

A Qualitative Examination of Masculinity, Homelessness, and Social Class Among Men in a Transitional Shelter

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This study explored the intersection and meaning of homelessness, masculinity, and social class among 15 men who are homeless. Using Consensual Qualitative Research Methodology (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), three major domains arose from the data: The Homeless Experience, Perceptions of Men and Masculinity, and Changing Social Status. Participants described (a) gaining empathy for the homeless after they became homeless; (b) economic, personal, and substance use and abuse as barriers to moving out of homelessness; (c) retaining their sense of masculinity regardless of being homeless; and (d) aspirations for a better, nonhomeless future. Men also discussed the importance of mental health and substance abuse services. Implications for psychologists and future research are discussed.

Keywords: homelessness, men, social class, poverty, consensual qualitative research

Homelessness is one of the most significant domestic policy and mental health issues in America. Yet this community remains understudied and underserved by psychological professionals. Currently, there may be between 2.1 to 3.5 million persons who are homeless (Burt, Aron, Lee, & Valente, 2001). Approximately two to three percent of the U.S. population (5–8 million) will experience at least one night of homelessness (Link et al., 1995). The homeless, being at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, often have the poorest mental and physical health and prognosis (Liu, Hernandez, Mahmood, & Stinson, 2006; Rank & Hirschl, 2001), have histories of substance use and abuse (Vangeest & Johnson, 2002), have greater exposure to violence (Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, Unger, & Iversen, 1997), have higher rates of suicidal ideation and behaviors (Eynan et al., 2002), and are likely to have histories of domestic and physical abuse when compared to those who have never been homeless (Toro et al., 1995). Research on men who are homeless suggests higher frequency of substance use, experiences of poorer

housing quality, greater criminal involvement (Stein & Gelberg, 1995), prior institutionalization, drug use and mental illness, experiences of victimization, and longer periods of homelessness in comparison to women (Allgood & Warren, 2003). Tessler, Rosenheck, and Gamache (2001) reported results from a large-scale epidemiological study of persons who are homeless. Fifteen cities in nine states were used to collect interview data. Over a 5-year period from 1993 to 1998, 4,497 homeless men and 2,727 homeless women were interviewed. The results suggest that men typically reported that homelessness was a result of a loss of a job, discharge from an institution, mental health problems, and alcohol and drug problems, while women cited eviction, interpersonal conflict, and loss of support as their main reasons for homelessness.

While men are often seen as homeless, much of the research on homelessness and men (a) addresses gender differences and not masculinity, (b) does not address the implicit relationship between masculinity and social class and status (Liu, 2002), and (c) does not explore how masculinity may change or adapt as a consequence of changing situations and context. To understand this community better, this study qualitatively examined the experiences of homelessness among men at a rural homeless shelter. The intent of this study was to investigate the personal experiences of being homeless and

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explore how men make meaning of their masculinity and social class.

Understanding Homelessness

The 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (PL 100–77) defines a person who is homeless as someone who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; an individual whose primary nighttime residence is in a supervised public or private shelter designed for temporary accommodations, an institution that provides temporary residence, and/or a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used for sleeping accommodations for human beings (Legal Information Institute, 2005). In this study, persons who are homeless are defined as people living on the streets or in homeless shelters who have little familial support and limited personal and public resources from which to draw. They are persons who lack residential options (Baker, 1994).

Qualitative research with the homeless has explored hope and hopelessness (Partis, 2003), experiences with crime and incarceration (Gowan, 2002), survival strategies (Osborne, 2002), and drug use (Neale, 2001). Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai (2000) used in-depth interviews among 29 persons who are homeless in a single adult shelter and investigated the homeless identity. Participants were 18 to 61 years old ($M = 38$ years, $SD = 13$); 70% were men; and 52% had not been homeless prior to this experience. Results pointed to three aspects of their self-identity. First, participants discussed their Past Self and the loss of an identity due to no permanent residence and a constant reference to their life before homelessness. The second theme of the Present Self focused on their current situation. Participants described themselves as honest, kind, loving, moral, friendly, strong, hardworking, resourceful, independent, generous, proud, and survivors. The third theme was the Devalued Self. This theme focused on their social discomfort and stigma due to homelessness. Marginality, problems with mental illness, substance use, and histories of abuse were issues relevant in the participants' lives. Participants also described problems with social isolation and alienation. The fourth theme was a coping mechanism that discriminated between people who are homeless and the participants. One

interesting result was that many of the participants resisted the description of themselves as homeless. It seems from the results that resisting their current identity as homeless would facilitate a future self that focused on the hope of a nonhomeless identity.

Using a thematic content analysis with 24 homeless men and women, Miller and Keys (2001) wanted to identify perceptions of events that validate or invalidate dignity and how these events impacted the homeless person. Miller and Keys found eight events that validated the dignity of persons who are homeless. The eight events were receiving care; being recognized as an individual; receiving personalized services in social service settings; being a part of a family or group; having access to available resources to meet basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, medical); having access to resources to feel self-sufficient; having opportunities in the community (e.g., access to plays, movies, sporting events); and having opportunities to volunteer and contribute. Those who felt validated tended to feel self-worth and motivated to improve themselves. The authors also found eight conditions that violated dignity. The eight were not being treated as an individual, human, or adult; receiving poor service; experiencing unfair treatment and harassment by service providers, police, or hospital staff; feeling that others did not care; being in a setting that had unfair or arbitrary rules; having a lack of resources to meet basic needs; having to associate with others who behaved poorly; and having a dirty or inadequate environment, such as a shelter. Consequences for feeling violated were lack of self-worth, anger, and depression. Miller and Keys's (2001) research suggests that poor treatment by service providers could potentially thwart or retard an individual's self-efficacy and his or her recovery process out of homelessness. Additionally, the research suggests that, even though there were material conditions (e.g., food) that were related to recovery, there were also salient interpersonal concerns needing attention.

Finally, Applewhite (1997) conducted group interviews among 60 male veterans who were homeless. Using content analysis, the veterans reported high incidence of physical and mental health problems and believed there were limited resources available to them. The veterans also reported negative public sentiment and treatment.

Their experiences with public services, such as shelters, were largely negative; they reported frustration with service delivery, bureaucratic barriers in receiving services, and perceived the policies and procedures to be dehumanizing. Recommendations were made to focus on increased advocacy-based care, employment options, affordable housing, and increasing sensitivity in the provision of services. Although the data were drawn from male veterans, the researchers did not explore masculinity specifically.

The qualitative research suggests those who are homeless experience stigma, marginalization, and struggles with their personal identity (Roll, Toro, & Ortola, 1999). The research also implies that men and women vary in coping and survival strategies. And while the current research is adequate in exploring and illuminating the broad experiences of homelessness, researchers have not investigated the interdependent roles of gender, specifically masculinity and social class. Psychologists need to understand the ways in which men who are homeless construct, maintain, and recuperate masculinity and the role these men believe social class plays in their sense of masculinity.

Masculinity, Social Class, and Homelessness

Liu (2002, 2005) suggested that integrating a specific focus on social class into the study of masculinity allows researchers and clinicians to potentially better understand the social construction of masculinity. Masculinity in the United States is already suffused with status and social class (Liu, 2002); Men are in part socialized toward independence and achievement (Good, Thomson, & Brathwaite, 2005). Cultural messages of "Being the Big Wheel" (Thompson & Pleck, 1986) may be conceptualized and measured through constructs, such as Winning, Primacy of Work, and Pursuit of Status, in the Conformity to Masculine Role Norms Inventory (Mahalik, Talmadge, Locke, & Scott, 2005) or Conflict Between Work and Family on the Gender Role Conflict Scale (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986). Kimmel (2001) posits that men are socialized to be the "breadwinners" and family providers, and men often face tremendous psychological consequences when removed from this role. Thus, the

"breadwinner" is only one example of how masculinity and social status and social class are intertwined; being the breadwinner is the attitudinal and behavioral expression of a socialized expectation for men to attain status.

The problem with the extant research is the assumption that men have access and opportunity to express these social class/status expectations and roles. That is, what happens to men who lack opportunities to construct masculinity outside these normative social contexts within which status is achieved (i.e., school and work). The challenge in the current research is that, while masculinity may be construed as multiple and subjective, social class needs to be operationalized as a subjective and psychologically meaningful variable as well. In this study, social class is used to imply that people do behave and perceive the world as though there are distinct groups (e.g., middle-class), and individuals see themselves a social-classed beings (Liu, 2002). This subjective approach to understanding social class has been found to a robust predictor of psychological variables, such as subjective health (Sapolsky, 2005). In one study of subjective social class Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, and Ickovics (2000) surveyed homeless women in a homeless shelter. They found women who rated themselves with better subjective health tended to rate themselves higher on a social status measure, even though objectively (i.e., income, residence) these women were similar to other women in the shelter. This result may suggest the ways in which individuals interpret their environment and their own agency may be related to potentially positive outcomes.

The rationale for using a subjective approach to social class is that psychologists have too often relied on a sociological approach to understand an individual level experience. Similarly, research on social class suggests that there is no salient and meaningful distinction between the terms social class and socioeconomic status (Liberatos, Link, & Kelsey, 1988; Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004), and in fact these terms are used inconsistently and interchangeably. Hence, for this study, the term "social class" is chosen because of its connection to classism (Liu et al., 2004). As Liu and his colleagues have argued, exploring social class as a subjective experience allows psychologists to shift beyond the strict social class hierarchies (i.e., lower-, middle-class), which classify individuals

based on income, education, and occupation. This classification scheme assumes everyone within a “class” views the world similarly (Liu, 2002). But it is more important to note that this classification scheme does not explain people’s affect and cognitions related to their current social class. Liu et al. (2004) proposed that psychologists should study social class similar to the ways race and gender are both explored. That is, psychologists interested in race explore racial identity and acculturation but not race specifically; psychologists interested in gender explore gender roles and conflict, but not gender specifically. Thus, for social class, Liu and his colleagues suggest a worldview approach may be helpful in illuminating this experience.

The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM; Liu et al., 2004), which theoretically links social class and classism, encourages psychologists to consider an individual’s subjective interpretation and experience of social class. From the SCWM, individuals exist in economic cultures wherein they are expected to meet certain expectations in order to maintain their social class standing. Some support for the construct of economic cultures and the socialization of social class was found in a study of academicians who moved from lower social class backgrounds to the “ivory tower” (Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006). Other influences on their social class worldview are the socialization messages from peers, friends, and family members; individuals also change their behaviors (e.g., cultural tastes, buying habits) to meet the economic culture’s demands. Finally, classism is expressed and experienced by an individual to maintain his or her social class standing. Social class mobility, either upward or downward, challenges the individual to adapt to a new economic culture’s demands, but potentially feelings of internalized classism (i.e., frustration, anger, depression) because one is not able to meet the expectations of an economic culture.

Liu et al. (2004) also suggested that persons who are unable to meet the expectations of their social class group may experience internalized classism. Internalized classism is characterized by feelings of shame, depression, anxiety, and frustration resulting from failure to maintain one’s status. Therefore, masculinity and classism intersect when men are unable to meet or maintain their status. Consequently, feelings of

depression, despair, frustration, and anger may result from potentially two sources: masculinity and classism. Although theoretically this is applicable for men from middle-class settings, where opportunities exist to access resources and enact social-class behaviors, it is not clear if men who are homeless experience similar negative feelings.

Purpose of Study

This study explored the experiences of homelessness, the meaning of masculinity and social class. The research question was “How are masculinity and social class status affected by homelessness?” Because of the limited previous research on this topic, we felt that Consensual Qualitative Research design (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) would be ideal for our purposes. The CQR methodology involves interviewing participants, then organizing responses into general and specific themes to develop an inductive understanding of the phenomena.

Method

Participants

Fifteen men were recruited at a transitional shelter for the homeless in a small, Midwestern city. This transitional shelter focuses on helping individuals seek jobs, save money, and obtain independent residences. The men are permitted to reside for 90 days in the shelter. Nonresidents also have access to the shelter but their use of services is inconsistent and their participation in helping programs is random at best. With the consultation of the shelter staff, residents who participated were chosen because these residents would be interested in a self-reflective study and would benefit more from the compensation. Therefore, for this study, all participants were screened out if they did not live in the shelter, had any severe mental health problems (e.g., severe depression, schizophrenia), and did not have a job. To recruit participants at the homeless shelter, advertisements were placed around the facility. Each participant was paid 20 dollars for their voluntary participation. Eleven participants identified themselves as White; two were African American; one identified himself as Latino and African American; and one participant

identified himself as Irish American and Native American. The participants' ages ranged from 29 to 61 years ($M = 44$, $SD = 9.28$). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Interviewers, Bias, and Auditors

Three of the interviewers were doctoral students in a counseling psychology program. They were a biracial Asian/White male, a White female, and a Latino American male. The fourth interviewer was a nontraditional age White male undergraduate student in his late 40s. The three doctoral students also served as the primary data analysis team.

Before conducting the interviews, the research team discussed their potential biases for working with the homeless population as recommended by Hill et al. (1997). The four interviewers reported limited previous interaction with individuals experiencing homelessness and acknowledged having preconceived beliefs about what the interview experiences would be like. For example, some of the biases discussed were that homeless persons are dirty, scary, lazy, mentally ill, and substance abusers. The purpose for discussing these expectations was to minimize the influence of bias on the interview process, transcribing process, and data analysis.

To preserve the quality of the data analysis, three other counseling psychology students un-

affiliated and unfamiliar with the study and related literature served as auditors of data.

Measure

The finalized protocol consisted of two sections: a demographics portion and an open-ended portion. The protocol began with 13 demographic questions about the participant's age, race/ethnicity, basic family history, education, and occupation. The additional 19 open-ended questions (each with a list of standardized queries) were created in accordance with CQR methodology (Hill et al., 1997; see Appendix). The purpose of the interview was to gain a qualitative understanding of (a) the participant's life experiences and perceptions of homelessness, (b) the participant's perceptions of their own masculinity, and (c) the social class concerns of this population. To create the interview, the originally created protocol was reviewed, critiqued, and revised three separate times by the research team. The interviewers then practiced the revised protocol on each other in a structured format, followed by a research team discussion of interviewer/interviewee experiences. As a result, the protocol was revised a fourth time in response to the practice session feedback. Lastly, a pilot interview was conducted with a participant at the shelter house, resulting in feedback for a fifth and final version of the interview protocol.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information (N = 15)

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Highest level of education	Current occupation
Nicholas	61	White	GED	Construction worker
Ryan	56	White	Some community college	Maintenance worker
Daniel	54	Irish/Native American	GED	Unemployed
Samuel	51	White	HS diploma	Unemployed
Joseph	50	White	12th grade	laborer
Richard	49	White	Some community college	Construction worker
James	45	White	11th grade	Salesperson
Christopher	44	White	GED	Newspaper carrier
Michael	43	African American	12th grade	Cook
Austin	41	White	Some community college	Concrete finisher
John	38	White	GED	Laborer
Joshua	35	White	One semester of college	Unemployed
Tyler	34	African American	12th grade	Cook
Robert	30	Latino/African American	11th grade	Salesperson
Jacob	29	White	11th grade	Unemployed

Note. GED = General Educational Development.

Procedures

The interviews took place in a private staff office at the shelter house or in a private room at a local community center/church that offers services to the county's homeless community. The participants were instructed to read and sign an informed consent document for research participation and for permission to be audio taped. The informed consent document was also verbally summarized to participants. The participants were then given 20 dollars (prior to the interview) and reminded that they could stop participating at any time. All interviews were audio taped and later transcribed verbatim by the interviewers. To maintain the anonymity of participants, transcribers replaced the participant's real names with pseudonyms on transcripts.

Development of and coding into domains. After all transcripts were completed, the data were analyzed using CQR methods (Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). CQR involves categorizing data into accurate themes via research team deliberations and external auditing. Each member of the primary team read all 15 transcripts, developed a "start list" of domains (i.e., themes) they found, and presented them to the entire team using examples from the transcripts. The team approved a list of domains after deliberation, resulting in a second read through of the data by each team member. For this additional read through, the new consensually chosen domains were focused on to verify their quality. The primary team subsequently met again and arrived at a consensus on a revised list of domains.

Abstracting core ideas within domains. Each team member then read through the transcriptions of those participants they interviewed to search for core ideas that illustrated aspects of the chosen domains. According to Hill et al. (2005), a core idea should be an edited representative example from the data that conveys "the participant's perspective and explicit meaning" (p. 200).

Cross-analysis. After meeting and reaching consensus on core ideas for each of the 15 cases on each of the domains, the primary team developed categories from the core ideas that best represented specific themes across all data. This cross-analysis procedure of developing categories involved deliberation by the primary

team—coming to a consensus on the categorical groups that would more specifically describe each domain across all cases. For example, under the domain Man in Society is the category Expectations of Men, which specifically describes a theme across the data. After a list of categories was established, the primary team members then examined these categories in the data by coding all participant remarks into the established categories. This resulted in a single document that listed each domain and within-domain category, including all client data coded into these categories. In addition, this document provided an "other" category for all data that did not apply to any of the team's categories. The document was individually read by the primary group members and revised to consensus in an additional team meeting.

External audit. To check the cross-analysis and domain construction, three auditors read the finished collated data document, reviewing the wording and accuracy of categorization of themes (i.e., domains and categories). The auditors also read all data in the "other" section to check for additional domains, categories, or core ideas that may have been overlooked. The auditors presented their suggestions to the primary research team, who then revised the wording and categorization of data for several domains and categories.

Frequency. Finally, categories were labeled based on the frequency of occurrence of the theme in the data. We employed Hill et al.'s (2005) revised labels of general, typical, and variant. General qualifies that the category was reported by all or all but one of the participants (14–15). Typical describes a category that was acknowledged by more than half of the participants up to all but one (7–13). The variant label includes at least two participant reports up to half of the participant reports (2–6). These labels are used to better communicate results to the reader and to allow for comparison across research studies.

It should also be noted that the research team did not perform a stability check as recommended by Hill et al. (1997). That is, the authors did not withhold two cases from the data to be used as a check to determine if the existing data had been collated properly into the frequency categories of general, typical, and variant. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that the stability check was no longer a necessary part of

CQR methodology, due mainly to a lack of utility. Therefore, the authors decided not to include the check in the current study.

Results

Three domains emerged from the data. First was *The Homeless Experience* domain, which arose from the participants' common discussion of their own lifestyle and the lifestyle of those in their homeless communities. The specific categories within this domain were a) *Negative Feelings About Being Homeless*, b) *Greater Empathy for the Homeless*, c) *Homeless Struggle with Substance Use and Mental and Physical Health*, and d) *Dichotomy of Homelessness*. While the first domain addressed the basic homeless lifestyle, the second domain focused on *Perceptions of Men and Masculinity*, which was comprised of the participants' perspectives on male role norms and on how they perceived their current homeless situation as a man. The specific categories within this domain were a) *Man as the "Breadwinner,"* b) *No Changes in Masculinity Since Becoming Homeless*, and c) *Others Perceive Homeless Men Negatively*. The third and last domain was labeled *Changing Social Status* because it emerged from the participants' discussions of social class concerns

and desires for upward mobility and a life out of homelessness. The categories within this domain were a) *Aspirations for Upward Mobility*, and b) *Barriers to Change Identified*. A summary of results across domains and categories can be found in Table 2.

The Homeless Experience

Negative feelings about being homeless. Out of the 15 participants, 12 expressed negative feelings about being homeless, producing a typical response. For example, Nicholas stated: "There is no good or happy about being homeless. There is no . . . I mean, you just gotta accept the situation you're in . . . I feel ashamed everyday." Similarly, Jacob discussed his feelings on being homeless:

A lot of self-pity. A lot of regret. I can't believe that I let myself come to this again. I just regret not having not any other outlets to go and stay somewhere and have someone to help me. Or being able to help myself . . . I'm embarrassed to tell them [friends] that I'm outdoors and most of my friends would be upset that I didn't even let them know. I don't want to bother anybody with it because I feel like it's my fault. I just need to take care of it myself.

Robert stated, "Looking at it from the point of view of strictly where I am financially, it's

Table 2
Domains, Categories, Frequencies, and Illustrative Core Ideas Regarding Social-Class Experiences of Men Who Are Homeless (N = 15)

Domain/category	Illustrative core idea	Frequency
1. The Homeless Experience		
a) Negative feelings about being homeless	Depression, shame, frustration, injustice, helplessness	Typical
b) Greater empathy for the homeless	Changed attitudes, greater sympathy	Typical
c) Homeless persons struggle with substance use, mental illness, and physical illness	Alcohol, drugs, mental and physical illness are problems	Typical
d) Dichotomy of homelessness	There are two different types of homeless individuals—those who choose to be homeless and individuals who are not homeless by choice	Typical
2. Perceptions of Men and Masculinity		
a) Man as the "breadwinner"	Breadwinner, provider, worker	General
b) No changes in masculinity since becoming homeless	A succinct "no" when asked if they viewed their masculinity differently since becoming homeless	Typical
c) Others perceive homeless men negatively	Viewed as drunk, looked down upon, outcast	Typical
3. Changing Social Status		
a) Aspirations for upward mobility	Desires to change to a higher social class, including not being homeless anymore and discussion of home family and job	Typical
b) Barriers to change identified	"Myself," financial situation, substance abuse, and/or health	Typical

saddening, it's discouraging, frustrating because I don't feel like I'm getting a fair shake. But it's depressing, that's the bottom line." Likewise, Michael said,

I started feeling bad about myself because of my position. Yeah, I got depressed. I felt that I didn't deserve to be homeless because I always thought I was a better person. And I shouldn't have . . . I was like "God what did I do to deserve this?"

Finally, Tyler, succinctly stated the sentiments of many of the participants' feelings about being homeless: "I got more depressed being homeless." The overarching consensus among participants was that being homeless was depressing. Shame, frustration, injustice, and helplessness were also commonly reported feelings. The three participants that did not report strictly negative feelings about their homelessness had mixed feelings about their situation.

Greater empathy for the homeless. Of the 15 participants, 11 disclosed having a greater empathy for homeless individuals after having become homeless themselves, producing a typical response for this question. When asked about their perception of homeless individuals before the participants became homeless, seven participants reported having no opinion, while eight reported looking down on the homeless or not caring about homelessness.

Tyler, who used to look down on the homeless, changed his views when he experienced homelessness.

I used to have an attitude. I used to say remarks to my girlfriend like, "If I can work, you know there should be no reason why they shouldn't work." Now that I'm here and I see all the different problems that people have, I feel differently now about people being homeless. The attitude I had before was that I just thought people didn't want to work and just didn't want to do nothing for themselves, but there's other problems that people have that keep them from working.

Tyler disclosed that the homeless condition was much more complex than he previously thought. This was a feeling shared by the interviewees in their experiences collecting data; they were surprised by the multitude of personal, mental, health, and support problems experienced by persons experiencing homelessness and keeping them from work.

Jacob said he changed his opinion about homeless individuals by becoming more socially involved with other homeless folks:

I used to hate it [homelessness]. I thought that the homeless people were scourge of the earth . . . Dirty, smelly and pretty much they're all thieves. That's what you think of all of them until I actually grew up a little bit . . . I had met some homeless people. Some homeless kids. They called them the *ped-rats* downtown . . . Talk to them and their good kids. Good people. They're all not there 'cause they lost their house or anything. Some of them are there 'cause of the situation they were in. It was not healthy, they were being abused or what not. That definitely changed my attitude about homeless people. I actually met some and talked to them.

Robert shared a similar change in his thinking:

I looked at people really scummy . . . I did look at people who are homeless as lazy. More than anything I looked at them as drug addicts. I figured that would be the only reason a person wouldn't pay their rent. Not because their job didn't pay them enough to do it or they got laid off. I never looked at those aspects of it 'cause I didn't see it. It's changed in the sense that now I'm aware of the circumstances and reasons behind why it happens. So my view about it is more understanding, not sympathetic, because sympathy is like feeling sorry for somebody . . . I feel more of an empathy, an understanding because I can't hate you if I don't know how you got here. So I can't look at someone who's homeless and say that person is messed up. I gotta say I wonder what got them there. Maybe I should get to know them.

While eight participants reported looking down or not caring about homelessness before becoming homeless, seven participants reported having no strong opinions about homelessness before becoming homeless. Regardless of previous opinion of homeless individuals, the typical response (11 cases) was that upon experiencing homelessness first-hand, a greater empathy arose for the complexities among problems in the community.

Homeless struggle with substance use and mental and physical health. While no direct protocol questions asked about any of these issues, problems with physical health, mental health, and substance use were often brought up by the participants. This category encompasses all three topics because they were typically discussed as connected and pervasive problems for the homeless community. Substance use was mentioned by seven participants, mental illness by five, and physical illness by four participants, all of which constitute variant responses.

Austin stated that he believed these issues were pervasive for the homeless community:

My estimation, it's just personal—that 85% to 95% of the people that you will find homeless and on the street have one of two or both problems and that's mental health issues, whether the mental health issue stems from an actual physical problem or just something that's happened to them, some trauma, or something, or they have a substance abuse problem.

The extant literature seems to support this response (McCarty et al., 1991; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2003).

When Joseph was asked about how he lost his job, he responded:

Alcohol. I couldn't handle the work . . . I got a bad discharge from the military because of drugs and alcohol. So after I got a bad discharge from the military, I started traveling around, living homeless. When you're living out there homeless. You don't have the right shelter to protect you from illness, disease, or whatever.

Nicholas gave us some recommendations for substance abuse treatment for the homeless:

I was in that drug state for a long time . . . I had a drinking problem and I went to treatment. . . I had a drug problem, I went to treatment. . . It's a lot of things going on here [shelter house] that shouldn't be. Like drug dealing and all that—they shouldn't do that, but it happens. I've got approached a few times . . . I think they should have more counseling. They got the counselors here, but all they do is mostly observe. They should have more one-on-ones. Because just coming in and having a one-on-one, really don't get it. Just like putting an alcoholic into treatment. Thirty days ain't going to do it. It might get you off the drug or the booze, but you need counseling after that. Like AA, NA, you know. You gotta keep on, you gotta have follow-ups.

Nicholas seemed to acknowledge the substance abuse problem in the homeless community and recommended that more counseling services would be helpful.

Christopher reported to us, "Most homeless people have mental problems. Twenty years ago homeless people that had mental problems had mental hospitals to be in state hospitals." Christopher also referred to the deinstitutionalization of the mental health system in the 1980s, the effects of which can be seen in the increased number of displaced homeless persons who suffer from psychological ailments.

While substance abuse and mental health problems were often reported, physical ailments were a concern for the men as well. Four participants discussed the serious physical health problems faced by individuals in the homeless community. Ryan stated,

My health has deteriorated somewhat. I've filed for disability right now and in the process of that. I go to the university hospital two or three times a month. Congenitive heart failure, diabetes, hypertension, are the main. Now I need health care and of course no insurance of any kind.

Dichotomy of homelessness. Also not explicitly stated in the interview protocol, but emerging as a theme, was *the idea that there existed two types of homeless individuals*. Ten participants (a typical result) discussed a dichotomy in the homeless community, where some chose to be homeless or are seemingly content with their living situation and some are not content with their living situation and do not want to be homeless. For example, Daniel concisely stated a response typical of those interviewed:

I think you should know that there's two different types of homeless. There's the guy's that you consider homeless, but they've chosen this lifestyle . . . Then you have the homeless people who actually don't want to be homeless, they lost their jobs, their house, you know stuff like that.

Similarly, Michael gave his estimates for the proportion of individuals who fit into the two types of homeless categories: "I would say that 70% of the people that I've associated with here have been trying to get out, and 30% don't."

Nicholas went into further detail, saying "Some peoples, they'll do this till the day they die because they ain't got no ambition, they ain't got no nothing. They lost all their self-esteem and everything else. All they want to do is sleep and eat. I can't." Finally, 38-year-old John, a White, GED educated laborer, expressed his frustrations with the situation: "Let me show you that I can do it. I'm not a damn drunk bum, just because I'm homeless just like some of these people are."

Perceptions of Men and Masculinity

Man as the "breadwinner." All participants were asked about what they believed a man's role in society to be. Fourteen of the participants responded with something akin to the traditional "breadwinner" role (a general response rate). One participant perceived man's role as changing and no longer existent. The following five participant's remarks are representative of the sample group's discussion of man's role.

James gave a characteristic response of man taking responsibility for himself and family: "First they should be able to take care of themselves. Take care of what is his. If he has a wife and kids, he's gotta be able to take care of them too." Robert responded to the question with, "The provider, the one that even if it kills him he maintains whatever it is he has. He's not weak its all about ego. That's the bottom line it's about ego." Robert emphasizes that man retains his breadwinner role at all costs. This idea of taking care of one's own responsibilities and taking care of one's family was also identified as a primary construct of manhood among African American men as well (Hammond & Mattis, 2005).

In contrast, Ryan perceived the breadwinner role as more dependent on the situation: "In the perfect family situations he does have a role . . . I think a man's role is breadwinner and as a role model for the children . . ." John qualified his answer with the man's responsibility to take care of his family in an ethical way: "I think a man's role in society is to go to work, pay the bills, raise a family, be honest, nonviolent, that's what I want." Lastly, Richard acknowledged that his views on man's role were largely influenced by his socialization experiences: "Provider, that's the way I was brought up." Besides "provider," the terms most often used by participants to describe man's role were "worker" and "breadwinner."

No changes in masculinity since becoming homeless. When men were asked if becoming homeless changed their self perception as a man, the typical response (by nine participants) was a succinct "no," while only three described feeling less like a man and three gave ambiguous answers. Austin's response was the most elaborate of the typical "no" answers:

There is absolutely no change. The fact that I'm homeless is 99.9% because of the decisions that I've made in my life, bad decisions that I've made in my life, so they have nothing to do at all with how I feel about being a man, or what it is to be a man just because I've put myself in that position.

A more typical answer was a terse "no."

Of the three participants (a variant response) who described feeling less like a man, Jacob stated:

It's funny 'cause my ex-girlfriend told me that I need to stand up and be a man and deal with things. And I

don't feel like much of a man right now. I feel pretty worthless 'cause I can't help myself. I can't get myself out of this rut. It's just tough. I don't feel like much of a man right now.

Jacob disclosed that his ex-girlfriend pointed out to him that he was not living up to the traditional male role of being responsible and dealing with things. He described feeling "worthless" because of his inability to take care of himself and live up to the male role he and his ex-girlfriend expect.

Another variant response about the perception of self as a man came from Samuel who stated,

Well, there's times that I feel as though because I'm a man, I'm not . . . you know if I have to prepare my . . . I hate to say it but a woman at least gets a . . . a woman gets a break. I don't think men really do get a break. People tend to feel sorry for women, whereas I think most people got the notes on their head that men are supposed to be out there, men are supposed to be the breadwinner, all that kind of crap. That's not always true, but I think that's society's perception, is that man is supposed to be the guy that goes out there and makes the money and bring home the bacon as they would say. You know, I think that's very true. That's the way I see it.

Samuel expressed some frustration for society's sympathy for women in distress that is not equally shared for men who are in distress. He perceived society as holding men to a higher standard than women in being the "breadwinner" and being "out there" making money.

Others perceive homeless men negatively. This category emerged from the typical participants' remarks on the negativity projected toward them as homeless men. Eleven participants stated that other people looked at them in a negative way. For example James said, "They figured I'm just a drunk, derelict . . . Once they find out you're homeless they think, 'There's a homeless person, he ain't important.'" Joseph reported being harassed by others:

People driving by, holler at you, "get a job" . . . They look at you funny. Wrinkle their nose. Look down their nose at you. They just say, "hey lazy bum, get a job." They talk like . . . they act like they don't even want to talk to you period . . . I don't know what they expect of me. Except not to be homeless. But see, they're not part of the solution they're part of the problem . . . They expect you to get better, but they don't treat you like you should be getting treated better.

Similarly, Richard reported:

The way I can tell you is they feel like they had lowered their standards by talking to you. They don't

want to be seen talking to you. That makes them look bad to people that they know or other people in their class . . . instead of white-collar, blue-collar class types people. They don't want to be seen that way, they don't want to be seen associating.

John concurred with Richard's sentiment, saying, "Society looks at me like I'm lower . . . People look at me like I'm spit in a garbage can."

Tyler commented on the perception of his friends and family regarding his condition: "I think people think that . . . well, people that know me know that I can do better than what I am doing. They look at me differently because they know I should be doing better than what I'm doing." Finally, Robert reported his views of holding a unique perspective over the rest of society because of his situation: "I think society may see me as being an outcast, but I think I'm more in touch with humanity than they are."

Changing Social Status

Aspirations for upward mobility. This category arose from the typical participant disclosure of wanting to change to a higher social class. Twelve participants stated that they wanted to change to a higher social class; all participants did not want to be homeless; and all discussed changes they would make in their home, family, and job situation.

For instance, Samuel stated his desire to have a steady job and income, a permanent residence, and to be a "member of society" and not be seen as lower than society. He also mentioned not feeling like himself and becoming a member of society would help him "feel like "myself."

Similarly, Jacob addressed his aspiration to reenter society:

I would like to be able to be a part of society, like I was when I was driving a cab. I felt like I meant something to people and people looked forward to seeing me. They needed me. I want to be wanted again. I want to be able to talk to people and make a difference. I feel like people listen just to be respectful. But they're not listening, they're listening to what I am saying but they're not understanding it. I look forward to that. Things getting better and I think it all has to do with getting my job back. Its just one step up the social ladder. It just keeps going up from there.

Likewise Austin reported his strong want for employment and being a healthy member of society again:

All I wanna do is just work, and stay employed, and employable. Don't get caught up using again . . . I just need to go in and follow the course of what I need to do in order to become a contributing member of the society, basically, and there's nothing wrong with that, I like it, I like to be a contributing member of society, and not a drain on it.

Whereas Austin discussed *staying clean* as part of his aspiration, some men like Michael addressed their aspiration to help their families:

I want to get a job, get a place. I want to finish raising my children. Because I have one that's nine and one that's eight. And the worst thing about that is they know I'm homeless . . . It's not easy because all I want to do is get a nice job and get off of the street, and start to pick up where I left off before all of this happened to me. Because I deserve better, I am better. I want to get a job, get a place. And I want to finish raising my children . . . I feel I should be somewhere else other than here. Like I said being with my family, being able to raise them. Have a home for them, because I love my children.

James also described wanting to be at a better place:

The only way I get a dollar in my pocket now is to pick cans and trade them in for a nickel. And that's a long ways from where I should be. Better. That's all I really need to get in. Get to work, substantiate my life better than what it is now . . . falling apart . . . I don't like being homeless anymore . . . I'd like to be back to the working class.

Unfortunately, some men like Joseph, reported aspirations but also expressed hopelessness: "I'd like to be middle class . . . House, car, family. Like I said, at this point in my life it's beyond hope." For the most part, participants were optimistic about change and were interested in becoming contributing, employed members of society, providing for themselves and families, and residing in a permanent residence.

Barriers to change identified. This category arose from questions related to barriers that were keeping men who are homeless from changing their social class status. Two participants stated that there were no barriers keeping them from change and that they were not necessarily interested in change. Five participants described "myself" as the primary barrier to change, while five participants referred to their financial situation as the main barrier, and three stated substance abuse and/or health reasons as their main barrier from change.

Tyler's response embodied one of the variant responses, "myself," as a significant barrier:

“Nothing’s in my way, but myself I guess.” Thirty-five year-old, Joshua, an unemployed White man with one semester of college education, also responded: “Myself. That’s all I got to say about it, just myself.” Jacob identified his status as a homeless person and disability as barriers: “It’s like for some reason I think they know this is a homeless guy and they don’t want to hire me. The biggest [barrier] now is being able to find a job with something that I can do with my disability.”

Another barrier reported by James was age:

I guess it has something to do with age. Once you turn 40 or something, if they know you been drinking or are homeless, they know you use Salvation Army give away stuff like that. They just kinda put you on a “no hire” list or something. Don’t have much to do with you.

Lastly, Ryan cited financial barriers as realistic dilemmas for upward mobility:

Even though I’m quite frugal and all that, to be comfortable, you gotta admit it’d take 40 thousand a year. I mean c’mon. That’d get you a car, not a Mercedes, but a car. That’s what it takes to make a statement on a condo or a house.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences and perceptions of masculinity and social class among men who are homeless. The results from this study suggest that men reported mostly negative personal appraisals of their current homelessness, but also expressed hopefulness in escaping their situation. Their negative appraisals and related depression are consistent with the literature supporting this connection (Eynan et al., 2002). The men also recognized that there were some situational barriers to their recovery, such as the lack of money, but regarded their own choices as likely related to leaving homelessness. Additionally, the men reported that poor mental and physical health negatively affected their own and others’ homelessness, and that current and historical use of substances were problematic for individuals who are homeless (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Tessler et al., 2001).

One of the interesting finding in this study was that many of the men did not believe their masculinity changed (i.e., diminished) as a result of their homelessness. That is, given the potentially deleterious circumstances that these

men who are homeless find themselves, most did not believe their sense of masculinity changed or diminished. But given that all the trappings of “dominant” (i.e., middle-class) masculinity have been stripped from them, why has their sense of themselves as men not been reported to change? There may be several explanations. To begin, the result may be an artifact of the question. The inquiry is a privileged question that assumes these men have had the luxury of contemplating their sense of masculinity and its evolution resulting from homelessness. It may be that they are too focused on survival and that opportunities to be deeply self-reflective are not available. Thus, their frequent succinct “no” to our question may reflect that situation. For many of the men in this study, their answer may also signal defiance and resistance toward the interviewer and what they perceived to be additional negative attributions on them as homeless men. And while these men do recognize that people see them negatively, this perception by others is largely attributed to the men’s homeless condition and not related to their masculinity. The participants also acknowledge their inability to meet certain expectations of masculinity, but this is attributed to situational and contextual barriers and does not necessarily appear to be attributed to being “less of a man.”

This finding is also intriguing because, although masculinity may be socially constructed, it may not necessarily be socially contingent. That is, a lifetime of socialization messages about being a man may not likely diminish as a result of changes in social context. In this case, becoming homeless does not seem to negatively affect their self-perceptions of masculinity, or it may be that these men in a transitional shelter are improving their situation and are less likely to subscribe to negative ascriptions by others. Certainly the social context exerts demands and challenges, but it may be that these men in a homeless transitional shelter do not perceive their homelessness to be a chronic state but a transitional one. Similarly, for these men, in the absence of an opportunity to fulfill this role and expectation, an auxiliary gender role expectation is focused upon, such as “taking responsibility.” Thus, as “responsible-man” takes prominence, these men look for opportunities to exhibit this role; that is, these men may convert or conflate the “breadwinner” role of bringing

home money toward an action and belief more congruent with their current situation. The men's masculinity may be recuperated by taking responsibility for one's own actions, and this is supported by some of the men when they regard their homelessness as a result of their poor decisions. Consequently, the breadwinner is less defined as the "moneymaker" but is likely someone who takes care of those under his responsibility—a much more expansive definition of man as the breadwinner.

Another reported result of becoming homeless seems to be the enlivening of the men's sense of empathy, especially toward other homeless individuals. The development of more empathy for these men may be a way of creating a positive sense of masculinity borne from their marginalized and subordinate social status in society (Pyke, 1996), but also their homelessness may be a way to define their difference as a potentially positive feature of themselves (Emslie, Ridge, Ziebland, & Hunt, 2006). The strengthening of the men's capacity toward empathy, as a result of being homeless, may have three results. For some of these men, empathy may allow them a broader sense of community and affiliation with other homeless individuals. In turn, this may broaden their sense of community and their opportunity to provide and receive support. The second possibility is that these men may strengthen their nontraditional notions of masculinity, and this flexibility with their masculinity may provide resistance to the deleterious effects of homelessness that targets one aspect of their masculinity. Finally, it may be possible that the increased empathy is translated to self and other forgiveness. For example, Toussaint and Webb (2005) found that empathy and forgiveness was highly correlated for men but not women. These greater interpersonal resources allow these men to endure the devaluation they experience for being homeless.

But even with this expanded definition, for some men being homeless does seem to trigger aspects of internalized classism, such as frustration, anxiety, and depression. In this case, internalized classism is triggered from other people "looking down" on these men, which is a form of downward classism (Liu et al., 2004). Thus, for many of these men, they must not only negotiate their own internal disappointments related to social status and being a man but also navigate the castigation from others who may

regard them as "homeless men" (i.e., lowest-class men). As Liu et al. (2004) speculate, internalized classism is a noxious state from which these men may attempt to escape or alleviate. For some men in this study that have seemed to conceptualize more positive aspects of themselves as a responsible man, they may have alleviated these feelings of internalized classism through a reinterpretation of the "breadwinner" role for men. It is interesting to note that the capacity to which the men were able to identify barriers preventing them from moving out of homelessness was related to their perceptions of upward mobility. That is, the more clearly they could identify the personal/internal and external/situational barriers the more hope they had for themselves to one day be more upwardly mobile. But, it also seems that for a small group of these men who were experiencing high internal distress and internalized classism, they have been less able or unwilling to reconceptualize their masculinity to broader schemes, which allow them more flexibility to practice their masculinity. Furthermore, it may be that they have not fully taken responsibility or recognized the internal and external barriers to their homelessness. Consequently, some of these men may be experiencing dual oppressions that manifest from their sense of masculinity and internalized classism. Since this research did not explicitly explore the reasons why men's masculinity did and did not change related to homelessness, future research could explore this question further and discuss the deeper intersectionalities between masculinity and social class.

Connected to their sense of hope and movement from homelessness was their men's identification of mental health problems and services. Although it was unclear if the men would use services if available, the men did recognize the relationship between recovery and mental illness. This finding generally supports the previous research on use of services within this community (Boydell et al., 2000). Without prompts, the men discussed the significant problem of substance use and abuse among people who are homeless and the difficulty of "staying clean." These statements seem to endorse extant research on the relationship between substance use and abuse and homelessness (Vangeest & Johnson, 2002). Similarly, they felt that while some

individuals who are homeless are relatively free from severe mental illness, many could benefit from supportive and directive mental health services. Again, these findings endorse the need for psychologists to provide supportive and empathic services that recognize the dignity of these men (Miller & Keys, 2001). According to the participants, it is not enough for psychologists to simply consult with individuals who are homeless; psychologists need to explore ways to provide consistent and contiguous services.

Thus, these findings generally show that men who are homeless, especially those in a shelter setting, are well aware of the barriers in their recovery (i.e., substance use, inadequate health care, stigma, peer pressure) and sensitive to negative and positive treatment. This may be a positive finding for these men since it may indicate that these men are accurately appraising their environment and themselves. Thus, for these men in a shelter, even though they live in a context of poverty, they are able to conceptualize themselves with some self-agency and capable of accessing and using available resources. For psychologists, it may be important to know that these men already live in environments where they are likely devalued and have jobs where they lack autonomy and agency. They are also likely to expect negative treatment from service providers (i.e., Gallo & Matthews, 1999). Therefore, strong positive and supportive services that focus on encouragement may be received better than correction and direction.

Participants in our study also pointed to the important role that substance use and mental and physical illness play among the homeless population in general, as well as among the participants themselves. The participants' responses concurred with the extant literature describing mental health correlates of homelessness (Roll et al., 1999). Increasing mental health treatment, or making it more effective and accessible, were considerations suggested by the men. The men's comments support research on mental health treatment and effectiveness, which shows that low-income individuals typically receive poorer and more ineffective treatments than those of higher incomes (Applewhite, 1997; Miller & Keys, 2001). From their experience, it seems that consultation services (i.e., drop-in) are not as

helpful as in-house counseling services and substance abuse treatment. Contiguous treatment, like those offered by an in-house psychologist or counselor, would be able to track treatment and observe treatment adherence better than drop-in consultation. For instance, from the interview responses, it was difficult to discern whether or not alcohol and substance use was the cause of homelessness, a coping mechanism for life stress among persons who are homeless, or a consequence of homelessness. Consistent mental health care could help identify the role of substance use and abuse for individuals who are homeless, and as a result, psychologists could develop more effective prevention, intervention, or tertiary care.

Limitations

Because this was an exploratory study, conclusions and implications should be considered in light of some potential limitations. Research shows that individuals who are homeless tend to be difficult to recruit for research (Hough, Tarke, Renker, Shields, & Glatstein, 1996; Toro & Wall, 1991), so the participants were chosen from a local shelter house because of convenience. These participants may not be representative of the general homeless population since these participants sought out and were engaged with resources to help them change. Finally, the researchers attempted to account for their own biases and assumptions prior to the project, but the results of this project certainly reflected the researcher's interpretations and worldviews (e.g., which questions were in the final interview protocol). Other researchers would need to replicate and extend the findings from this research.

Implications

The results suggest that these men may have some resiliency and ability to cope and manage their homeless situation. With much of the external markers for social class and successful masculinity removed from them, these men found ways to maintain a core sense of themselves that may have served to help them move out of homelessness. Thus, psychologists need to be aware of their own

biases and assumptions when working with people who are homeless and not perceive them as completely helpless and without identity. Additionally, many of the participants in this study highlighted the importance of accessible mental health services. In addition to providing basic supportive counseling services, psychologists could also offer vocational services to this population. Research has shown that adapting contemporary vocational approaches to be sensitive to social class concerns can be effective (Chaves et al., & Perry, 2004). Additionally, the unique concerns of the homeless community require attention, but also advocacy. As psychologists strive to include social justice into their work, the reports of the men in this study are a reminder of this population's dire need for direct services and advocacy. For instance, psychologists not already employed in agencies that serve the homeless population might consider volunteer or other pro bono work within these settings. Psychologists working or volunteering in these settings need to learn about and understand the complexity of social services available for both men and women who are homeless. This education could begin in training settings that expose students to federal and state resources, eligibility, paperwork, and how to advocate within these systems. On this same issue, psychologists need to become comfortable with asserting their position and power in order to advocate for their client. Often, agencies may not have psychologists or access to psychologists who can navigate hospitals and health care agencies (e.g., a Department of Veterans Affairs). Furthermore, access to health care settings is sometimes contingent on accurate psychological assessments, which must be communicated to other health care specialists. Psychologists, with some additional training and experience, would be best suited for these settings.

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Appendix

Homeless Men Interview Questions & Script

Ok. We are going to start now with the interview. Feel free to ask us questions if we have asked anything in a confusing way or you don't know exactly what we are trying to ask. This interview is about homelessness, masculinity, and social class issues.

We realize that a lot of people have different definitions of the word "homeless." For our project we are using the legal definition of the word "homeless." The legal definition states this. A person who is homeless is a person who "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence"(Legal Information Institute, 2003).

1. Do you consider yourself homeless according to this definition?
2. Would you normally consider yourself homeless?

(p) Is it ok with you if we refer to your situation right now as homelessness?

3. According to the definition, how long have you been homeless?
4. Did you ever experience homelessness before that time?

(p) Did you experience homelessness as a child ever?

Now I am going to ask you a couple of questions about when you became homeless.

5. Tell me about when you became homeless. Describe what happened?

(p) When did you begin to identify yourself as being homeless?

(p) In what ways was it difficult for you?

6. Did you begin to see yourself differently during this time in your life?

(p) Explain some of the ways you saw yourself differently.

(p) Did you feel differently about yourself?

For this project we are interested specifically in your experience as a man who has dealt with homelessness.

7. What do you think a man's role in society is?
8. How have your thoughts and feelings about being a man changed since you have become homeless?
9. Do you think other people see you differently as a man since you became homeless?

(p) Have other people treated you differently, in general?

10. Do you ever feel that people have expectations of you since you are a man?

(p) What are these expectations?

11. Do you think there is anything special or different about being a man who is homeless?

(p) Do you think it is particularly hard being a man who is homeless?

Now I am going to ask you some questions on how you feel about your current socio-economic status . . . Some people call this their social class.

12. How do you feel about where you are economically and where you are in society in general?
13. Describe a time when you felt good, happy, or proud about being homeless.
14. Describe a time when you felt ashamed to be homeless.
15. Describe a time when you tried to hide being homeless.

(Appendix continues)

16. Who do you tell that you are homeless?
- (p) Does your family know?
 - (p) Does your employer know?
 - (p) Are there people that you intentionally don't tell?
 - (p) Why don't you tell some people?
17. Think back to before you became homeless. How did you view homelessness then?
- (p) How has your view of homelessness changed since that time?
18. Tell me about the social class changes that you have experienced in your life?
- (p) What types of social class changes would you like to make now and in the future?
- (p) Does changing like that seem like a difficult task?
- (p) What are some barriers that are keeping you from changing your social class situation? Describe some of those barriers to me.
19. Do you have any final comments that you think we should know for our project?
- Thank you very much for participating in this interview and in our study.

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