

## Research Statement

My primary research interests are broadly situated in social inequality, issues of poverty, social movements, and social policy in the United States. My comprehensive exam focused on social inequality with additional in-depth focus on homelessness. I have made contributions to several areas of scholarship related to homelessness by averaging one publication every year since my second year of graduate school. I have published on subjects that include addressing methodological issues related to “point-in-time” homeless counts, health issues among Hispanic immigrants in low-income housing, public policy, social movements, and activism related to the homeless. My most recent publication entitled *Fitting Stories: Outreach Worker Strategies for Housing Homeless Clients* was recently accepted by the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. My current research utilizes a mix of qualitative methods and includes my ongoing dissertation that focuses on issues of homelessness and social policy. Another of my publications is used in the new edition of Sage’s Frankfort-Nachmias and Leon-Guerrero’s methods textbook called *Social Statistics for a Diverse Society* (2018).

My interest in the topic of homelessness comes from when I worked with homeless populations as a social service worker for six years in Cincinnati, OH; Covington, KY; and Phoenix, AZ from 2002-2008. Such experiences inform my academic work with the homeless in El Paso, TX, from 2012 to 2014 and Salt Lake City, UT since 2015. I have used my insights from the field to formulate hypotheses that have been tested through surveys, homeless censuses, and in-depth grounded ethnographic study.

Early in my graduate career, I was encouraged to informally lead a project on homelessness with my advisor as formal lead, which replicated Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) annual Point-in-Time homeless count. The paper, which is currently under review with *Social Currents*, provides methodological contributions to improving HUD’s Point-in-time counts and homelessness research more broadly. By considering what Peter Rossi (1987) called the “marginally” housed population of the homeless we used student researchers to gather data in a hands-on learning environment (please see attached teaching philosophy for more information on “learning by doing”). Students canvassed the city in designated areas and also included personal contacts they had with people who were doubled up on couches, a population considered to be homeless under HUD’s definition at the time. Our replication study counted more street-homeless than HUD’s official local census count and has already resulted in one publication with the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*. The study provides enough data for more manuscripts to come in the future. I also presented these findings at ASA’s annual meeting in 2017, and there are two additional papers currently in process with more papers to be written using data from this project.

I have continued this research interest and trajectory by seeking out Leon Anderson as my advisor at Utah State University. Dr. Anderson is a highly respected scholar among qualitative researchers, specifically in studies on homeless populations, deviance, and identity work. While I have continuing interest in issues of inequality faced by the homeless themselves, I have sharpened my current research to examine social service workers who work with homeless populations in Salt Lake City, UT, a city that caught national attention among media sources such as Mother Jones and The Daily Show for its novel homeless services. Salt Lake City has also experienced recent conflict over provision of housing and other services throughout my fieldwork, which impacts the way social service workers are able to do their jobs.

My current research focuses more directly on social service workers as street-level bureaucrats, which is consistent with the scholarship of Michael Lipsky and Evelyn Brodtkin. Lipsky's (1980) term "street-level bureaucrat" describes how ground level workers have great discretionary power over the public with whom they interact with because social policies are often ambiguous or subject to different interpretations. Drawing from Lipsky, Brodtkin (2008) maintains that the ambiguities of policy can actually make street-level bureaucrats at the bottom of their employment hierarchy virtual policy makers through their face-to-face interaction with the public. She emphasizes the need for research on street-level implementation of social services to better inform policy.

By investigating why and how bureaucratic practices develop in specific organizational context, my street-level analysis can inform policy. It has the distinct advantage of moving analysis beyond what Brodtkin calls the "command and control" assumptions of the compliance model to take empirical account of factors that influence routine practice. In short, my current research focuses on how many outreach and case management workers respond to the challenges of providing housing services to the homeless. They do this by: 1) developing what I term "fitting stories" that present their homeless clients as worthy of support within contexts of social services for homeless populations; and 2) "referral management" involving the active negotiation and management that social service workers engage in between housing gatekeepers (e.g., landlords and property managers) on one hand and their homeless clients who either have, or are about to receive, housing services on the other. The first chapter has already been accepted for publication by the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* and the second chapter is under contract with the University of California Press in Boeri and Shukla's (in progress) *Ethnography Uncensored*.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Advancement**

While my past research included using SPSS, STATA, and GIS, my current research utilizes a mix of qualitative methods to collect data to develop rich detail on activities of homeless services street-level bureaucrats in interaction with the homeless, with other agency personnel, and in public venues. I use grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2001) to analyze the data beginning with an open coding process to identify a wide range of themes related to the challenges that homeless service street-level bureaucrats experience and the ways in which they attempt to meet those challenges. My efforts to connect key themes and categories throughout my research has been an explicit attempt to optimize theoretical refinement and extension of ethnographic data as advocated by Snow, Morrill, and Anderson (2003) in their call for "linking ethnography and theory."

### **Future Research**

My extensive data sets from research in El Paso, TX and Salt Lake City, UT will allow me to continue to publish articles that deal with social inequality, social policy, and homelessness. Conducting applied and ethnographic research in Salt Lake City makes it possible to observe detailed accounts of many cutting edge issues in this field. I hope to utilize this knowledge by working closely with local social services as a junior faculty member. I am also currently seeking funding through HUD for contributing to their methodologies. In my experience with service providers, such research knowledge attainment can result in grant expansion and improvement among social service providers while also improving sociological understanding of homelessness and homeless policy.