

This article examines the social dynamics of life inside a public shelter for homeless men in New York City. It shows how distinctive forms of association—in particular, a ganglike body of elite residents and marriages between residents—are the product of the nature and exigencies of life in the shelter and how the requirements of such a life may limit possible trajectories out of the shelter. Shelters, it concludes, do a lot more than provide a bed for the night.

Great Work! "10"

MORE THAN REFUGE

The Social World of a Homeless Shelter

GWENDOLYN A. DORDICK

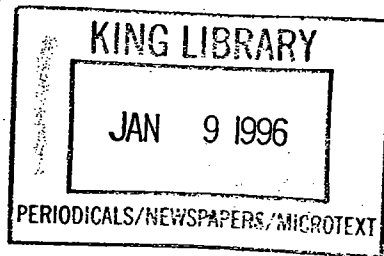
James has a "lover." Although they don't sleep together or engage in any kind of sexual activity, James refers to Rusty as his lover and even his "wife." His wife is a man, but James says that he himself is not gay. Muscles has a "Mo," Candy, a transgendered male. They have sex, or at least Muscles allows his Mo to perform fellatio on him.

Both Muscles and James live in a men's homeless shelter—the Armory. Muscles is also a member of the "crew," sometimes referred to as the "posse" or "house gang." Muscles has the "juice," the power. He commands and receives respect from the members of the crew and from many of the "clients" in the shelter. One member of the crew swears that Muscles would "give you the shirt off his back." Some residents who are not members or "down with" the crew like the way they run the "house"; others are more wary of their activities.

The Armory can be, I learned early during my stay there, a dangerous place. On the vast, open drill floor that 700 men call home, things can happen. Men get sick; they disappear; they die. The authorities do nothing. Muscles, James, Rusty, Candy, and the others who live here need allies, other residents they

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can count on to help them get by and stay safe here. They get married; they form organizations; they create structure within the open space. They make their shelter more than refuge.

Argue
against!

Marriages (neither legally sanctioned nor ritually sealed) involving heterosexual men and ganglike behavior might be taken as yet further "evidence" of the "deviance" of the homeless (see Baum and Burnes 1993 for a definitive statement). This article argues otherwise. Although the participants in both marriages and the crew are by virtually every definition homeless (Jencks 1994), these relationships are not so much the product of the "lack of access to a conventional dwelling" (Rossi 1989, 10) as they are a response to the exigencies and opportunities of the specific unconventional dwelling in which these men live. This article demonstrates how a particular type of institution—a large, public homeless shelter—gives rise to a particular type of homeless life and how the requirements of such a life shape and, in fact, limit possible trajectories out of the shelter.

Summary

Key

As the homeless crisis wears on through its third decade, shelters have evolved from an emergency stopgap to a permanent fixture on the urban and suburban scene. As a collecting ground for those without conventional homes, shelters have also offered many opportunities for researchers to study the homeless. Ethnographers looking to study the homeless as people (Liebow 1993; Snow and Anderson 1993) and survey researchers looking to document the demographics of this population (see Shlay and Rossi 1992 for a review; Hopper 1991 for an exception) have found their respondents in public and private shelters.

Recent analyses suggest that shelters may be important in a very different way. Rather than simply providing a place to study the attributes of the homeless, shelters can be seen as institutions that shape the practices of life among the homeless as well as trajectories (or lack thereof) out of homelessness. Shelters, these new analyses suggest, may do more than offer emergency refuge.

For Christopher Jencks, it is the mere availability of free housing that is important. In a short yet provocative chapter in

his acclaimed book affirmative answer to homelessness?":

Improving the lot of some people who or poor, wants to stay avoid it. If shelters available . . . some hotels may well pass places that are free

Jencks suggests, all shelters affects the suppositions, he con Stone, in a critique of of rationality" than of (1994) himself writes on where the homeless (p. 44).

Hopper and Baurr fact, provide a "free tive to Jencks's rati shelters are part of the role of providing work—to 'redundant ruptive threat to soc housing on demand "makeshift" subsiste 1985) that requires re Shelters do not, ac "offer secure refuge. of most shelters has there for extended p degrading" (p. 530).

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his acclaimed book *The Homeless* (1994), he offers a partially affirmative answer to the question, "Do shelters cause homelessness?":

Improving the lot of the homeless may even change the behavior of some people who have been living on their own. Nobody, rich or poor, wants to spend all their money on housing if they can avoid it. If shelters become more attractive or more widely available . . . some people who have been living in very cheap hotels may well pass fewer nights in hotels and more nights in places that are free. (p. 106)

Jencks suggests, albeit cautiously, that the very existence of shelters affects the kinds of choices individuals make. Such suppositions, he concedes, are based more on what Deborah Stone, in a critique of *The Homeless*, calls a "universal standard of rationality" than on actual data (Stone 1994, 31). As Jencks (1994) himself writes, "We badly need more reliable information on where the homeless get their money and how they spend it" (p. 44).

Hopper and Baumohl (1994) contend that shelters do not, in fact, provide a "free ride." Providing a neofunctionalist alternative to Jencks's rational choice perspective, they argue that shelters are part of society's "abeyance" process, they serve the role of providing "sustenance and occupation—virtual work—to 'redundant' people who might otherwise pose a disruptive threat to social order" (p. 530). Rather than providing housing on demand, as Jencks sees it, shelters are part of a "makeshift" subsistence strategy (Hopper, Susser, and Conover 1985) that requires real effort on the part of those who live there. Shelters do not, according to Hopper and Baumohl (1994), "offer secure refuge. . . . [The] aggressively transient character of most shelters has . . . meant that residents forced to live there for extended periods find the experience taxing if not degrading" (p. 530).

Several ethnographies of homeless life suggest the many ways in which shelter life is truly burdensome (Liebow 1993; Rosenthal 1994; Snow and Anderson 1993). Excessive rules; harsh treatment by shelter administrators, guards, and workers; and overly zealous programs of social control and reform make

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x shelters difficult places to live. Many of the homeless, in fact, choose not to avail themselves of opportunities for "free" shelter "out of pride, distrust of other homeless people, or an unwillingness to accept regimentation" (Rosenthal 1994, 57; see also Snow and Anderson 1993).

Free
Wagner (1993), in fact, sees the decision to eschew shelter life as empowering. Studying collective resistance by subjects of Checkerboard Square, a homeless community in "North City," he found that the loss of freedom and control resulting from a punitive municipal shelter system was more than some of the homeless would bear. The more pervasive the social control, the more shelter residents chose "literal homelessness over submission" (p. 104). According to Wagner, Checkerboard Square residents weighed "the relative strength of their social networks on the street and in the shelter" (p. 104), foregoing the latter in order to retain their "dignity" and "autonomy" in the former. In the end, this among other acts of collective resistance empowered individuals and furthered their struggles for recognition.

The Argument
Taken together, the works summarized above suggest a dynamic interaction between shelters and the homeless persons who use them. Whether shelters attract the homeless (Jencks 1994), keep them busy and occupied (Hopper and Baumohl 1994), or repel them (Rosenthal 1994; Wagner 1993), the consensus is that shelters are important agents influencing how the homeless live. This article builds from this basic understanding to consider how life inside a shelter transforms the situations and identities of the individuals who live there. More than simply influencing the kinds of choices homeless people have, I argue that shelters produce an enclosed social world whose rules and values come to constitute the worldviews of those who live there.

My approach draws on the more general sociological concern with the power of place, or more specifically, of particular types of places in shaping people's lives. A classic exploration is Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*. Defining mental hospitals and prisons as "total institutions," Goffman affords such places a power that extends beyond their formally prescribed function. More than simply housing mental patients or criminals, these

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places provide an "enclosed, formally administered round of life" (p. xiii) and help create "a particular kind of person who dwells in a particular kind of world" (p. 186). Are homeless shelters total institutions? Do the individuals who live there become particular kinds of people who dwell in particular kinds of worlds?

Through a detailed analysis of life in one homeless shelter, I explore these questions. Although one must use caution in generalizing from a single location, this article suggests three conclusions regarding the role of shelters. The first concerns the economics of shelter: while at least some residents derive benefits from the shelters beyond the basics of food and refuge, no benefit of shelter life is truly free. Simply staying alive can have its costs. The second involves the power of place in shaping the nature of homeless life: the particular institutional form of a shelter profoundly effects the kind of world the homeless experience there. The third is the consequence of such places: both the economic and social environment of the homeless shelter further curtail the hope of any exit from the shelter.

DATA AND METHOD

At the northern tip of Manhattan, across from one of New York's largest hospitals, is an old Armory that is home, depending on the season, to between 700 and 800 men. The Armory is one of New York City's largest public shelters, run under the authority of the Human Resources Administration, a municipal agency.

Within the New York City system, public shelters vary greatly in size and purpose. There are shelters for homeless with jobs, for the mentally ill, for those over 45, and for the handicapped. There are also general facilities—segmented only on the basis of sex—that are essentially open to all who seek shelter. Concerned with the generalizability of findings from a single-purpose shelter, I decided to sample from the list of general purpose facilities. I randomly selected the Armory from the list provided by New York City's Coalition for the Homeless.

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In order to gain entrance into the Armory, I had to obtain a "monitor" identification card from the Coalition for the Homeless. As a monitor, my official task was to inspect the condition of the shelter and the residents and report back to the coalition if there were any wrongdoings on the part of the staff. At first I was hesitant about being considered a monitor. I did not want the residents or the staff to perceive me in any other role than that of a researcher. Dual roles, such as researcher/monitor, can cause a great deal of confusion and difficulty in gaining trust, which ultimately influences the kinds of data a researcher can collect. The coalition was aware of my research and allowed me to obtain the card without having to fulfill my duties as a monitor. In fact, we made a deal. I would informally talk with several coalition staff, helping out in any way I could. My status as a monitor, in the end, had little impact on the research. I did not identify myself as a shelter monitor to residents or staff once I passed through the entrance.

The data were collected from February 1991 through April 1991 using participant observation and in-depth, informal interviews at the Armory. I visited approximately four times a week and stayed at least three hours each time. On four occasions, I spent the entire day in the shelter, leaving only at 10 p.m. "lights out."

I spent time with these men on their own turf—inside the Armory and the surrounding neighborhood—and on their own terms. I often joined the men for meals and tagged along on outings to the market or to the park near the Armory. I was there as the men gossiped about one another, mostly listening to their conversations and encouraging them to explore issues more deeply than they may have initially intended to in my absence.

As a "visitor"—a term coined by Herbert Gans (personal communication, January 1988) to describe a type of participant observation that includes observation, various kinds of participation as a researcher, and a great deal of informal interviewing and probing—I did not covertly enter the scene as a homeless person seeking insider status. My visitor status allowed me to be, at times, a confidant, someone who would listen patiently and not take sides in frequently occurring disputes. I was

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allowed to gently probe, a method of informal interviewing that works quite well with a population who, as a whole, are suspicious of outsiders, as well as one another.

Like they do for more stable populations, norms among the homeless both frame and govern everyday interaction. The men I spoke to had situationally grounded interpretations of what they believed was right and wrong, as well as guidelines for actions and behaviors that they deemed acceptable or not. One way in which to understand the nature of life in the shelter was to examine those circumstances in which norms were breached. As William Foote Whyte (1943) aptly suggests, "It is only when the relationship breaks down that the underlying obligations are brought to light" (p. 257). In short, one can see what people expect from one another when, for some reason, those expectations are not met. Over time, I was able to discern patterns of conflict and conflict resolution. These conflicts were the topic of many discussions and interpretations by each resident, regardless of whether they were involved or were even present. They were part of the daily gossip and folklore of the Armory.

In coming to terms with what was going on, I would balance the various sides to a story with my own observations, and probe the residents further in order to better understand the root causes of the dispute. Often, my understanding of the event differed from that of the residents. I would discuss my impressions with them, allowing them a chance to "set me straight," offering "street wisdom" and experience as an alternative to my "academic" wisdom. The analysis that follows is based on such street wisdom.

"THIS PLACE HAS NO SUPERVISION"

One enters the Armory after passing through a metal detector and showing identification to guards, always on duty. In addition to a guard booth, the first floor also contains laundry facilities. On the shelter's second floor are bathrooms and showers, a large recreation room no longer in use, the kitchen and dining room, and social services and medical facilities. The third

floor is a single, undivided drill floor, the size of a football field, where residents spend much of their time, both sleeping and awake.

Cote

Neighborhood

The drill floor, a vast open space, is divided by the residents who live on it to reflect distinct social territories. The spatial arrangement of the cots, used by the men during the day for hanging out, reveals social divisions analogous to neighborhoods. There are, for example, a great many "Mo's," transgendered males whom residents, though not guards, address with feminine pronouns and whom are illustratively referred to by some as "chicks with dicks." Mo's sleep and hang out in the "uptown" section. One resident referred to this section as "Motown." "Downtown" are other groups: Jamaicans and Africans share one corner, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have their own space; as do the crew, a group of men who claim to be the governing body in the shelter and whose operation is discussed in greater depth below. By shelter rules, those classified as mentally ill occupy a designated row. Shelter residents fear the sometimes erratic behavior of the mentally ill, and consequently leave them alone. Snow and Anderson (1993) discovered similar practices among the homeless in Austin, Texas: "The mentally ill appear to be outcasts even among outsiders. They are avoided by the other homeless as much as possible and they seem to reciprocate in kind" (p. 68).

Wow

Territories on the drill floor are jealously guarded as turf. Blacks of American origin are keenly aware that they are not welcome in the space appropriated by the Jamaicans and Africans. As they do outside the Armory, Jamaicans and Africans believe that American Blacks are uneducated, lazy, and generally lower in status than they are. One Nigerian man, for example, maintained that he was the son of a tribal chief. In such ways, the homeless preserve, create, and emphasize status differentials among themselves. Such affirmations of status—referred to by Snow and Anderson (1993) as "distancing"—are extremely important in a large environment composed almost exclusively of homeless individuals.

Though not officially designated as such, I discovered after some time that the Armory is the shelter of last resort in the New

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York City system. Although this may lead to a somewhat more violent and lawless environment in this shelter compared to others, conversations with homeless people throughout Manhattan indicate that all city shelters are plagued by some level of violence. Residents arrive at the Armory after having been processed by social workers who deem them "unsuitable" for other shelters in which the population is selected by program suitability or personal criteria; or after having been thrown out of another shelter for "inappropriate behavior," such as stealing, curfew violation, or other infractions of shelter rules. According to one resident (Dexter),

You see, a lot of these people can't go to another shelter because they are messed up. If you mess up at a shelter they don't want you back. They give you a code three [an order of eviction] or something. You know, they just don't want them there no more. They can't put you in the street.

Therefore, unlike many of the shelters within New York City's public shelter system where an individual may be evicted because he breaks a rule, the Armory is designated for rule breakers.

In 1979, under what has come to be known as the Callahan Consent Decree, residents of New York City's public shelter system were afforded civil, religious, and personal rights and protections. At the empirical level, however, a sizable gap exists between legal entitlements and "rights" and protections actually enjoyed by those who live in shelters.

The gap between what is and what ought to be is played out daily in the old Armory now used to house hundreds of homeless men. The approximately 700 cots are lined up side by side, one row after another. They are, according to the *Operating Standards Under the Callahan Decree* (Coalition for the Homeless, New York), supposed to be spaced a minimum of three feet apart. In fact, some are three feet apart, others may be one or two feet apart, and still others are pushed together. The proximity and condition of the beds provides the initial clues to the breakdown of the shelter administration's authority within the Armory. According to one resident,

This place has no supervision. At Wards Island they have no beds pushed together. At Wards Island, when you get up you got to make the bed. Do you see any beds made here? At Wards Island if you don't make your bed you lose it. The people don't care. That's why this place is run like it is because nobody cares.

Compassion and care ought to be inconsequential given that the agents of shelter authority, institutional aids (IAs) and security guards, are responsible for allocating basic services in a disinterested manner and that the Human Resource Administration (HRA), their employer, has a list of rules intended to make it a safe place to live. The de jure custodians of the Armory rarely, if ever, enforce the rules.

This general failure appears most acute when one looks at the most basic exigencies of survival in the shelter: food and safety. The "running" of the food line provides an excellent example. On several occasions, I stood in line with the residents or waited inside the dining area until the security guards opened the doors to let them in. On one occasion, one of the Mo's snuck into the dining area past two security guards. When I asked one of the guards why he did nothing, he said, "we are not allowed to have any physical contact with the men unless we're provoked into a fight." The other guard looked over and said, "He's a homo and you don't want to deal with that shit. He's just too pretty."

Often, the residents are too sick or injured to make it to the dining area. Living in such close quarters makes them susceptible to many contagious diseases. Low-grade infections fester and often blossom into life-threatening illnesses, such as pneumonia and tuberculosis. Sick residents eat their meals in bed on the drill floor, a violation of shelter rules. Only on rare occasions, however, are they reprimanded. The director made it a point to enforce this rule when he gave me an initial tour of the shelter. On later visits, however, I observed residents not only eating and drinking on the drill floor, but some warming cans of soup and beans on a portable hot plate.

The discretionary nature of rule enforcement makes the flow of essential resources unpredictable. On those rare occasions

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when the rule is enforced, some residents may go without food for an extended period of time. Jacob, a young Nigerian man, whose leg was badly swollen and wrapped in an Ace bandage, told me that it was too painful for him to walk to the dining area for his lunch. He told me that he asked his friend to go down to the lunch room and bring him a meal. He said that the IA knew him and knew that he was hurt but would not let his friend take him any food: "You can't count on them," he told me, "this place does things to people and they don't act the same after they've been here for a while."

NET
SAFE
Formal authorities in the shelter fail to provide adequate assurances of safety as well. Violence is the overriding concern of those who live in the Armory. According to Dexter, a resident was recently murdered in the Armory:

Yeah, they scald a man to death down in the shower the other day. Somehow the shower wasn't workin'. These guys had a beef and somehow one of them made the water real hot. I don't know how he did it? Scald him to death.

Other unconfirmed tales of murder are commonplace, and less severe acts of violence occur daily. Perhaps the best evidence of the level of violence in this and other city shelters is the extent to which many of the homeless avoid them. In a 1984 New York District Court case, Hopper testified that of the homeless who live on the street, between 80 and 85 percent had had some experience in city shelters. Hopper explained that the reasons for not returning to the shelters included "personal threat of injury, particularly against the elderly and more disabled, the threat of lice infestation, [and] in particular, the threat of robbery" (*Marthaan E. Pitts v Robert S. Black*, 84 Civ. 5270 [MJL] [S.D. N.Y. 1984]).

Lack of privacy and limited resources are two aspects of shelter life that exacerbate the potential for conflict and stealing. In fact, conflict is the norm. While some conflicts result in protracted violence and even murder, most lead to momentary outbursts that disappear as quickly as they arise. Stealing is also an everyday occurrence. Storage lockers are easily broken into, forcing many men to sleep in or on top of their possessions.

Stealing

* Older men, the mentally ill, and the physically disabled who receive checks become easy targets.

The experiences of two residents are exemplary. Anthony, a young man who has lived in the shelter on and off between 1984 and the present, told me that each time he came back things had gotten a little worse. Anthony comments on the conditions and how he copes with them:

As far as stealin' clothes, breakin' into other people's lockers, takin' people's things, gettin' jumped, you know gangs, little small posses of guys in here that just go around beatin' up people and things like that. All you [have] to do [is] block it out of your mind, you know, ignore it. Don't get into anybody's business, mind your own business.

Simply ignoring the violence is not an effective strategy for some. Jesse, a midget, whose broken body and awkward gait make him a target, claims that he has to buy protection because he cannot rely on shelter staff.

— MAKING ALLIES —

The inability of residents to rely on the institutional aids, security guards, social workers, and psychiatrists forces them to explore and develop personal mechanisms for the distribution and sharing of resources, such as food and safety, that are key to their survival. The residents develop a set of rules that govern the sharing and distribution of necessary resources. In the Armory, these rules are predicated on the shared values of respect and fidelity. These values shape residents' expectations and provide guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate actions and behaviors. The two general ways that respect and fidelity are practiced can be examined within the "crew" and marriages.

THE CREW (*like city gangs*)

The lack of formal supervision and authority in the Armory creates a vacuum that members of different groups can fill.

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Africans and Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, and the group known as the crew fight for control over turf on the drill floor and over privileges in the shelter. In the Armory, the fight for power is the most fundamental basis of group life and, as a result, profoundly shapes the kind of world the men in the Armory experience. The most successful and powerful group among competing factions is the crew.

The crew is made up of approximately fifteen American Blacks who claim to be the "governing" body within the Armory. According to one member,

The IA's and security guards will let anything happen. They will let anything happen. So, we got up and got up and got together and formed our own organization in here.

Need for gangs

Residents of the Armory are supposed to receive, as a matter of right, "three hots [meals] and a cot" and a secure place to live. The breakdown of administrative authority, however, means that they can count on nothing. Consequently, the crew attempts to control and administer virtually every aspect of life in the Armory. They set up cots and, to a great extent, decide sleeping arrangements within that portion of the drill floor over which they have control. They also run the food lines into the dining room, provide protection for a price to many residents of the Armory who lack a group affiliation, distribute over-the-counter medication, decide what is shown on television, and come and go as they please, ignoring the 10:00 p.m. curfew.

The crew

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They

run everything

They also run the Work Employment Program (WEP), a fixture in all New York City public shelters, which puts residents to work assisting in food preparation and cleanup, custodial tasks and facility maintenance. In short, in the words of one crew member, "We enforce the rules. Everything that got somethin' to do in here that got a special detail done the house gang will do it." As one resident succinctly put, "if a client is 'runnin' it, he be down with the house gang."

"Runnin' it" allows the crew to enjoy privileges that other residents are denied. The most important privileges come from running the food line and the Work Employment Program (WEP) line. Access to the food line is controlled by the crew. It

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is no surprise that the first in line and the first to eat are members of the crew. In the WEP line, crew members also take their place in the front. According to one crew member,

We run the lines. Who can get in front and who can't get in front. You're supposed to get on in line at the end, but the crew can just walk up in front. Once we get in line, the line goes the right way. The first one in line is the first one to get in. After the crew, of course. And if you fight in the line, you got to fight us.

Running the food line enables the men to eat first. Control of the work employment line gets them the best jobs.

In order for the crew to "run" the shelter, the staff must "look the other way." This can be accomplished through blackmail. Some of the IAs and guards get high with the residents. Some have crew members sell drugs for them. They are thus compromised. As one member suggests,

We got security guards and IA's smokin' with clients. That's how they lose their own respect. You see, then we got somethin' over on you. See, we wouldn't be able to run the place without the supervisor, IA's, security guards, without all of them lettin' us.

Some of the residents, nevertheless, resent the privileges enjoyed by the crew members. James, who has lived in the Armory for about six months, spoke bitterly of the crew's food privileges:

If you have the privileges, you can go in there and get anything you want. They only let the people in the house gang go past. They said that they was goin' to change it. They said that they were goin' to have the IA's run the food line and everything. But they said that and they still have the clients runnin' it.

Others see them as just payment for the services they provide:

They run the line, they have access to the kitchen like it's their own. I don't mind that. I don't mind them runnin' the line 'cause I'm tired of gettin' pushed and stepped on.

For this resident, not a member of any of the Armory's contending power groups, the protection he receives by being in the good graces of crew members is worth the wait for food.

The Crew Does good

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Crew members, then, protect themselves and create a safer and more predictable environment for everyone. Members of the crew, as well as those they are close to, can rely on the support of other crew members in any physical confrontation. To attack one crew member, or to attack a resident who has secured the crew's protection, is to attack all. Crew membership provides a strong promise of mutual protection and is a powerful deterrent, and this is seen by others:

You know it's good to have a crew sometimes. Sometimes you might get jumped in here. If they jump me, it's good to know that I can go back there and ask for help and come back with half the shelter.

Challenges to the crew's power by rival groups often force them to fight to maintain their position. But while the threat of intergroup violence is almost constant, crew members and their allies need not fear random and predatory acts of mugging or murder, being beaten or getting raped. For its members, therefore, the crew in effect rationalizes the violence in the Armory by setting up clear divisions between friends and enemies, and mitigating uncertainty.

In the Armory, staying safe in a violent environment is of greater issue than securing resources. Despite the irregularity and incompetence of food provision, it is unlikely that a person will starve. While the privileges exorted by the crew and certain other groups make life more pleasant and indeed profitable, they are not the fundamental reason for the crew's existence. In the Armory, concerns about staying alive predominate. The crew is about protection. Those in and affiliated with it believe that it will make them safer.

What of the kind of world created by the crew and groups like it in the Armory? In this particular shelter, it is a world based on the idea and practice of respect. Respect governs relationships between crew members and also between the crew and other shelter residents. I asked one crew member to tell me about the rules of the crew. He responded incredulously, as if the answer were self-evident: "the main rule is respect." Respect, as they see it, is deference to those who have power in their relations

with other crew members; individuals in the crew place paramount importance on the idea of respect. This works in two ways. First, individuals expect that others will accord them the respect they deserve. Second, they accord respect to others in their dealings with them. They expect to get respect and are obligated to give respect. In the Armory, crew members refrain from pushing self-interest too far out of concern for the importance of being respected. Pushing too far means losing respect. One crew member explains,

Some people come in here and play hard, right. They can't do that. They talk tough and try to take over the camp. They think they got muscle or somethin' and what happens is they get it. I came in with respect. I gave people respect and they liked me. You see, I smoke pot, right. I like weed, right. And I usually buy a lot of weed, right. And when I first came here I started hangin' out with one of my friends, Richie, and he was down with Calvin and Calvin's pretty big with the house gang. We got to hangin' together a lot and smokin' [weed] and they realized how cool I was because I ain't into that ra ra stuff, you know, big shot stuff. I just respect everybody and they respect me. I guess they just took a liken' to me and I just went right in and before I knew it, I was just down with everybody, I was down with the crew.

Respect for his fellow crew members, not being into that "big shot stuff," (not being boastful), makes this individual a desirable crew member. He made no demands and broke no rules. Over and above his connections with the "right" people and his ability to supply "weed," (he is not the only potential supplier in the Armory), his willingness to play by this single, critical rule demonstrates his place in the hierarchy of the crew.

Every crew member must respect every other crew member. Respect is a solidaristic principle. Respect, however, is not owed equally to all crew members. Rather, individuals have degrees of respect earned during their residence at the Armory. Respect functions as a reputational device. The leader of the crew, Muscles, has the most. One member explains, "Muscles got all the respect in here in the world." Muscles is due greater levels of deference than anyone else; he has the most power.

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Reputations, and consequently respect, are earned through one's experiences in the crew. Crew members expect others to treat them in accordance with the amount of respect due them. For Muscles, as well as some of the other senior crew members, high reputations translate into power within the crew. Crew members recognize and abide by a hierarchy:

I give respect, but I'm not the rough, rough type. You see, in every crew you got your nonviolent type of person. But you keep them around because they cool. They can use their hands and they can fight, but they cool. They don't go pickin' on people. That's kind of what I'm like. There are some people that get in closer with the IA's and the supervisors and the other stuff that gets you through. That's where a lot of the juice comes from. I got juice, but in the crew there are people that got more weight, more juice than I got.

Respect requires acknowledging one's place within the power hierarchy and to not challenge those "that got more weight." As one member warns, "Don't come in acting like a biggy biggy." That is, don't presume to have more power, more respect and status than you actually have.

While respect requires individuals to defer to the more powerful, it also constrains those who have "the juice." Because power is built upon respect, and because respect is a matter of reputation, individuals who abuse their power, or fail to meet the expectations of others, risk losing the respect on which it is based. According to Whyte (1943),

The man with a low status may violate his obligations without much change in his position. . . . On the other hand, the leader is depended upon by all members to meet his personal obligations. He cannot fail to do so without causing confusion and endangering his position. (p. 257)

Were Muscles, for example, to shake down another crew member or fail to come to another's assistance in a dispute, his reputation would suffer and his power would diminish.

The crew's power and their ability to use that power to control life in the shelter is based ultimately on physical coercion. Most often, it is the threat rather than the execution of violence that

*Violence
still*

musters compliance from the other residents. That the threat of violence from the crew is a deterrent in the Armory became evident when I started to ask the residents questions about the crew. Many clients outright refused to answer any questions concerning the crew. Others tried to steer me away. I asked one to explain his reticence:

They may make it difficult. But they would never step on you. But if a person was gonna get in trouble, they would step on the person that spoke to you. They wouldn't hurt you, but they would step on that person [who spoke to you]. If you were to talk to the wrong person and they were goin' to go up and tell the house gang that your askin' this and that, the person that you talked to could get into trouble. I don't spill the beans on nobody.

Fight Sometimes, of course, the crew's potential for violence does need to be demonstrated. Challenges to their power from contending groups, such as Puerto Ricans or Jamaicans and Africans, must occasionally be put down with force.

Violence alone, however, is neither a sufficient nor practical means for the exercise of power within the Armory. The crew needs to cultivate and maintain a belief among the residents about the appropriateness and desirability of its authority. It can be said that the crew asserts and the residents accept the legitimacy of its power. To understand the essence of the legitimacy claim, I return once again to respect.

As it works in the Armory, respect is a process by which residents defer to crew members whom they hold in esteem. When residents obey crew members out of respect, it is because they see them as individuals worth listening to, much as a student defers to a teacher. Understanding why residents respect crew members, understanding why the crew is worth listening to, requires an evaluation of the social bases of esteem in the shelter.

Residents perceive crew members to be strong, intelligent, and, within certain limits, altruistic. However, it is difficult to analytically separate those aspects of compliance that emerge from respect for an individual's strength in contradistinction to fear of that strength. Therefore, it can be said that strength,

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although necessary, is not a sufficient quality to achieve respect. Consider one resident's estimation of Muscles:

Muscles got all the respect in here in the world. Nobody would even think about fuckin' with that man. You'll get demoeed, you'll get rushed. You will get totally fucked up if you fuck with him. With all that respect he's got, he's the nicest person you could meet. He will help you out if you're a little down and hungry or something, if he's got something he'll give it to you. And he's running a lot of the house gang.

While it is clear from the above that Muscles (as his name implies) is strong and that residents of the shelter have cause to fear him, it is also evident that there is more to his power than physical strength. Both the above quote and conversations with other residents demonstrate that Muscles is also considered quite intelligent and that he is known to constantly extend himself for the benefit of others. This capacity to act in the interests of others, a capacity I have identified as a form of limited altruism, enables Muscles to gain the respect of other residents and in so doing command authority over them.

From the above discussion it would seem that the crew, especially the highest ranking members, are capable of doing just about anything they please; this is not the case. During my many visits to the shelter I neither saw, nor was told of, any instances of random or unprovoked acts of violence nor any episodes of stealing on the part of crew members. Why is it then that crew members who seem to have unlimited power stop short of totally abusing that power? Why, given the state of deprivation in which both crew members and residents find themselves, do they not use their power for greater material advantage?

Answering these questions requires us once again to turn to the concept of respect. The shelter would be an impossible place to live if residents had to constantly fear random and unpredictable exertions of power. In order to mitigate this uncertainty, residents need to trust the crew. This trust is built from the idea and practice of respect. Residents can trust that crew members will limit their discretionary use of power for fear of

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losing respect. Respect, as already noted, is based not only on physical strength but also on intelligence and a circumscribed altruism, both of which are subjectively judged. The crew member must be perceived by residents as acting in an intelligent and at least somewhat disinterested manner. If he steals from another resident, then he risks no longer being perceived as the object of esteem. The loss of such esteem and the respect that comes with it may also mean an unwillingness of residents to defer to that crew member in the future; he may, in short, lose power.

Respect, then, appears as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it enables certain residents to achieve a position of power over others; on the other hand, it places clearly defined limits on the exercise of this power, both within and outside the crew. By defining limits, respect mitigates uncertainties. Respect is a de facto contract between each crew member as well as between each crew member and shelter resident that is enforced by each resident for the other in the constant process of giving or withholding respect.

The case of the crew extends our understanding of power relations among the homeless. In Wagner's (1993) *Checkerboard Square*, residents derived their power from their collective resistance to and eventual avoidance of the shelter system. Crew members, however, derive their power from within the shelter. The crew's very existence is contingent upon the social and physical boundaries of the Armory. Lack of administrative authority and the lack of daily supervision provide the conditions under which the crew flourishes. Empowerment is specific to locale.

The hierarchy of the crew, delicately constructed around the idea and practice of respect, is similarly not portable. Muscles's respect, earned through long tenure in a particular place, is worthless outside. A situationally constructed stratification system like the crew depends on local determinations of deference and demeanor. This point is artfully conveyed by Elijah Anderson (1976) in his study of Jelly's, "a hangout for working and nonworking, neighborhood and non-neighborhood black people, mostly men" (p. 1). Anderson discovered an emergent

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social order among the "regulars," "wineheads," and "hoodlums" that is predicated on the construction and cultivation of social esteem among peers and limited to those men whose social interaction is continuous and rooted in place—"a place on the corner." The crew, like the regulars, wineheads, and hoodlums, must negotiate within the narrow parameters of their physical and social space the terms on which respect is constructed and demonstrated. Derived from the particular constellation of ideas and practices specific to life within a particular location, respect is not a fungible resource. Unlike money, it is extremely valuable in some places and utterly worthless in others. The crew, however, is an imperfect solution to the problem of building trust in an environment plagued by suspicion. Not all residents meet the crew's requirements for inclusion, nor do all residents desire to participate in the crew. For some, then, marriage provides a way to stay safe.

MARRIAGES

Having addressed the nature of group relations within the Armory—the crew—I now turn to a second type of relationship: bonds of trust between pairs of men. The men in the Armory, both in the crew and outside it, tend to pair off. Most can readily identify a single individual with whom any one man is particularly close. Anthony, good friends with Milton, explains his choice of a partner this way:

Like if you're the type of person who gets high and you know how much you like to get high, you can find another person who gets high like you do then you can hang with that person and you can get high together. Now, if you got a job, and you want a better job, then you hang with a person with a better job than your job.

In addition to group relations, those who live in the Armory also tend to focus on a single, particular other.

Often these intense pairings become sexual. Just as in prisons, the division of men into sexual pairs is quite common in the Armory. According to Anthony,

This is like an outside jail. . . . In a jail, you got homos. Same thing they do in jail they do here. This is just like jail. The people in here take it as jail. They put that image in their mind that they're locked up again. Sometimes it really gets to them because sometimes they do things like they are in jail.

Sex Sex on the drill floor and in the shower and bathroom stalls is common. The lack of privacy does not get in the way. To quote Anthony, "Privacy. Forget it. This place is about as private as a football field. But things go on at night." The men speak of partners as "lovers," "husbands," or "wives." Residents often refer to pairs of others as "married." Any pair of men who appear to others to be particularly intimate or close are assumed—sometimes incorrectly—to be having sex.

The sexual orientation of those in marriages varies considerably. Some relationships—particularly those never consummated—are between two "straight" men. Others are between a straight "husband" and a gay "wife." And others are between straight men and transgendered males called "Mo's." Husbands in these relationships see themselves as straight, and most vigorously assert their heterosexuality despite their relationships with the Mo's. Some, like James, have lovers even though they are unwilling to have sex with them:

I'm not saying that I would never do anything with him or nothin' would ever take place between me and him. But it's just kind of hard for me to get into that because I never done that. It could happen, I love him, I love him more than a friend.

Work Marriages offer both material support and protection. Much as husbands and wives in stable society are obligated to come to each other's aid, residents in the Armory feel similarly obligated to protect their "spouses." To the extent that the marriage bond is viewed as the most intimate, indissoluble and infused with trust, some residents enter into marriages, often involving sex, in order to trust.

Consider the kind of expectations a Mo can have of her man as they are revealed in a typical event in the shelter. Muscles's Mo, Candy, was upset by a threatening confrontation with

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another shelter resident. Candy sought help from Muscles, who immediately joined the dispute on "her" behalf. In this particular case, one can say that the sexual bond between the two enabled Muscles's Mo to know with certainty that her man would come to her aid.

The certainty with which a Mo can count on the support of the man she sleeps with makes them powerful, even feared within the shelter. "Some of these homos in here got the biggest juice. These homos got the biggest juice in here," relates Hugo. Like the members of the crew, partners in marriages benefit from the strength and deterrence that their alliances provide.

Marriages also offer material benefit. Many Mo's have income that they earn from prostitution and from stripping in bars. Anthony explains:

You see, the homos in here has a potential, you know, to go out and get something, you know, money, you know, go out and get a job or find a striptease job on 42nd street and they go out there and they make money.

Consequently, they have more money, and a more stable flow of money, than the other residents. This makes them desirable as partners for men whose material situation is more precarious.

Much that transpires within marriages can be understood in terms of exchange. The following story comes from Mel, who has lived in the Armory for a couple of years:

This guy had nothing to do with the gays, he would keep his distance. One day, however, he asked a fag to get him a beer, boom, he got the beer for him. The guy thought that this was great. So the next day he asked him to get him some cigarettes, boom, he got him cigarettes. This guy tried to tell me that this gay guy wasn't so bad. Eventually the gay guy would just give him some money, food and cigarettes. Boom, the next thing you know he was letting this gay guy suck his dick.

The Development

In this story, the exchange seems fairly explicit. Sex is traded for beer, food, and cigarettes, the supply of which is quite unpredictable. Marriages often originate in exchange relations in which sex is initially traded for material goods and protection.

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Husbands and wives, however, are not simply trading partners. The relationships, and the rules that govern them, go beyond initial and subsequent exchanges. As such, they provide a means through which one resident can trust another to act in matters of both exchange and protection.

Wow!
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Those in marriages expect their spouses to behave in ways traditionally sanctioned by the marriage contract. It is taken for granted that an individual will provide for, protect, and in every way look out for his or her spouse. Husbands and wives expect each other to be faithful. Several residents commented that the most vicious fights in the Armory were in response to acts of infidelity: either between the Mo's (one of whom had flirted or had sex with another Mo's man) or between husbands and wives.

The case of James and Rusty is typical. When I first met James he was lying on his bed shouting that he missed his "wife," Rusty, and was waiting for him to come back from jail. James, a Black man in his mid-twenties, and his brother have been in the shelter for approximately seven months. James's brother was arrested for selling crack. While his brother was incarcerated, James hooked up with Rusty, a gay White male in his late twenties.

Consider how James speaks of Rusty, whom, it will be recalled, he calls his "lover" despite the fact that they do not have sex together:

I love him, I love him more than a friend. A lover is someone you can really trust and depend on and that's how I see him. I don't see him as just a friend.

We all want a good, safe life!

Rusty is White and thus somewhat of a target in a predominantly Black and Hispanic (Puerto Rican and Dominican) shelter. James protects him: "If someone was to bother him, I would be right by his side." During my time at the Armory, Rusty was arrested for stealing and sent to prison for sixty days. In his absence, James keeps Rusty's bed intact and his blanket crisp, with dolls propped up on pillows. "That's his, nobody can sleep here," he said. Their relationship thus continues even during the

separation—both six remain faithful and returns to the shelter.

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separation—both sides bound by the expectation that each will remain faithful and that life will resume as it was when Rusty returns to the shelter.

Most marriages, such as the relationship between James and Rusty, are born of a simple exchange. Rusty allows James to share in the fruits of his petty thefts in return for which James protects him from danger. When, by force of circumstance, the exchange stopped, the relationship did not. James did not replace Rusty even though there were opportunities. Rather, he waits faithfully for his lover's return. The trust that had emerged through their marriage is not readily dissolved or transferred to another.

*Key
love*

Residents in the Armory appropriate and transform the institution of marriage in binding one another to a set of expectations that facilitates trust. Other residents recognize these relations as legitimate and provide sanctions when husbands and wives violate their marriage "contract." Consider how Anthony describes the relationship between Tweetie (a Mo) and Joe:

Tweetie has a head on her shoulders. That's what he's [Joe] lookin' for. He's lookin' for somebody with a head on their shoulders. She's got welfare and at least some type of potential with herself. The type of potential to get out of here and make a livin' and bring Joe with her. Joe, he's the type that will get a job and go out there and hustle and make some money. This is how they keep themselves goin'. He knows that Tweetie's a man and he still kisses on her and whatever and it doesn't bother him for the simple reason that she's not bringin' him down and he's not pullin' her down. They not pullin' each other down, it's a kind of bond between them.

In Anthony's words, one can see a complete and almost taken-for-granted recognition of the mutual obligations that bind Tweetie and Joe. Anthony speaks of the two in a collective language. Tweetie and Joe are, for him, an inseparable unit. The issue is not whether each as individuals will survive, but how they will "keep themselves goin'." Tweetie and Joe's behavior toward one another is thus subtly, but significantly, constrained by the expectations of their fellow residents, such as Anthony.

social expectations

Failure to honor spousal commitments, like failure to abide by the requirement of respect, can have reputational consequences. Muscles, for example, is bound to Candy, his Mo, by not only her expectations but those of others. People like Anthony recognize the "bond" that exists between them. For Muscles to treat Candy badly would mean that he is, in general, neither trustworthy nor faithful and may result in a loss of respect. It is easy to see how Candy can place faith in "her" husband.

Like the crew, marriages provide a good example of the use of personal relations in an atmosphere of pervasive distrust. Marriage, at least for some residents, provides universally recognized and legitimated parameters through which one can circumscribe and predict another's future behavior. As such, the idea and practice of fidelity on which these marriages are based plays a critical role in mitigating the existential uncertainty of life in the shelter.

But marriages are—like the crew—an imperfect solution. These relationships are plagued not only by the tensions of unequal reciprocity (e.g., the question, "Am I giving more than I am getting?"), but also by tension between the instrumental origins of the union, the romantic expectations implicit in the ideal of marriage, and the incompatible sexual identities and orientations of the people involved. Many of the straight men would rather be with what they call "a real woman." And many of the Mo's know it. For example, Danny told me that his lover "came onto me because he really liked my hair." As I talked with them, Danny's lover told me that he would never tell his girlfriend about Danny. He told me that he had a six-month-old son and if his girlfriend ever found out about Danny she would kill him. He started laughing and said that no one would know. Danny just sat listening, staring straight ahead. A few minutes later I noticed Danny's lover looking at a photograph of a naked woman as Danny fondled him. Such discrepancies in sexual orientation can result in tension between the spouses. Rusty, a homosexual, wants to sleep with James:

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I get up enough money to get a hotel room and James says he still can't because he's confused. James blames me for confusing him. He said that before me he never even looked at a man. He makes me feel so guilty for doing this to him.

As the above incident suggests, relations between husbands and wives are born as much out of necessity as mutual physical attraction. Marriages are a solution to the problem inherent in needing to rely on others in a violent and impoverished environment. Upon entering the Armory one must find an ally quickly. There is no time to discover the kinds of personal qualities in others that facilitate trust. Distrust is addressed by cementing relations in a language where roles and normative behavior are easily understood. The residents in the Armory harbor no exaggerated conception or notions of friendship. They rely instead on lovers whom they feel can be trusted more completely and who, as the case of James and Rusty indicates, can be found far more quickly.

The existence of marriages within the Armory echoes findings from other settings with respect to the social construction of kinship. Stack (1974), in her study of poor Black women, abandons "widely accepted definitions of the family" for a situationally grounded interpretation that illustrates the material and normative dimensions of family life as it exists in the Flats (p. 31). Liebow (1967) and Anderson (1976) explain the underlying obligations that bind street corner men together when they are "going for cousins." And Moodie (1994), in his analysis of Black South African gold mine workers, discusses the origins, social functions, and ultimate demise of same-sex "mine marriages" in light of proletarianization. Although the socioeconomic, cultural, and historical foundations in which constructed kin relations emerge vary greatly, each of the above examples suggests that monistic understandings of family fail to capture the myriad personal obligations, rights, and commitments that people assign to these socially constructed kin relations. According to Gubrium and Holstein (1990), "Family provides a reference point that is commonly shared and tacitly agreed upon, against which other relationships and behaviors are interpreted" (p. 139).

By utilizing the discourse of "family," participants signal to each other, and others, that their relationship is a personal, nontransferable commitment based on bonds of mutual trust and remains, under the most severe circumstances, unassailable.

As in the above examples, the men in the Armory use the language of "family" when they construct an ally. Like the gold miners in South Africa or prison inmates, they use marriage to pattern their social interactions with one another. Marriage provides a common ideology that conveys particular expressions of sexual desire, masculinity, femininity, and normative prescriptions that inform husbands and wives of their respective gender roles and of their rights and obligations to one another.

Love relationships in the Armory are similar, in many respects, to the "buddy" relationships analyzed by Goffman (1961) in his work on total institutions. "The distinctive element about the buddy relation in some total institutions is that it is an exclusively reciprocal relationship (as in the case of the matrimonial relationship): one has but one buddy and one is his only buddy" (p. 278). Yet, unlike Goffman's inmates, the marriages constructed by the men in the Armory are not, at least in their eyes, their only sexual options. Unlike prison or asylum inmates, Armory residents are not physically confined. I met one man who claimed to maintain a relationship with his girlfriend away from the Armory while simultaneously being a husband inside. Others expressed interest in meeting women, in hooking up with former girlfriends or wives, or in visiting prostitutes. Such talk rarely led to action, however. Although not physically confined to the Armory, they are, to a great degree, socially confined. Their desirability as mates inside the Armory far exceeds what they experience in the outside world. Their limited potential to get a job and earn a living makes them "unmarriageable" in the sense conveyed by Wilson (1987) in his analysis of the rise of single parenting and out-of-wedlock births. The Armory makes them marriageable. They can live up to the prevailing expectations here. As for the members of the crew, husbands and wives owe much of their sense of self to the particular circumstances of the place they live.

While on the public world of the marriages have little environment plagues cannot count on the protection or food. provide for themselves frequent exchange which can occur between the parties respect and fidelity provide the basis for the

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CONCLUSION

While on the surface it may appear that the power-laden public world of the crew and the intimate private domain of marriages have little in common, they are both responses to an environment plagued by distrust and uncertainty. The residents cannot count on their shelter to consistently provide them with protection or food. In response to this uncertainty, they need to provide for themselves. Such provision requires repeated and frequent exchanges between shelter residents, exchanges which can occur only given a preexisting relationship of trust between the parties. By embracing the idea and practice of respect and fidelity, respectively, the crew and marriages provide the basis for this trust.

Both the crew and marriages are personal relations that bind participating individuals to a set of rules and regulations, respect and fidelity, respectively, that set parameters for types of interaction, such as those between crew member and nonmember, lovers, or husband and wife. Mutual acknowledgment of these parameters allows residents to interact with a limited predictability; it allows them to trust. Trust can occur because residents know that breaches of trust will be negatively sanctioned. Sanctions, such as the withholding of respect for a crew member or unfaithful party to a marriage, are applied by the residents in order to limit the power of the crew and insure fidelity in marriages.

This view inside the shelter permits us to revisit the questions regarding the impact of shelters on the homeless. Life within the crew and within marriages demonstrates that the economics of shelter life are more complicated than Jencks (1994) surmises. The privileges obtained from crew membership or from association with a spouse clearly exceed the bare minimum of food and shelter. The benefits derived from both forms of association are, at least in some sense, an attraction of shelter life as against other "makeshift" living situations (Dordick 1994). As Hopper and Baumohl (1994) suggest, such benefits are not obtained without costs. As I have illustrated, staying alive and

safe in the shelter requires effort. More than simply watching their backs, residents of the shelter must either develop and maintain the kinds of social relationships that ensure protection in the event of random attack or purchase the protection of a group like the crew. Either way, safe housing, at least in the Armory, is not free.

More than simply providing them with a particular cost-benefit calculus, the institutional arrangements of the Armory truly shape the homeless experience. Groups like the crew and relations like the marriages exist in other settings; both have been observed in prisons and mental institutions (Bowker 1977; Goffman 1961). They are, however, in this instance, very much the product of this particular place involving particular kinds of people who dwell in particular kinds of worlds. While caution must be applied in generalizing to the universe of homeless shelters, it is safe to say that the Armory is very much a total institution. Its impact on the individuals who live there is far greater than simply offering them emergency shelter.

What then of the possibilities for getting out of the shelter?

Getting out
This article has identified three principal ways in which the nature of life in this total institution can discourage or forestall the efforts of individuals to leave. First is the matter of effort. So much time and energy is spent in efforts to "get by" within the shelter, there is little time to concentrate on or to pursue alternatives to shelter living. Second is the question of resources. Membership in the crew or some other group or a relationship with a particular other in a marriage is a resource, a way of surviving as homeless. These are difficult to give up. To leave the shelter is to leave behind individuals one can count on in time of need for a future that is uncertain given the poverty all shelter residents endure. Third is the question of commitment. Obligations as they emerge in this kind of world are taken seriously and felt as binding commitments. Leaving the Armory for these men means leaving these commitments behind.

Taken together, these conclusions suggest two important corrections to the current discussion and debate over "what to do" about the homeless. First, policy makers need to be sensitive to the way in which interventions such as emergency

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shelters affect the lives and prospects of the individuals they are trying to help. The places people live offer more than refuge; these places actively shape social worlds. Second, our understanding of the kinds of choices the homeless make must be sensitive to the social environments in which these choices are both understood and constrained. Concrete social networks that are the product of adversity are the reference point from which the homeless weigh what few alternatives and opportunities they have. Policies that ignore the reality and importance of these social ties can only produce unintended outcomes.

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GWENDOLYN A. DORDICK is assistant professor of sociology at Hamilton College. She is currently finishing a manuscript for Temple University Press comparing homeless life in four distinct New York City locations.

Advice can be highly problematic for HIV and AIDS when sexual behavior. However, the and receipt of advice. Using counseling sessions in a clinic that counselors deliver advice. Analysis concerns structure maintain an ambiguity between implications of these findings analysis are discussed.

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