nature of your service in the military?
    a. Were you active duty or reserves?
    b. What unit(s) did you serve in, in which branches?
    c. How would you describe your military occupational specialty and/or collateral duties?
    d. What was the approximate duration of your service?
    e. At any point were you or was your unit required to deploy overseas?
        i. If so which theater of operations and why?

2. Can you generally describe your military service?
    a. If you enjoyed it, hated it, loved it, would never do it again?
        i. What parts and why?
    b. What was the best part?

   c. What was the worst?

3. Can you describe your life immediately after separation from the military?

4. *Marginalization*
   a. Have you ever felt like you were never quite fully a civilian and/or quite fully a soldier?
      i. What do you feel may have been responsible for this?
   b. Do you now consider yourself fully a civilian or more of a Marine/soldier?

5. *Isolation and Loneliness*
   a. Would you say that you have as close friends as you did in the service?
      i. How do you feel about this?
   b. Servicemen often talk about the high level of camaraderie between members of the same unit, often describing the relationship as one akin to brothers. Others talk about the extent to which they were somewhat unconnected or distrusting of their peers. Would one would you say most closely resembled your situation?
      i. Please describe.
   c. How often would you say you socialize a month?
   d. Do you sometimes feel lonely or alone?
      i. Describe difference between solitude and loneliness.

6. *Reintegration*
   a. Are you part of any professional, social, community, veteran, or political group?
      i. Please describe the nature of your involvement there.
   b. How often would you say you think about the war?
      i. What triggers such memories?
   c. Do you sometimes have dreams or daydreams about the war?
   d. Are you currently employed?
      i. Please describe the nature of employment and the length of time.
         a. (Determine duration and how 'established' the nature of the position is.
         b. Is it a temporary position? Has he been there for years?

7. *Struggle for Recognition and Expectation*
   a. What did you feel about home, as far as the public support, when you were deployed in country?
   b. If you were in Vietnam, how did you feel about public sentiment towards soldiers and Marines?
      i. What did you feel about the lack of parades and ceremonial things in comparison to World War II?
   c. Was 'home' what you expected it to be when you returned from deployment?
      i. What were your expectations for home when you were deployed?
         a. Please be as specific as possible.
   d. Did you ever feel compelled to act a certain way because you were a service member?

e. In what way did you talk about the war (or president, government) with others in your unit?
    i. Did this differ from the way you spoke or thought about it as a civilian?
    ii. In other words what were your opinions about the war depending on whom you were talking to or what your status was?

8. *Alienation*
    a. Do you sometimes feel as if you are inherently different from those around you? As if you've been cut from a different cloth because of your military service?
        i. Why and how does this affect your life?
    b. Do you sometimes feel as if you are at odds with others emotionally, psychologically, or otherwise from your peers/coworkers/classmates?
    c. Do you sometimes feel as if people just don't *get* you sometimes?
        i. How and why?
    d. Do you feel as though you are different from when you left *for* the military as compared to when you returned?

9. *Anomie*
    e. Do you feel as if there was a big difference between the military and civilian worlds in terms of what you could or could not do?
        i. Please give examples.
    f. What were some of the things that you could do in the civilian world that you might not have been able to do in the military world (and vice versa)?
        i. What do you feel accounted for such differences?
    g. Did you ever feel like you performed a "faux pas" without knowing it?
        i. What happened?
        ii. Please describe the situation.
        iii. How did it make you feel?

Appendix B

Interview Schedule: Multiperspective Analysis (Administrators, Social Workers, etc)

1. What is the nature of your work with the homeless?

2. Can you describe your experiences with the homeless population in general?
    a. Would you describe it as very difficult but rewarding?
    b. Would you describe it as not that hard?

3. What has your experience been with homeless men in terms of why they're in their current disposition, in general?
    a. What is your opinion?

4. If you've worked with homeless veterans and non-veterans: What would you say the primary differences are if any?
    a. Similarities?
    b. What accounts for this differences and similarities?
    c. How has military service had any bearing on this?

5. Observations
    a. Do you think they feel more civilian or more soldier?
    b. What do you feel may have been responsible for this?
    c. How would you describe the sociability of the homeless men in your shelter?
        i. How do you feel about this?
    b. Servicemen often talk about the high level of camaraderie between members of the same unit, often describing the relationship as one akin to brothers. Others talk about the extent to which they were somewhat unconnected or distrusting of their peers. What has been your experience in how homeless veterans interact with each other?
        1. Please describe.

6. What are some obstacles or problems you have seen as far as any policies or shortcomings?
    a. What do you think might improve this in your shelter or in general?

7. Describe any observations you've had at your shelter in terms of how homeless men view the shelter itself?
    a. How about other faculty, administrators, volunteers?