

Research Statement

My new book with Routledge is titled *Homelessness and housing advocacy: The role of red-tape warriors* (F2022), which analyzes the efforts of social service workers to house their homeless clients. While homelessness and housing inequality are my specialty, my primary research interests are broadly situated in social inequality, poverty, social movements, race, and social policy in the United States. I have made scholarly contributions to subjects that include how social service workers implement social policy, health issues among Hispanic immigrants in low-income housing, addressing methodological issues related to “point-in-time” homeless counts, and activism related to people who experience homelessness.

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 experience has informed my academic work on issues of homelessness in El Paso, TX, from 2012 to 2014, Salt Lake City, UT, from 2015 to 2018, and Boston, MA, since 2018. 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. Additionally, I was able to seek out Leon Anderson as my doctoral advisor during from 2014-2018 because of his prior work on homelessness *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People* with David Snow, who also served as a member on my dissertation committee.

My most notable work with Anderson entitled *Fitting Stories: Outreach Worker Strategies for Housing Homeless Clients* is published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. I examined 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 also experienced conflict over provision of housing and other services throughout my fieldwork, which impacts the way social service workers are able to do their jobs. Workers needed to creatively use “fitting stories” to cater their clients’ situations to a heavily bureaucratized housing system that denied many clients without the advocacy from their workers.

My current research in Boston, MA, continues to focus more directly on social service workers, which utilizes scholarship of Michael Lipsky and Evelyn Brodtkin. Lipsky’s (1980) term “street-level bureaucrat” describes how ground level workers have great discretionary power in their interactions with the public 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, who are at the bottom of their employment hierarchy, virtual policy makers through their face-to-face interaction with the public. She emphasizes, as I do, the need for research on street-level implementation of social services to better inform policy rather than implementing punitive oversight.

Methodology and Theoretical Advancement

In 2013, I helped lead a project on homelessness, which replicated Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) annual Point-in-Time homeless count, which I have used for many of my publications. One paper, *Improving Homeless Point-in-Time counts: Uncovering the Marginally Housed*, 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 going”). Surveyors 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 the study provided enough data for four publications. One paper titled *Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Homeless Populations in El Paso, Texas* 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 current research utilizes a mix of qualitative methods focusing on issues of homelessness and social policy.

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 the activities of street-level bureaucrats among homeless services in their interaction with people experiencing homelessness and other agency personnel. 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 have 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." While conducting the research for my book, my perseverance in overcoming difficult hurdles of using ethnographic methods and to research a vulnerable and hidden population resulted in a book chapter in Boeri and Shukla's (2019) *Ethnography Uncensored: Researchers Reflect on the Challenges of Reaching Hidden Populations*.

Future Research

My extensive data sets from research in El Paso, TX, Salt Lake City, UT, and Boston, MA, 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 made 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. Given my prior experience working with service providers in various cities across the United States, I have had no problem engaging with local service providers to establish their trust and continue adding to my portfolio of research. I plan to continue presenting my findings at conferences, such as the American Sociological Association's annual conference. I am also currently seeking funding through HUD for contributing to their methodologies by working with colleagues in a multi-city study. 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.