



Appendix C

Samples of expanded notes of
qualitative data collection activities

Key Informant Interview #1 with John Smith

Filename: key_informant_1.doc
Topic: Perceptions of homeless about their situation.
Interviewer: Bill Weiss
Date Conducted: February 4, 1998
Location: Shelter, located at a Community Center in Baltimore County
Language: English
Date Expanded: February 4, 1998

I asked the shelter worker to identify five persons who stay at the shelter and who would be willing to be interviewed. When our team arrived at the shelter, the shelter worker suggested that we set up tables in different areas of the large square room which was the shelter. The shelter includes tables and chairs and lots of space to set up cots. Tables, couches, a large chair, some cabinets, stacks of cots and blankets line the edge of the room. There are some tables down the middle of the room that guests use to play games, make sandwiches for the next day, and read. (See diagram). The shelter worker introduced us to the five 'guests' of the shelter. As I set up a table and chairs for the interview, John Smith (J) sat down at the table I was setting up. J is tall - over six feet tall - but neither thin or heavy-set. He was wore a dark coat that was unbuttoned during the interview, blue jeans and a horizontal stipe shirt. We sit across from each other at the small table, about three feet apart. J alternates sitting back and sitting with his elbows on the table.

B: Interviewer
J: Informant
"XXX": direct quotes by the informant or the interviewer
{XXX}: my best guess/paraphrase of what was said
~ : missing words or statements
[XXX] : my comments and descriptions, gestures
....: pauses

B [I gave an introduction... emphasizing that I was interested in learning more about the people that use this shelter because I live in the community, that my church provides meals to shelter guests, but that we do not do much else. I told him that I don't really know anything about the situations that people at the shelter face and wanted to learn more from him. I read and signed the disclosure statement and gave it to him. I told him that a helpful way to start the interview was by asking about his typical day] ... "Can you tell me about your typical day?"

J "{Depends on how} the weather affords it... If I work, ~ landscaping, ~ if not, I frequent the library ~ regimented ~ don't have the latitude."

B "Can you tell me more about your work?"

J "Landscaping - trim trees, {brush or bush work}"

B "What do you mean by 'the weather affords it?' Is it certain times a year? Seasonal?"

J "{I work} all around the year... it's contingent on the weather."

B "What kind of weather?"

J “No rain, no snow... similar to the past couple of days” [it has rained the last couple of days]

B “Can you tell me anything else about your typical day?... What happens when you leave [the shelter]”

J “I go get a cup of coffee, call the boss, read the paper, study... I take a book with me to the Burger King... Then if the weather is not affording, I go to the library.”

B “Can you tell me more about what you do at the Burger King?”

J “Coffee and read, that’s all... nothing exciting... except reading... reading excites me.”

B “Can you tell me what excites you about reading?”

J “Procuring information... tend to use is someday... not merely as an intellectual exercise... plan to glean the information and use it in service of mankind someday.”

B “What kind of things do you like to read?”

J “In the [news]paper, everything... poetry, psychology, ~, religion... Or I study English.”

B “English?”

J “~ English, rhetoric, grammar.”

B “Can you tell me a little about going to work?”

J “Depends on where the boss is arranging to go... [some location], Howard County... he picks me up.”

B “Then what happens?”

J “Just go to work, have fun, talk, have a good time... he asks a lot of questions, I teach him a lot... ~ ... it is not a run of the mill {boss-employee} relationship, more like friends.”

B “How long does the work day go?”

J “Between five and eight hours... depends on the size and intensity of the job... some of it is very arduous ~.”

B “What happens when work ends?”

J “Usually about 5:00, I ~ go to the mall... have a cup of coffee ~ buy a few things ~ go see some friends {that I know from} around here before... ~... I come to the shelter around 6:30.”

B “Can you tell me more about the mall?”

J “I drink coffee, ogle women [implies that he is with friends at the mall]... laugh and joke and bullshit to put it

colloquially... but there are times that we avoid certain people that come here [referring to the shelter]... alcoholics, ~ can be caustic... don't want to be associated with that because it has nothing to do with me... so we avoid belligerent drunks ~ because people would associate them with ~... not because of status [status is not the reason that he does not associate with drunks], that's not why I sequester myself... ~... I wouldn't change it for the world?"

B "What wouldn't you change? Your status?"

J "No, I wouldn't exchange my experience... {I've learned a lot, [tested] } my theories?"

B "Theories?"

J "Theories, things I read... psychology, sociology... living this life you have a lot of time for introspection... ~... others become engrossed with their condition ~ they drink and take it out on other people."

B "Earlier you mentioned that you see 'some friends from before.' What do you mean by before?"

J [Informant says he goes to places or meets friends from:] "Where I worked as a teenager... talk to them, retrospective things... a lot of listening... I hear a lot, I hear a lot more than other people... my philosophy is: seek first to understand and then seek to be understood."

B "Anything else about the time you spend with your 'friends from before'?"

J "No... some friends have the same interests... poetry... [then J implies one friend from before in particular:] we converse about art, cubism... Chinese religion... we don't do the things we used to... He works all the time... I have to be here [the shelter] by 10:00... he's limited... and we argue about Christianity."

B "What kind of things?"

J "Pro and con things... They're all con, I'm pro... I try to explicate ~ apprehension... [something about that they don't know much about what they hear and tries to explain things]... I have fun correcting... Discuss a lot of poetry... listen to their woes and complaints... I try to teach them things."

B "Can you tell me what it's like here [the shelter]?"

J "It is a relaxed atmosphere... initially some troublemakers were here... ~ extricated... good people here now... trust... of course there are exceptions... lots of conversation [here]... it is a good time... we eat good... we are allowed to smoke every 20 minutes... fortunately we have a good man working here [gestures to the desk of the shelter worker]... totally selfless... some interpret that as weakness... he is not adamant about things... {people think that} if he's nice, he must be evil, trying to take advantage of them... most of my night consists of listening and talking to him... then I go in the back and hit the books."

B "Hit the books?"

J "Yeah, right... start to read... used to be a chair in the back there [gestures to a hallway off the main shelter

area]... now I just go to the bathroom... I write a lot... {poetry} and things like that... plan and save... you have to become very economical in this lifestyle... not a matter of avarice, but subsistence... and you have to learn to check wants and needs and learn to check your wants... contrary to popular belief, there is some discipline included.”

B Can you tell me about what you mean by ‘plan and save’?”

J “Plan is ~... vocational... ~ familial... I do a lot of visualizing, things like that... and believe it or not I visualize my own eulogy... ~... I evaluate in terms of context of the whole... makes you more pointed and decisive... have to begin with the end in mind... discover that you didn’t know was there... ~... standards, ~, what’s ephemeral, what to give yourself to, ~, how to become compassionate, ~.”

B “Savings?”

J “I go over my finances every night... keeps you sharp and keen... ~ goals, what I intend to do with the money.”

B Can you tell me more about these goals?”

J {My goal is to have} “an apartment before April [the shelter closes down between April 15 and November 15]... There is a computer course upstairs [in the community center] that I’m going to enroll in because most people who have enrolled have procured good jobs... It’s a six month course... it’s a feasible thing... I intend to use that to reestablish my foundation... then go back to school... these goals are stepping stones... my ultimate goal is to be a writer, teacher... I enjoy writing and imparting information... it gives me satisfaction... my way of serving people.”

B “Anything else?”

J “That concludes my night here.”

B “What about the food here? Sleeping? The basic things?... I don’t know much about what it’s like here.”

J “The process is you come in the door at 7:00 and go get a cot... by 8:30 chances are you are not going to get a cot... some are broken down... some have to sleep on the floor... those on the floor get three blankets, those with a cot get two blankets... there’s no struggling or territorial {stuff} here... people do have their favorite spots... as far as food ~ church... heat in microwave... done by 8:30... very good, lot of pasta, carbohydrates... have yet to taste any sour or pungent food... always coffee, tea ~ gallons of juice... At 9:00 there is usually seconds if food is available... sleeping is only difficult when some are snorers... that man there [gestures to a man being interviewed] snores like a barnyard animal... a new girl who sleeps over there [gestures to a corner in the room] makes orgasmic sounds all night... other times {it is a quiet night}... lights go out at 11:00/11:30... by that time, 90% of people are sleeping... and we have several nice chess players here... 15 games a night easily... some bring radios in the back... dance, revel, ~ wine bottles... quite a few prim themselves in front of the mirror for several hours... only time you encounter difficulty is in the bathroom... some drink/smoke for 20-30 minutes... can be a problem... there are 30-50 people here a night, mostly men, six to seven are women... but we only have four stalls [in the men’s bathroom]... mathematically it can be a problem... it’s funny seeing people smoking in the bathroom watching for him [shelter worker] to come back...~ other than that it is an

easy, facile night... have a good time... {you hear} stories, inflated stories about sexual prowess... we have a good time listening to lies... one guy we ask questions because he tells outlandish lies: {sex} with five girls at McDonalds, ~, parks his Lexus around the corner, owns a factory ~."

B "Tell me about the days that you don't go to work?"

J "It's the same in the morning, Burger King or the mall... I go to the library... and I have family around here... my grandmother {lives near here and I help her with} medium chores... listen to the same old stories... watch a little public TV... call my uncle... he works at Johns Hopkins University... I like to take long walks... resolve issues as I'm walking... take in feedback... go upstairs [community center] and volunteer... {people} make donations: clothing, canned goods... I take them out to the car and things like that... that's about it."

B "How do you get meals?"

J "I have some money... go to my grandmother's house if I have to."

B "Where do you usually go for your meals?"

J "Chinese food place on Ingleside [avenue]... sometimes the mall... 7-11, whatever is expedient at that time... {this is} where curbing your needs and desires come into play... you see a lot of things that you want ~... It's not that you can't but it... {there are foods you can't afford to have everyday, not certain kinds of food}... Most of the time you leave here with sandwiches... ham and cheese... I usually don't but other people do... ~, fruit... I never have a problem with food in terms of paucity."

B "What about some other people here?"

J "Only a few people I can speak for... most people leave with sandwiches... nobody starves here... we eat like kings, really do."

B "It's probably about time to finish. Is there anything you want to say, anything you think is important for me to know?"

J "{Life's not about what happens to a man} but what he does about what happens... {We are in this situation because of choices and things over which we had no choice}... This condition is volition, {it is a} choice... there are a variety of reasons [for being homeless]: volition, {substance abuse}, unwise investments, ~... No one is determined to be here... that's drivel... life is a learning experience... and I wouldn't change {anything} for the world... doesn't mean I want to be here... ~... I can't help the world here... ~... {but I use this time for learning}... one prerequisite to mental health ~ {is to have} individual meaning... {to} serve, {to} implement {your} individual meaning... {to know the greater} meaning... make yourself coherent with the greater meaning/natural law... {one shouldn't} perceive this as a time of failure but a time of growth and challenges... failure for some ~ means that they are determined to be here [in this situation], {that this situation is} what they deserve... Not true... they don't realize their power to choose... {they} can will themselves out, perhaps not as quickly but {it can be done}... everyone here has a unique mission ~ to discover their opportunity to implement... no, not discover but integrate themselves... once they do that they won't be here very long... my synopsis."

B [I thanked J for talking with me. I told him I would like to get some background information from him]
“What is your age?”

J “27”

B “Do you have any kids?”

J “No”

B “What is your employment history?”

J “I’ve had a lot of jobs {since I was a teenager. I worked at a} gas station, {did} landscaping... I made some bad investments... I’ve been a year and a half in this condition.”

B “About how many years would you say you’ve worked?”

J “Since I was a teenager... about ten years.”

B “Are you married? ever been married?”

J “No”

B “What level of education do you have?”

J “I have my GED... I’m self taught... [statements about school and universities not providing a real learning experience/education - missed most of it - wasn’t expecting a lot of statements at this point].”

[The informant willingly agreed to a follow-up interview next Wednesday. Bad weather days are best. Overall, the interview went well. There was good rapport and the informant spoke a lot and was able to tell me what he felt was important to tell me. I needed to prompt much more at the beginning than as the end to keep the interview going. The informant used a better than average vocabulary and I believe that I did not pick up the typical vocabulary of the shelter guests. It is hard to tell if the informant changed his vocabulary much or if the informant always talks the way he did during the interview. The informant is the kind of person who watches and listens to people - he may be a good key informant for this reason; he may be someone who can speak about the situations of others. A limitation may be his avoidance of alcoholics and other substance abusers - he may have less insight into their situation.]

Key Informant Interview #2 with John Smith

Filename: key_informant_2.doc
Topic: Perceptions of homeless about their situation.
Interviewer: Bill Weiss
Date Conducted: February 11, 1998
Location: Shelter, located at a Community Center in Baltimore County
Language: English
Date Expanded: February 11, 1998

My first interview with J was a week before on February 4. At the end of that first interview, I arranged with him to come back at the same day and time the following week to clarify any questions I may have when I reviewed the notes of the first interview. I arrived at the shelter at 7am on February 11 and greeted the shelter worker. Several guests of the shelter were still there talking and drinking coffee and preparing to leave for the day. J was not in the room when I arrived so I got a cup of coffee, waited a few minutes and chatted with the other students on my class project team. When J came in we greeted each other and shook hands. J is tall and heavy set but not fat. He is white, has dark hair and has a mustache. His hair and mustache appeared trim and his face and hair appeared clean (no dirt). He was wearing the same black coat that he wore the week before. He wore a blue shirt with a collar and buttons and a grey, ribbed T-shirt underneath that was exposed to about his diaphragm. He wore partially faded blue jeans and beige work boots that had some wear but appeared in good condition.

We talked for a bit about the news report on the television playing in the room. Then we sat down at a table in one corner in the room. I got my notebook and interview guide ready to use for the interview. I explained that the purpose of the second interview was to clarify things that he had said in the first interview and that I had prepared some questions to follow-up with. [In the first interview he described his typical day. I probed for details of things he mentioned. At the end of the first interview, I asked him if he had anything he felt was important for me to know and he described in some detail about his philosophy of life]. I told him that I needed to read the disclosure statement again. Then I read, signed and gave him the disclosure statement. I began the interview with the first question on the interview guided.

B: Interviewer
J: Informant
“XXX” : direct quotes by the informant or the interviewer
{XXX} : my best guess/paraphrase of what was said
~ : missing words or statements
[XXX] : my comments and descriptions, gestures
....: pauses

B “Last time you told me you were ‘self-taught.’ Tell me what you mean by that?”

J “It means everything to me... ~ only way for a person to learn... ~ learn without being confined... {you can decide} what to study... what’s valuable and what is not.. I don’t think people should be dependent on school.

B “Describe to me how you became self-taught?”

J “How... I frequented the library since I was a late teen ~... And I learned to model people... this has greatly increased my education... ~ didn’t have to reinvent the wheel... {by modeling I could} implement their philosophy... ~ model their philosophy... their tone of voice... how they see things... ~ have and have nots.”

B “Have and have nots?”

J {The ‘haves’ are} people who have families, relationships, are happy... ~ {I} could expedite by modeling [he could expedite learning by modeling ‘haves’]... {avoid} snags... another reason I taught myself is because I want to teach others.. ~ when I read, study, I read with that paradigm... ~ that I’m going to teach it.. ~ people come to me... {I am} empathetic, non-judgmental... and I’ve learned to enter their frame of reference.”

B “Anything else about how you became self-taught?”

J I listened to tapes... {tapes by a } man named Earl Nightingale... {especially two tapes called} ‘lead the field’ and ‘stranger’s secret’... {the tapes} had a great impact on me... he was a man who studied world religions... ~ {his philosophy is that} ‘you become what you think about’... I went on a {search} for the same information... I came to the same conclusion... And that I found out that a man is the sum total of his thoughts... A man is perceived in accordance with his thoughts... {his thoughts will determine his success}... I studied a lot of English because I wanted to know how to speak properly when I had to and speak colloquially when I had to... I’ve always had an interest in the English language... reading sentences... parsing.. ~... things like that... language theories and so forth... {I am interested in} parsing because the essence of any relationship is in communication... [statement that he feels the need to communicate precisely]... because I’ve seen so many problems {coming from what people think others are saying}... ~... I also have a fervor for reading great religious works... I have always believed that there is something beyond {ordinary life}... That there is some transcendent meaning... [statement about wanting to ‘implement’ the transcendent meaning] and ascertain facets of harmony... I have experienced death in my childhood in my family... {I have experienced} divorce in my family... I wanted to know if families could work, ~ so I didn’t have to fall into the same trap... So I went on an extensive research mission... I learned a lot about Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Christianity, ancient Babylonian religion... I believe {that there are truths} behind myths... I learned about suffering, to find meaning in suffering... something that transcends it, gives it purpose... ~... it gives an eternal strength to surmount anything... {a mountain is nothing but insurmountable thought}... {we} have the capacity to change that... Then I started reading about Nazi Germany... I started reading about the holocaust, how people could {be such sadists} ~ for no rational reason ~... And I learned that the individual has worth that transcends his condition, his position... ~ benefit to society... one’s worth is not contingent on {what is happening today} but it is innate, it cannot be repudiated... And I realize that many problems people have is that they have a poor self-image, don’t believe in themselves... ~... it’s the reverse... [statement meaning that one needs to understand that one’s worth is with them from the beginning, that it is not a matter of becoming worthwhile, that it is important not to see today’s condition as reflecting their self-worth - difficult to capture the words, phrases used].”

B “Describe the benefits of being self-taught?”

J “You learn at your own pace... learn individually... it doesn’t feel contrived, restricted... the only criteria you have to meet is your own... Another reason {I taught myself is because I wanted to keep learning my entire life}... I see education as a verb... it’s transitional... a process... My personal experience is that people relied on a degree alone... they stopped learning when they get their degree... highly detrimental... beyond that I just like absorbing information... enjoyable, not an act of labor... I thought I was different... {I wasn’t ‘boozing it’ - not that I never had a drink}... I want to help people... I have a tremendous compassion for people... my mission is to teach... If I don’t have information I can’t fulfill my function... I won’t be {satisfied}, I know I won’t... Another reason is that I wanted to think for myself... {figure things out for myself}... ~ {the masses fall into line}... I didn’t want to manipulate people but emancipate people, in an egalitarian sense... anything else would be base.”

B “Last time you mentioned that you had ultimate goals. I wrote down that your ultimate goals were to be a writer and a teacher. You also say that you want to ‘serve people’. Describe how this fits together.”

J “That’s my way of serving [to be a writer and a teacher]... {some people are nervous - they can’t serve, they become ‘complacent’}... they begin to die...sense of meaninglessness... The best way to take care of myself is to forget about myself... it’s sort of a paradox... ~.”

B “Is serving people your ultimate goal and being ‘writer/teacher’ some ways to reach that?”

J “It is my medium through which it is done ~... I know what I want to become and I will become... I’ve known since I was a boy... I don’t wait for things to come... {I move things}... people have to be pro-active ~ instead of waiting for change to come to them... I continue until they do {change}... I’ve developed a tremendous pertinacity... you don’t take no for an answer... you realign but never give up your ultimate goal... hurdles are learning experiences, {an opportunity to sharpen yourself}.”

B “Describe to me other ways you serve people?”

J “By affirming them unconditionally... I separate them from their behavior... ~ doesn’t mean they are determined for the rest of their life... {they say,} ‘I do drugs and I’m a loser’ {and I tell them,} ‘No, you’re not, you have bad thinking patterns’... they have a deep need to be understood, that’s why I empathize not sympathize... empathy ~ is firm yet yielding at the same time... many haven’t been affirmed unconditionally... ~ ... they always had to meet a standard {they didn’t learn their innate value}... {it’s not about} what they were but what they can become... ~ innate worth at the beginning... And I give them practical advice... about relationships, habit breaking, things like that... But mostly I try to help them find meaning in their suffering, meaning in their condition... a meaning that surpasses their current understanding of their condition... Once they find their meaning they will develop the fortitude {to change their condition}...”

Direct Observation: Participant Observation

Filename: direct_observation_1.doc
Topic: Perceptions of homeless about their situation.
Observer: Bill Weiss
Date Conducted: February 23, 1998
Location: Shelter, located at a Community Center in Baltimore County
Language: English
Date Expanded: February 24, 1998

1. Description of Type of Observation:

The observation was conducted on Monday evening, February 23rd at the shelter where our team conducted its key informant interviews. I selected this type of observation because I wanted to understand more about shelter life and the people that use the shelter by being a participant in shelter life as much as possible. I felt the best way to do this was to spend a night at the shelter. I made arrangements with the shelter worker and his supervisor at the Community Action Network (CAN). I was required to register and get approval as a shelter volunteer from the CAN Director; in exchange for the approval I agreed to act as a volunteer at the shelter, as needed, on the night I was there. The type of observation is an unstructured participant observation. I did not take continuous notes of what I observe. My plan was to have a timer on my watch go off every 30 minutes. And when the timer went off the plan was to quickly record what I was doing or observing at that moment on a small pad of paper that I could keep in my back pocket of my blue jeans. For the most part I was able to accomplish my plan, although I did not always hear my timer go off and therefore did not record observations exactly at the half-hour interval. At other times it was awkward to stop what I was doing to jot some notes down. In these cases, I had to wait until an appropriate time and record what I was doing earlier when the timer went off. The purpose of using the timer was to provide a time line of what I did that could serve to help me remember what I observed throughout the night. The time line would also provide a good idea of the sequence of events at the shelter. The observation was not focused. I was, however, interested in learning about the goals and obstacles faced by shelter users and was probably more attuned to these issues if I saw or heard something that was relevant to these.

The shelter is located within the building of a community center in Baltimore. The shelter is located on the ground floor of an addition at the back of the community center. The shelter is composed of a large square room, a hallway to the restrooms, a staircase, and the men's and women's restrooms. The large square room has two designated areas for people to sleep on cots or on blankets on the floor. In the center of the room is a series of tables that creates essentially a long rectangular table separating the room into the two sleeping areas. Along the shelter entrance wall are tables for food and drink, two refrigerators and some cabinets for food storage/pantry. Along the opposite wall is a desk for the shelter worker, chairs backed against wall on each side of the desk, and a long couch. The other two walls are bare except for some mirrors and pipes. The walls are painted orange and the ceiling is very high with tiles. There are several floor to ceiling posts in the room. Within one of the sleeping areas, adjacent to the shelter worker's desk, is an area designated for women. The men's restroom is on the ground floor. The women's restroom (I did not get to see where it is exactly) is on the second floor. The women's restroom is secured from the shelter by a door or gate in the second floor hallway or at the top of the staircase. The men's restroom (a place I did get to see) has four toilets in stalls, a long three faucet sink, a shower area with three shower heads and a locker room. The women's restroom also has shower facilities. (A diagram of various aspects of the shelter is provided within the text of the expanded field notes below).

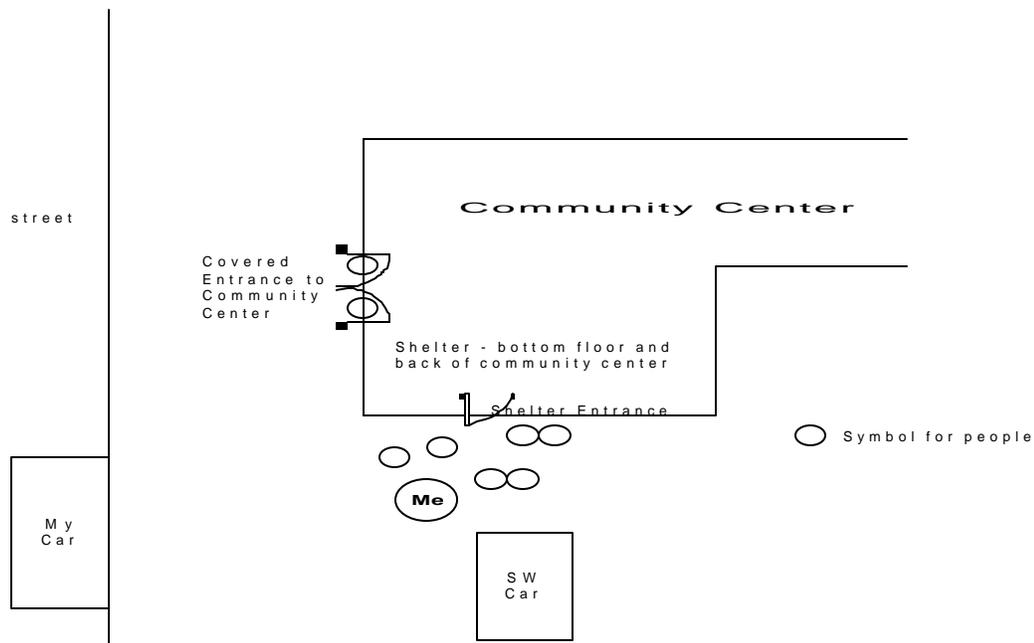
2. Expanded Field Notes, by Time interval

6:45 pm

I arrived by car at the shelter and parked on the street in sight of the shelter entrance. It was dark and raining. Five to six people were bunched around the door waiting for the shelter to open. I couldn't see these people very well from the distance I was at. The shelter lights were off so I stayed in the car to wait for the shelter worker to come and open the shelter. Most of the people waiting had umbrellas. Several people had one or more very large bags with them. Several people are around the side of the building under a covered entrance to the shelter; one of these person (tall, black man without an umbrella, with a coat on) walks around the building to the shelter entrance [to see if the people waiting had gone in. And on seeing that people were still waiting] returned to where he was standing before.

The people waiting are grouped together - like they are talking to each other. A man comes to the group but stands a little bit back. At 6:53 a car arrives in the parking lot. Two men get out of the car (one white, one black) and go into the shelter [I recognize the car as belonging to the shelter worker, SW]. At this point the shelter is not open to the group of people waiting. I get out of the car and walk to the group waiting outside. I stand at the back of the group. [I don't want to make a bad impression by using my 'volunteer' position to go inside before the group]. I wait outside with the group. It is raining constantly and I feel cold standing there. I try to imagine what it would be like to spend most of every day outside in the cold. At around 7:00, I enter at the back of the group of people and mill around inside the shelter for a few minutes to adjust to the new surroundings. I introduce myself to RR, a person who works at the shelter two nights a week. I tell him I am volunteering tonite. I greet SW and J as I mingle about the shelter. Others are arriving at this time. Among the arrivals is a man and woman with four children ages 2, 3, and I think 6 and 7. They are given priority attention, a place together with cots for each person. People who have entered are busy getting cots and/or blankets and setting up a sleeping spot. I go and get three blankets, two for a cushion and one for a cover and set up a sleeping spot. I place my bag and coat on my blankets. [I did not get a cot because I knew there would be a shortage and I can sleep in a bed any night.]

7:20 pm

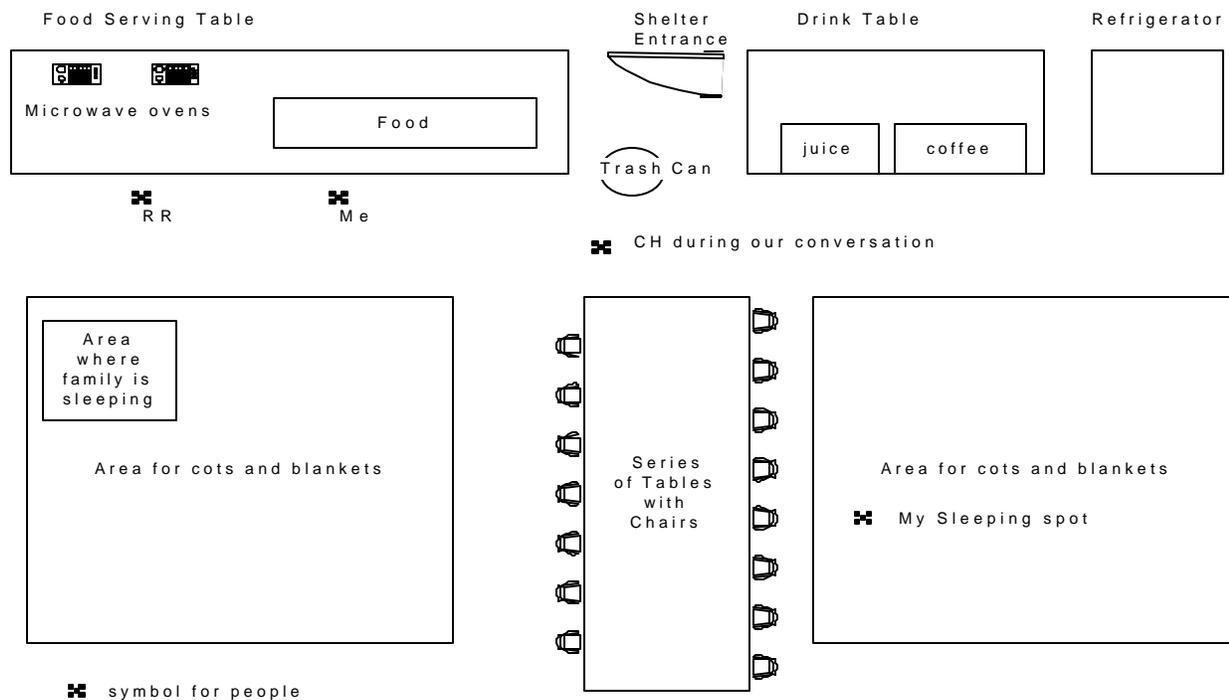


I am helping out RR to prepare for the meal in the food serving area near the shelter entrance. I do things like make two gallons of ice tea from a mix, fetch items from the refrigerator, such as hot dogs. RR heats up hot dogs and canned baked beans in case the church group responsible for bringing food that night does not bring enough. SW comes to the food serving area and tells me that the church responsible for the bringing the food this night, usually brings less than is needed. SW says that the people of the church say they don't have enough money to provide more. I asked SW about my church - which brings meals on Wednesday nights while the shelter is open November 15 to April 15. He says that my church usually brings enough but is not bringing as much as last year and doesn't know why. He says that lately, especially when it rains, he can get up to 50 people. [That night's count will be 51 people]. I tell him that I remember from the past that we usually made food for 30 people, the number we expected would be there. And we both agreed that there are more people using the shelter this year than before. [Ironically, I am the person who is mainly responsible for bringing the meal on the coming Wednesday night. I know I will be better informed about what is needed after spending the night in the shelter and helping to serve the meals.]

During this time CH, a black man, about 35 years of age, approaches me, greets me. He asks me what is wrong... job pressures, marriage. I respond that I am fine. He is friendly. He asks if I play chess, and I tell him yes, but not well. Others are participating in a variety of activities. Some people are reading, some watching TV and some talking. People are sitting on their cots or blankets on the floor or at the series of tables in the center of the room. The bathroom is busy with people taking showers, changing clothes in the locker area of the bathroom in order to find a place to dry their wet clothes. The family is together in a corner of the large room and giving attention to the children. A woman, W, spends a lot of time with the children and begins playing some cards with the two oldest at the center tables. Since the shelter opened, a woman, HW, has been interviewing guests. She works with a County social services organization that provides services to the homeless. She spends considerable time with the family and then makes rounds of the guests, interviewing them and determining how social services can provide support.

A relatively young couple comes into the shelter. The man of the couple (Garcia) appears to be about 30 years of age and talks and postures more aggressively than others at the shelter. He is about 5 ft. 10 inches. Garcia has dark hair and mustache and a medium to wiry build. The woman (P) appears in her mid-30s, has blond hair and is attractive. Garcia points to me and gestures for me to come to him across the room. At first I think he is gesturing to someone behind me, RR or SW, and I turn around to see if there is anyone behind me but there is not. Garcia shouts that he wants to talk to me and gestures for me to come. His manner is what I would describe as confrontational and aggressive. I walk over to him and he asks me for a coffee cup. I had seen RR with a stack of cups so I walk back across the room to RR and tell him that cups are needed at the table with the coffee pot. RR says that he already put a cup at each person's sleeping site. Garcia comes over to RR and asks for a cup. RR again says that he already put a cup at people sleeping site. Garcia says that he doesn't have a sleeping site set up yet. RR gives him a cup. Garcia and P have some arguments with some people near the shelter entrance.

About 7:45 a man and a boy [presumably the man's son], both white with dark hair, bring food to the shelter guests. They bring five buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken, with a mix of pieces (breast, wings, leg, thigh); cole slaw, four loaves of white bread, juices, and baked beans. It does not look like enough for 50 people. For breakfast, they bring instant oatmeal. I help RR set up the food serving line, but keep warm foods together with lids on to keep them warm. RR continues to warm up beans and hot dogs in large plastic buckets that he places in two microwave ovens. I get out a salad that is in the refrigerator and some salad dressing and place it on the food serving table. SW asks me to do this.



8:00 p.m.

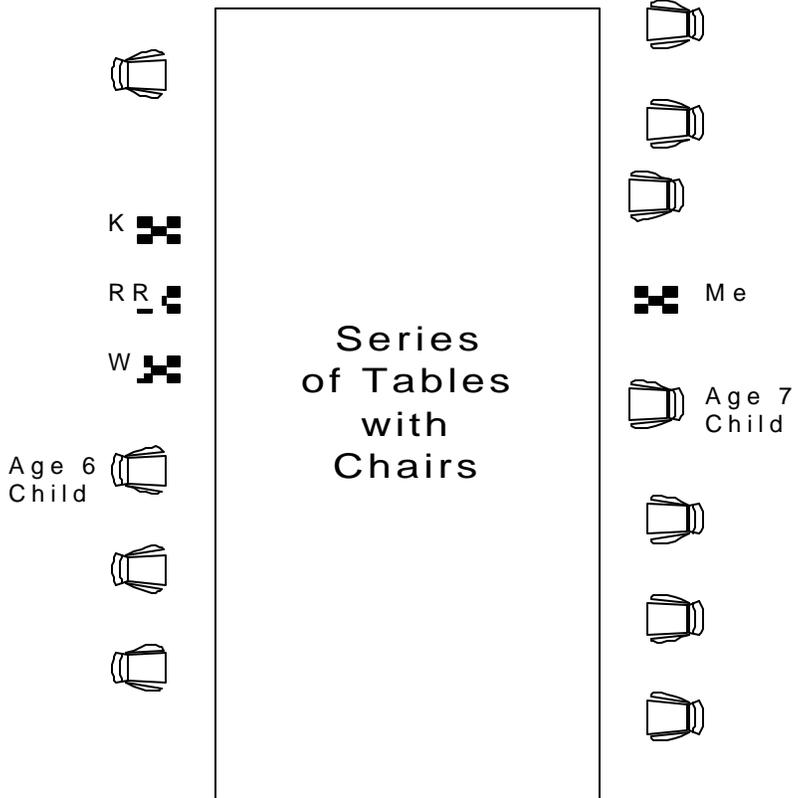
When it is obvious to the group in the shelter that dinner is about ready to be served, a line forms to the right of the trash can and down along the right side of the series of tables (see diagram above). The food is set up in this order: (1) loaves of bread; (2) Salad bowl and dressing; (3) Buckets of chicken; (4) containers of cole slaw; (5) baked beans; (6) hot dogs. People in line serve themselves bread and salad. I am supposed to serve chicken and cole slaw. RR serves the beans and hot dogs. RR instructs me on how to pass out the chicken: one piece of chicken to each person; do not let people reach for the piece they want in the bucket or select the piece they want; I am to reach in the bucket grab the first piece I touch and give it to the next person in line. Children and women are given priority in line, and the process is disrupted when women or children come up after. As people go through the line, it is difficult for me to comply with this instruction as some pieces are about one-quarter the size of the breasts. Many of the men in line are large (tall and/or heavy) and say they are hungry. Often I let people select the piece they want and as we get to the bottom of a bucket only wings are left. Then I put the remaining wings in the next bucket of chicken and continue the process. Toward the end of the chicken, and luckily the end of the line, I get permission from RR to give people two wings, since they are small. So far everyone has gotten at least a wing of chicken and some of everything else. Guests serve themselves coffee, ice tea and water. There would not have been enough food without the beans and hot dogs that the shelter staff brought and made themselves. SW told me he had two casseroles in his car if needed. Most people eat at the series of tables running down the middle of the room.

8:30 p.m.

At this point I am finishing serving food. We ran out of chicken. One person who came late did not get any chicken. Many people had commented on how chicken was a treat and appreciated. At this point the salad and dressing is

finished and there are hot dogs and beans and some cole slaw remaining. After everyone has gone through the line I stand around for awhile. A man (Jiffy) approaches me in a friendly manner and asks me if I work at the shelter. I tell him no, but that I am a volunteer tonight. Jiffy works at Jiffy Lube and is wearing the uniform: blue shirt and trouser with first name on tag sewn to shirt on the right side. He works full-time or more. Jiffy had alcohol on his breath when I spoke with him. He is white, age about 45 years or so with long black hair slicked back. He has a full beard and mustache. Jiffy complains that he doesn't get adequate compensation for working overtime and that he gets little or no benefits. Jiffy tells me that his family is in Salisbury. He has a wife and kids who live in Salisbury with his mother. He stays in the Baltimore area because he has a job, but is trying to get transferred to a Jiffy Lube in or near Salisbury; he is waiting for an opening. He says it is a lot less stressful now that his family has moved to Salisbury. This allows him to work and save money by staying in the shelter. His children can stay at his mothers house and go to a good school and his wife can help his mother out with the kids. [There is an issue of reactivity here as people who find out that I am not homeless tell about there plans for getting out of 'here'. As if I am expecting to hear their story and they have the need to tell me their plans to get out as a defense mechanism. It is not clear if 'getting out' would be the main content of conversations with other homeless persons at the shelter.]

❑ symbol for people



After talking with Jiffy, I sit down at one of the tables in the middle across from RR who is eating. Next to me and RR are W and the two oldest children playing cards. K sat down across from me; he appears visibly distressed to see children here in the shelter and says that he could never live with himself if he had to bring his kids here. K seems anxious to talk. He is recently homeless. He seems distressed to be in this situation himself. He is from an upper middle-class background and never thought he would be in this situation. He also has children the age of the children in the shelter and shows the children their pictures of his son. His family - he is now separated and his wife will not let him stay at their house - lives in the MW area of Baltimore City. K tells me some of his story: he was kicked out of a house where he rented a room. He said that he had asked for an extension on the rent because he was getting his car

repaired and needed the money he had for that. The woman of the house said okay, but when the rent was overdue the man of the house kicked him out. He did not understand why and said that he had never even been late on a payment before. So he has been at the shelter less than a week. He has plans for a new apartment, a 'beautiful place' he says that he will get soon - in about another week [? the beginning of the March ?]. He says that social services will help him pay for his car to be repaired. He says he is employed. He is Jewish and Kosher and was worried while in the food serving line that the beans would have ham in them. He says the experience is humbling and mentions that the people here at the shelter don't fit stereotypes of homeless. [Another issue of reactivity is that I have been approached by two white men who have offered, without asking, to tell me a little about their problems and about their plans to get out; because I am white, I may be getting more reaction from other (more similar) white men].

***** END OF OBSERVATION *****

3. Raw Field Notes. See attached.

4. Refined Coding Scheme. See attached.

5. Answers to questions:

a. Difficulties: Overall the observation was not difficult, but an enjoyable learning experience. The most difficulty I had was arranging this observation in time to get the assignment done. It took several days of phone calls and people checking for me to determine what was possible and the process. Then several of the key persons in the process were not at work when I called to make arrangements. This delayed the process. Later I was faxed forms to complete, which I did and returned. Then I had to wait to hear about my approval. Only after I was approved was I allowed to schedule a date. The next available date was Monday the 23rd due to other commitments I had already made with my family and church. Other difficulties, as described above, was trying to be equitable in passing out food when people in the food line had very different energy needs (body mass) and equity need a new definition other than one 'piece' of chicken each (e.g calories/body mass index or something else not very practical on the spot). The environment was new and a little disorienting. I tried to follow the unwritten rules and modeled people there as to how one sets up a sleeping site, how much space one should take up with coats and bags, etc. Another awkward issue was whether and when to identify myself as a volunteer. I always did when asked if I was a guest or worked there. But I did not tell people who assumed I was a guest and never asked.

b. Reactivity: The reactivity issue that was most important was race. I spoke with a lot more white people than black people although the percentages were about equal. [I spoke at length most with RR who is Black, however]. This was because I generally spoke to people who approached me – and white people approached me to talk far more often the black people did. So, my information is biased towards issues faced by white persons, and mainly males. Another reactivity issue is the type of information I observed. People who determined I was a volunteer and not homeless tended to make statements about how temporary they saw their condition and told me their plans for work or getting an apartment. I don't have good evidence, but I suspect that this type of information was not the key content of discussion among the guests themselves. So while this was the type of information I was interested in and got without specifically asking, the statements people made may be shaped for what they want me to think about them rather than reflecting more the reality of their condition or plans.

c. Structured observation: Structured observation may be useful in this setting if a specific, more refined range of

behaviors was the focus of study, such as negotiating the amount and type of food one receives at the shelter, or the types and amount of food people eat. It is less useful for the topic our group was interested, perceptions of the homeless - specifically goals, obstacles and resources. So, in answer to the question about whether structured observation would be advisable for our research project, I would answer no.

Actor Code: Description

- SW Shelter worker; Older middle-age white man who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the shelter. He works there every night, seven days a week. He rarely sleeps, on average 2-3 hours each day. He usually does not sleep during shelter hours (7pm - 7am) but in the afternoon after morning work is completed. He has worked at this shelter for several years and knows most persons using the shelter. He usually wears a collared shirt and regular trousers, both in off-white and earth tones. He is clean shaven, with grey hair. Not thin, not fat.
- RR Works two nights a week at the shelter. Tall, thin black man of middle age. RR likes to talk a lot and can talk at length in response to single question. RR runs the food and drink line, and was the person who gave me direction when serving guests the dinner and breakfast. RR usually stay up all night with SW and helps out cleaning up in the morning. RR lives on the other side of Baltimore from the shelter, was formerly homeless and a user of the shelter in 1996. He has his own place to live now.
- J John Smith. My key informant for two interviews. Tall, white man, 27 years of age. He wears a dark coat. Underneath is a sweater, blue jeans and brown workboots. J is heavy-set but not fat over six feet tall. RR referred to him once as SW's bouncer. J is a guest of the shelter every night and has been coming over the last 18 months. J helps out SW every night with the paperwork: tracking who and how many guests are using the shelter, who is new, who is returning after some absence, etc. J usually stays up late until 1-2:00am every night.
- CH Chess player. CH is about 35 years of age. He wears olive drab, military style trousers with side pleated pockets. CH is black. CH likes to play chess and plays for several hours this night.
- W Large, heavy set woman about 35 years of age. She is white and obese. She helps advocate with shelter workers for the family with children. She appears experienced with the shelter. She seem well-liked and spends a lot a time entertaining/helping. She sleeps in the hallway on the floor with blankets because she makes loud noises while she sleeps; this is for the benefit of others in the shelter. Others refer to her night noises as "orgasmic."
- K White man about 35 years of age. Not tall or short, thin. Wears a sweater and glasses. His hair is neatly cut. Looks to me more like a volunteer/worker than the rest of the guests. Recently homeless about one week. Has a children living in MW part of Baltimore living with their mom; he is separated from her. Says he is from an upper middle-class family as a child. He has a job, but was not able to pay the rent for a room in a house of a couple.

- H White man about 45 years of age. Small in stature and wiry. J says that H is a heroin addict. H is very pleasant and friendly with me and others in the shelter. All the time that I am there, H is busy doing things: cleaning, arranging things in his locker, writing.
- Twins T1 and T2. These two black women, dress alike and sleep next to each other on an office divider that is laid flat on the ground. They were the same hats: stretch knit outside and blue 'headress' inside the shelter. The two are probably about 40-45 years of age and heavy set. They carry several very large bags with them.
- Jiffy White man aged 45 years or so. Long black hair slicked back. He has a full beard and mustache. He is wearing a Jiffy Lube uniform, blue shirt and trouser with first name on tag sewn to shirt on the right side. He works full-time or more. Jiffy had alcohol on his breath when I spoke with him.
- Prof Former professor of physics. Late 50s or early 60s in age.
- S White male about 40 years of age, medium build with salt & pepper hair color. Former boyfriend of P. Works on bridges.
- P White female in her mid-30s who is in a relationship with Garcia. She has blond hair, is petite/wiry and attractive. She and Garcia fled the shelter after Garcia started a fight and hit a guest at the shelter.
- Garcia White male about 30 years of age. Uses aggressive language and body expression. He is known to be violent by other persons at the shelter and started a fight in the bathroom. Garcia fled the shelter before the police came.
- HW White female, maybe hispanic, about 45 years old. HW works for a County social services organization that helps the homeless. She interviews several people, especially new people, women and the family to see how social services can support them and to provide information about how to get help.
- Oriole White male about 40 years old. Appears to be an alcoholic and is intoxicated this night.
- Paradise White female about 40-45 years old with Sandy Blond hair and short of stature. She says she is newly homeless and that this is her first night at the shelter. She appears unnerved about the experience.
- M Black female about 50 years of age. She is of normal height and build. She keeps to her self and reads a lot.
- Dred Black man in mid-30s with dreadlocks. He is tall with a medium build. He wears a black and white knit cap on his head and his dreadlocks are short. He slept in the locker room and participated in conversations in the locker room.