On the island: marginalized residents of a single room occupancy motel

Christopher Philip Dum
University at Albany, State University of New York, christopher.dum@gmail.com

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Criminology Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd/1116

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
ON THE ISLAND:
MARGINALIZED RESIDENTS OF A SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY MOTEL

By

Christopher P. Dum

COPYRIGHT 2014
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- TITLE PAGE ..............................................................................................................i
- COPYRIGHT PAGE ....................................................................................................ii
- TABLE OF CONTENTS ..............................................................................................iii
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...............................................................................................iv
- ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................ix
- CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODS ........................................................1
- CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHY OF A RESIDENTIAL MOTEL .............................................50
- CHAPTER 3: PATHWAYS TO MOTEL LIFE ...............................................................84
- CHAPTER 4: MANAGING STIGMA AND IDENTITY ..................................................124
- CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, AND FRAGILITY ......................................154
- CHAPTER 6: INTERACTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY ..........................................202
- CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION ......................................................................................230
- APPENDIX A: REFLECTIONS ON ETHNOGRAPHY .................................................277
- APPENDIX B: FIGURES AND TABLES .....................................................................289
- NOTES .....................................................................................................................336
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the future, over the course of what I hope is a long and fulfilling life, this dissertation will be referred to over and over again as “mine.” While that would not be a false narrative, it would mask the many ways in which this product has been guided by family, faculty, and friends. Because I view this study as part of a larger literature that attempts to uncover hidden worlds, I think it is fitting that I take the time to pull back the curtain and express my gratitude to those whose support made this possible.

Throughout this project, I have tried to remain conscious of the fact that my success is largely the result of good fortune. I entered foster care at a very young age and were it not for the loving actions of my adoptive parents, Donna Hoffman and Richard Dum, I would not be where I am today. Any sense of duty that I have to fellow human beings stems from their early efforts to expose me to people from different circumstances and I am grateful for the values they instilled. They never once attempted to steer me down any path, but I hope that they can crack a smile, knowing that our 3-person family unit will now consist of two Dr. Dums. This project would not have been completed without their support and I will be forever grateful for everything they have done.

I have also been fortunate to be in the classroom with many wonderful teachers. In my senior year of high school, Mrs. Sheldon taught me to embrace writing in the form of short stories. Although my final story was flat out rejected at Playboy, the fact that she encouraged me to even submit it there did more for my confidence than she probably knew. At the same time, Mr. Phillips introduced me to ethnography and through an exploration of the local punk music scene, I learned to celebrate the experience of putting
my thoughts together in ways that enlightened and entertained, albeit with the help of a few curse words here and there.

Robert Johnson of American University deserves a tremendous amount of credit for encouraging me to pursue a doctoral degree, and apply to the University at Albany. When I first met him I was a Master’s student, unsure of my research interests. Rob quickly took me under his wing and over weekly lunches of Subway sandwiches, encouraged me to write and embrace creative exploration in ways that I had not considered before. His qualitative work on prisons and the death penalty was exactly the sort of introduction to research that I needed and I am fortunate to count him as a friend and colleague.

There is no one who deserves more credit for any leaps and bounds that I have made than my advisor, Jamie Fader. Jamie was put in the unenviable position of advising me just as she began her tenure-track career, something that no one has recommended to me for obvious reasons. However, I will go on the record by saying that this pairing will go down as the defining moment in my academic career, precisely because without Jamie, I would have no career to speak of. She engaged me in constructive ways from the beginning, allowing me to dip my feet into qualitative research with her own data, something that I can now appreciate more than ever. As an untenured professor, she placed more trust in me than I ever should have asked her to. There were countless ways that this dissertation could have gone wrong and she never lost faith in my abilities. To the contrary, she helped me rise to the occasion by advocating tirelessly for me and offering the perfect combination of encouragement, insight, and tough love in her comments. When I encountered alien situations in my fieldwork, I always knew that
Jamie would be there to guide me and that solace continued to push me forward. I am proud to have been her student and proud of what we accomplished together. While neither of us saw any of this on the horizon when we first met, I hope it is safe to say that we have no complaints.

The other members of my dissertation committee, Frankie Bailey, Jeff Ferrell, and Alissa Worden, deserve my gratitude, because like Jamie, they signed onto this project when my proposal was just a husk of what the final product would turn out to be. They agreed to serve despite the fact that approving my prospectus meant that almost everything on my end remained to be done. It was their enthusiastic support in allowing me to fill that shell that continued to drive and inspire me throughout my writing and I hope that they do not feel they got more than they bargained for as they count the pages of this dissertation.

I also owe my thanks to those in the School of Criminal Justice at the University at Albany, who welcomed and supported me during my time there. Allison Redlich was instrumental in my grant writing experience. Dana Peterson offered incredible feedback on early drafts of an article manuscript. David Bayley spurred me to think deeply about the theoretical framework of my comprehensive exam. Heather Washington provided wonderful feedback on my grant application for the ASC Minority Fellowship. I am very appreciative of Alan Lizotte’s support when I entered the chaos of the job market and Robert Worden was incredibly understanding when interviews took me away from my teaching duties. Michele Fox, Diana Mancini, JoAnne Malatesta, and Andrea Lawrence saved me on numerous occasions when I was lost in the doctoral process. Kathleen Maguire brought me onto the Sourcebook Project at just the right time and was incredibly
supportive throughout our time together. I would also like to thank all those who offered their insights during my practice job talks, which not only enhanced my preparation for interviews, but my analysis as a whole.

My work would also not have been possible without generous support from the National Science Foundation Award No. 1323945, the American Society of Criminology, the Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice, and the University at Albany Benevolent Association.

I want to extend thanks to my friends at the University at Albany who played key roles in my survival as a graduate student. The “old head” Kelly Socia socialized me to grad student life and taught me that attempting to cut your own hair before an academic job interview is a poor decision. Robert Norris has been a true friend, and I sincerely miss our Friday nights at the Pump Station, drinking Dawn and Terri’s blends with Caitlyn and the door-wreckers, Vicky Schall and Chris Nelson. Although they have since dissolved, poker nights with Andy Wheeler, Jeremy Shifton, and Matthew Phillips were a great stress reliever. To the wonderful friends that I made through the countless soccer teams at Afrim’s, I am indebted to the drinks, weddings, trips, and amazing experiences that I had with you all. Having a group that never wanted to talk about anything criminal justice related was a life saver when I needed to get away. Jennifer Masa, thank you for your love and care as I made my way through this dissertation. I know that my fieldwork tossed quite the wrench into our living situation, but you never complained or wavered in your support. Thank you for being a wonderful person to come home to.

Finally, the most important contributors to this product were the men and women of the Boardwalk Motel. I met you simply wanting to understand you, and as we faded in
and out of each other’s lives, I was overwhelmed by your courage, care, and perseverance in the face of incredible odds. After all you had endured, there was little reason to open up and trust me with your life stories, but you did and you have my upmost respect. I would not trade my time with you for anything, and my greatest hope is that you feel I have told your stories in ways that acknowledge the richness of who you are. This is for your hopes and dreams, may they forever flourish.
ABSTRACT

One consequence of the punitive turn in criminal justice policy has been an increase in residential instability among previously incarcerated individuals. For registered sex offenders in particular, residence restriction laws severely limit housing options. Many formerly incarcerated individuals find difficulties securing employment, which limits their ability to afford a stable residence.

Other citizens also lack the resources to afford stable housing and they live on the brink of homelessness in part because minimum wages have failed to keep up with increased costs of living. A work or health crisis often drains precious monetary resources and leads to displacement. When this occurs, some turn to friends and family for housing, but others must rely on social services.

Finally, some individuals lack stable housing due to mental health issues or other disabilities that make them unable to function autonomously. Without strong social networks, these individuals rely on public assistance throughout their lives. The task of many social service agencies is to provide these populations with the housing and social support they need to live with dignity.

The task of addressing these issues of homelessness is given to social institutions like the criminal justice and social welfare systems. Social institutions are public and government services that are designed to govern behavior and create social order. The question that these two particular social institutions face is, where do we house those who would otherwise be homeless? One answer has been found behind the walls of American motels.
Despite its rise in the years immediately following WWII, the independent motel industry began to collapse in the late 1960s. Motel owners, hearing the death rattles in the distance, found new life as rising incarceration, de-institutionalization, and increased inequality created a pressing need to house individuals pushed to the margins of society. Fueled by a cultural zeitgeist of sanitizing social space, the public discourse on these locations lacks insight into who motel residents are, how they behave, and how social forces influence their lives.

This study examines the results of social and criminal justice policies by using a year of ethnographic research at one such motel. This motel is home to a confluence of marginalized populations representing the divides between American social classes: registered sex offenders and parolees returning from prison, those placed by social services, as well as those who need affordable housing. Drawing on diverse literatures and perspectives, this study seeks to paint an empirical portrait of life at the intersection of social inequality and social institutions.

This research answers several important questions. First, how residents arrive at the motel? Second, how do residents socially organize in the context of stigma and external efforts to sanitize social space? Third, what survival strategies do residents employ to meet the exigencies of daily life? Fourth, how do motel residents interact with a local community opposed to their presence? Finally, what types of societal changes are required to best address the issues of culturally situated marginalization?

Results indicate that motel residents have histories of vulnerability created and exacerbated by social institutions that deal with criminal behavior, and disadvantage such as homelessness, poverty, mental illness, physical disability, and substance abuse.
Residents face stigma from the community and other residents as they attempt to go about their daily lives. Because residents are placed in close proximity with each other, they create a thriving culture of community and care, as well as conflict over resources. Finally, findings show that much of the policy governing motel use as a solution to social problems is substantially flawed, and recommendations for micro and macro-level policy, as well as new cultural perspectives are discussed.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Methods

Homecoming

It is 11am in late April as I drive out of the Riverfort County jail parking lot. Reggie’s six foot five Irish frame barely fits in my back seat as he takes the pack of Newports I offer and mutters, “Get me outta here. Fuckin’ A, it ain’t real man.” Sitting with his girlfriend Sky, he makes a phone call to secure marijuana, “It’s me, Reg from the fucking Boardwalk Motel. I just got out man, gimme a call.” He then looks at me in the rear view mirror and says, “I can taste the fuckin’ beer already. I just wanna fuckin’ beer, don’t feel normal.” Giddy to have him home after four months apart, Sky cuddles next to him in her hoodie as we make the 15-minute drive back to the Boardwalk Motel.

We pull into the parking lot of the two-story building which is empty except for the manager’s purple Hyundai, and everyone bounds out of the car. Sky and Reg open the green door to their first-floor room and Sky announces to their roommates, Jake and Fran, “Look what I brought home! A stray puppy!” Reg immediately downs a hard cider that I had brought and Sky shows him how much cleaning she has done in the cramped space.

With Fran’s obese frame overflowing her chair at her usual spot at the room’s only table and Jake lying on the worn black leather couch in front of the 60-inch projection TV, Reg tells them how life is going to be now that the four of them are sharing the crowded room:

_I just gotta wait to get my [Social Security disability] check before I can do anything, so it’s gonna be tight quarters in here for about a month. Like I said, if I have to I can put half this shit in storage to give you guys a place to sleep. I don’t give a fuck. We’re gettin’ outta here as soon as possible anyways. I just gotta get my check back, then we’re out. Okay Fran? I just gotta get my check and then once I get my check, we’re all outta here. It’s gonna be like a month or so before I get my check._
Curious about how Reg’s return will affect the weekly rent payments for each resident, Fran asks, “What are we doin’-?” and Reg cuts her off, “We’ll talk about rent, fricken, tomorrow. I’m not even interested in doin’ that. It’ll be cheaper on ya, so don’t worry about it.” He looks at Jake and says, “We’ll figure somethin’ out here, we’re gonna figure it out. We’re gonna make this work.”

Reg grabs several hard ciders and he and Sky walk up one of the three black metal staircases to the second floor to hang out with Sky’s friend, Mary Anne and her boyfriend, Spike. Jake and I go outside to talk to Larry, a resident-turned manager who bears a striking resemblance to wrestler Owen Hart. Nolan, a frequent resident, walks by slowly from his room at the end of the first floor wearing jeans, a maroon jacket, and blue baseball cap. I ask Larry if Nolan still carries a knife and Larry says, “I dunno. He’s loaded, he’s been drinkin’ brandy for the last day.” Nolan saunters slowly over, mutters something through his white mustache, and gives Jake two dollars. Larry exclaims, “Don’t go down there, what are you crazy?” Jake replies, “I’m not goin’ to the store for him! He just gave me money for beer I gave him.” Reg comes downstairs and says he is ready for some real food, so we walk to the nearby Home Cooking buffet.

After lunch, Reg is sated with “real meat” and we hang out in the room with the door open, enjoying the nice weather. We hear Elizabeth, the manager, yelling at a new resident in the parking lot, who yells back, “I ain’t disrespect nobody. Fuck all that bullshit. I ain’t no suck ass nigga. Sell that shit somewhere else.” Reg wonders who it is and I say it is someone new, to which he replies, “If he’s new, it’s probly [sic] rent.”

Around 4pm, Reg comes out and asks if I can bring him and Sky to his storage unit to get a grill and then to the Giant Foods so he can buy dinner. I oblige and they
spend $118 in food stamps; buying mussels, sausage, burgers, and chicken. Reg says, “That’s enough food freakin’, to get us through a few days, four or five.”

Back at the motel, Jake has washed several pairs of blue jeans and hung them on the second floor railing to dry. I assemble the grill and Jake bikes back to the store for ice. When he returns, Reg dumps ice and a thirty pack of beer into a large plastic tub, announcing, “Beers on ice!” The door opens to Room 3 and Vito wheels his overweight frame out in his electric wheelchair. He welcomes Reg home, who tells him, “If you’re around in an hour you can grab a burger.”

Mary Anne comes downstairs with her sister, as well as Spike and her sister’s boyfriend. She is still mad about the woman in Room 23 calling the cops on her a few nights ago, “Fuckin’ bitch is crazy. I told my boyfriend, what is up? Everywhere I go people call the cops on me.” Vito’s friend Slash comes out of their room in a white tank top, black pants, and red baseball cap. He brings several empty cans of Pepsi to the black trashcan near the middle staircase and Jake quickly stops him, “Did you just throw empties away? Do you throw empties away?” Slash nods and Jake says, “No, no, no, no, no, no. Put ‘em in room four.” I tell Slash that cans are hot commodities and he says he will give them to us from now on. Slash then shows me several drawings of tattoos that he claims he did in prison for members of the Aryan Nation.

Reg puts burgers on the grill and Jake regales us about one night in a motel up the road when all he had were burger patties and pancakes from Burger King so he ate them as a sandwich with mayonnaise. Elizabeth shuffles over from the office, wearing a large knit cap instead of her usual wig, taking her brown pit bull, Mocha out for a walk. Slash
tells her, “Nice sneakers!” and she says she got them for a dollar at the nearby drug store.
Reg offers her a burger and she says she is full, but takes a hot dog for Mocha.

By 9pm it is 48 degrees and clear. We have eaten our fill and people are milling about outside their rooms. In Room 3, Jake is drunk and Fran is sitting at the table on cloud nine because she had sex with Slash earlier, whom she had just met, “Nothing can put me in a bad mood right now. I’m fuckin’ wired.” Reg tries to cook meat in an electric skillet, but he and Jake keep blowing a breaker because Jake wants to watch Red Dawn at the same time. Tat comes downstairs from Room 26 looking for a beer and Reg says, “It’s right there, grab one.”

Sometime after midnight things begin to wind down. Reg looks at Fran and Jake and says, “I don’t care which one a you is sleeping where tonight, but fuckin’, in the morning we’re gonna figure this out for everybody.” Jake says he knows where he is sleeping and tells Reg that he is not allowed to go to bed yet, “You’re gonna fucking keep hanging out, and drinking.” Reg and Sky’s three cats are in heat and their meowing is aggravating Jake to the point where he yells, “Stop it! Stop spraying!”

As everyone prepares for bed, Jake lies on the couch, which fits his skinny frame nicely, and says to Fran, “So this is like your new territory now right, again? So I got access to that chair and this is gonna be your shit.” She replies, “Pretty much.” Jake nods, “Alright, that’s good to know. I gotta spray that down with fuckin’ Febreeze.” Reg scolds him, “You’re bein’ too loud, Jake. You and Jake play nice, Fran.” He heads into the back bedroom area with Sky to watch the other TV and fall asleep. Their mattress sits directly on the floor and as he lies down on it he mutters, “Fuck I forgot how this bed was.” Jake calls out drunkenly, “Yeah that jailhouse bed is a lot better right?”
In 1993, National Public Radio (NPR) reporter David Isay arrived in the South Side of Chicago to plant the seed of a remarkable product. His mission was to find two kids growing up in public housing and in his words, “hire them as reporters for a week and give them a chance to tell their stories.” Isay’s methodology was genius in its simplicity. He would give his young reporters tape recorders to carry as they went about their daily lives, chronicling their thoughts and experiences as they happened. It was in the Ida B. Wells housing project that Isay found his young and insightful correspondents; thirteen year-old LeAlan Jones and fourteen year-old Lloyd Newman. For seven days in 1993 and a year from 1994 to 1995, the pair used the simple power of their voices to capture the realities of inner-city life. They also reported on the aftermath of the death of Eric Morse, who died at the age of five after he was dropped from the fourteenth floor of an apartment building by two other young boys. Using over a hundred hours of audio, Isay, Jones, and Newman produced two award winning NPR segments and the book, Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago. I read this book as a first year doctoral student and it made me wonder, what other voices were waiting to be heard?

There is perhaps no other class of criminal more stigmatized or scrutinized in the United States than the sexual offender, especially those who offend against children. In fact, citizens report they would actually prefer to be around a murderer over a child molester. Fears about sexually violent predators reoffending against children have led to the passage of numerous laws at the federal, state, and local levels designed to keep convicted sex offenders away from potential child victims. Such laws include sex
offender registration laws, such as the Jacob Wetterling Act, community notification laws, such as Megan’s Law, and residence restrictions, which prohibit the areas where sex offenders may live. Research has found, however numerous problems, including inaccurate information on sex offender registries and little effect of residence restrictions on recidivism. By way of surveys and interviews, sex offenders report trouble finding jobs and securing housing, as well as the psychological effects of losing friends, feeling alone and isolated, being harassed in public, and fearing for their safety. These experiences may have distinct effects on the abilities of sex offenders to reintegrate successfully into society. I wondered, what is it like for registered sex offenders to live with these policies and the social stigma that surrounds their presence in the community? If someone empowered them to be the reporters of their lives, what would they say?

I imagined a project that involved using the state sex offender registry to contact registered sex offenders and convince them to either use tape recorders to record their daily lives, or meet with me on a regular basis to discuss their experiences over time. However, after careful discussion with my adviser, it became apparent that using the registry was not a viable option. Conducting what would essentially be “cold calls” through the mail would likely generate incredibly low response rates. Registered sex offenders are highly aware of their stigma and have little incentive to trust those in the community, especially a researcher who they have never met who wants to record them using audio technology. If any sex offenders chose to participate in the full study, there would be a significant non-response bias in the results.

I realized that I needed a different method to access this population whose faces were quite public, but whose lives were very much underground. Furthermore, it seemed
prudent to not only record the voices of sex offenders, but also observe how they lived
day to day. My initial explorations into the state sex offender registry alerted me to the
presence what I will call the Boardwalk Motel (Figure 1), located in the largely white and
middle-class suburban town of Dutchland. This motel carried a dubious reputation
because government agencies used it to house registered sex offenders who would
otherwise be homeless. This motel was the subject of many community debates
concerning where sex offenders could live and how many could live in one location.
Adding fuel to the fire was a local legislator who found through her own investigation
that social services had placed families with children at the Boardwalk at the same time
that registered sex offenders were living there. She also uncovered a plethora of code
violations that included:

no up-to-date fire alarm certifications, raw sewage, structural damage to roof,
interior water damage, mold throughout entire room, exposed wiring, gas leak,
missing bathroom tiles, rooms missing smoke detectors, bug infestation, bathroom
mold, debris piled outside rooms, electric socket falling from wall, spliced wiring,
cracked toilets.8

In the fallout from this investigation, social services stopped housing families with children at
the motel, but continued to place adult clients there.

These revelations about the Boardwalk made it clear that the motel was not just a
home for sex offenders. Rather, it was a home for a variety of marginalized populations
who lived hidden from the public eye, in conditions that many would deem unfit for
habitation. I had not only found an interesting group of potential reporters, but a unique
location where they were socially embedded, due to the simple fact that they lived there.
The focus of the study then moved from how sex offenders lived in the community to
how marginalized populations lived at this motel.
My research began as the intersection of inequality and criminal justice policy reached a thunderous level. The recent “Great Recession” painted a stunningly bleak picture for a growing number of people and created a host of consequences with the potential to increase motel usage among the poor. Wealth inequality among racial and ethnic groups reached ratios that were the highest since the government began publishing data, with the median wealth of whites 20 times that of blacks and 18 times that of Hispanics. For the first time ever, there were more Latino children in poverty than any other racial or ethnic group. Many families attempted to consolidate their living situations in the hope of saving money. From 2007-2009, the number of families living in multi-generational households increased 10.5% from 46.5 million to 51.4 million. However, this strategy for making ends meet was not an option for those with limited or non-existent social networks. Therefore, in the face of increasing poverty, those who already came from low socio-economic status with no family to move in with were likely to turn to locations such as motels.

In addition to increasing the concentration of poor minorities living in motels, the recession may have affected how formerly middle class individuals used them as well. From 2008-2010, at least 3.5 million home foreclosures were completed and at the end of 2010, 2.2 million more homes were in the foreclosure process. Without places to live, many evicted families turned to the types of motels that have long provided homes for the chronically impoverished. In a 2009 survey conducted by the National Coalition for the Homeless, 26% of the newly evicted homeless reported living in motels/hotels. This blending of the traditional “haves” with the traditional “have-nots” had already piqued
the interest of journalists and presented a culture in desperate need of in-depth examination and understanding.¹⁵

America’s criminal justice system also played an important role in the culture of life at residential motels. Ninety-three percent of prisoners eventually leave prison and one of the main struggles they face is the need for stable housing.¹⁶ Depending on a returning ex-offender’s support system, a motel could provide temporary or fairly permanent housing. Prisoner reentry has become an undeniably important issue for our justice system. On April 9, 2008, the Second Chance Act was signed into law and in 2009, over $28 million dollars were awarded to governments and non-profit organizations to provide services for reentering ex-offenders.¹⁷ In 2010, this number increased to over $82 million.¹⁸

Finding reentry housing is even more difficult for registered sex offenders. Residence restrictions may limit sex offenders’ access to affordable housing, which could lead to financial and emotional hardship, which in turn could lead to new offenses.¹⁹ At the aggregate level, it has been found that sex offenders live in neighborhoods that proponents of social disorganization consider impoverished and lacking informal social control, or reactive and pro-active behaviors that encourage conformity to the law.²⁰ Restricting sex offenders to these neighborhoods may decrease the chances of successful reentry by surrounding them with neighbors who offer little social support, drug use, and criminal behavior.²¹ Residence restrictions may also force sex offenders out of urban areas, and living in rural areas may limit their opportunities for employment and access to treatment.²²
Of particular note was the stigma that the local Dutchland community attached to the motel. In his study of a single-room occupancy motel, medical sociologist Harvey Siegal referred to the location as, “an outpost of the poor located in a comfortable middle and upper-class area which is actively hostile to its presence.” The Boardwalk Motel was a target of similar concern. Dutchland residents complained that the motel residents wandered around their neighborhoods and deteriorated their quality of life. Others voiced similar concerns about behavior, “They create an unsafe situation. They are continually partying every night.” In response to the presence of sex offenders at the Boardwalk, a resident wrote on a local newspaper’s online website:

If you don’t think people have a right to be concerned with housing that fosters such a dense concentration of rapists and child molesters in the middle of a community otherwise characterized by families and single family homes then you are absolutely correct... “This country is going down the tubes, I tell you what.”

During a town meeting, an elderly Dutchland resident suggested that her tax dollars should not have to pay for any ambulances and police who responded to the motel.

While my research was located at the Boardwalk Motel, the motel itself was simply a unique community through which to study the powerful social forces of inequality as they were shaped by culture issues and social institutions. The motel represented a location of last resort for poor individuals in search of affordable housing. It was also home to registered sex offenders and other parolees in need of shelter. Finally, the motel was a refuge for many individuals with mental and physical disabilities who were placed there by social services because they lacked the ability to secure more stable residences. In short, the Boardwalk Motel was symbolic of the larger social issue of homelessness and the cyclical ways in which homelessness creates an underclass and exacerbates conditions among the underclass that already existed.
The Boardwalk Motel also represented the increasingly dystopian cultural response to inequality, what sociologist Jeff Ferrell calls, “the regulation of public interaction, the restoration of exclusionary community, the reencoding of cultural space along lines of order and privilege.” As Ferrell documents richly, those in power have made concerted efforts to “sanitize” urban public space by removing those deemed unsightly and unwanted from the streets, which has long included the homeless. The local response to the Boardwalk Motel suggested that the “insidious sanitization of urban life” was extending far beyond city streets, as powerful suburban communities attempted to “round up and neutralize as many undesirables, outsiders, and subversives as possible.”

The Boardwalk’s confluence of “problematic” residents created a stigmatized community whose members were similarly situated on the outskirts of society, but who were also wildly different in many respects. What remained to be seen were the ways in which residents of the Boardwalk went about their daily lives in the context of the social forces that created the very need for the motel in the first place, and at the same time, the cultural resistance to its existence.

This framework prompted several broad research questions that I hoped to answer as I began this study. First, who were the residents of the Boardwalk Motel and how did they end up there? Second, how did they organize themselves as they met the needs of everyday life? Finally, what types of societal changes were required to best address the issues of culturally situated marginalization raised by this study?

With these broad questions in mind, my next step was to figure out how to make contact with and recruit motel residents to participate in the study. Putting flyers or
business cards under doors or on car windshields seemed invasive and out of the question, as did going over to the motel as a complete stranger to knock on doors or try to approach people who I saw out and about. After I spent some time considering and discarding various ideas, a solution became clear. I would move in.

*Research Methods*

*Planning an Ethnography*

Renting a room enabled me to conduct an in-depth examination of the social setting of the Boardwalk Motel. A social setting can be viewed as the interaction of one or more actors engaging in activity at a particular time in a particular place. Immersing myself in the social setting of the motel allowed me to capture what inhabitants viewed as meaningful and important by observing daily conversations and activities. This technique, referred to as ethnography, is the systematic study of people and social groups as they go about their daily lives. Ethnographers collect data during observation and record them as written fieldnotes. Writing fieldnotes is an active process that involves interpretation, meaning a researcher will choose to record something as important or not important and may miss something altogether. This selective process of writing fieldnotes should not be viewed as detrimental to the validity of the data and there is no one “right” way to write them. Properly recorded fieldnotes capture and preserve indigenous meanings without relying upon preconceptions about the members of a social setting. They also pay close attention to what members of a setting say or do, focusing on the words, phrases, and categorizations that are used. Ethnography has been employed by many social scientists to shed light on hidden groups and locations such as; Italian immigrants, unemployed black men in our nation’s capital, public drunks, poor black
communities, working people in the ghetto, the homeless living in the streets, crack dealers in Harlem, street youth in Canada, sidewalk vendors in Greenwich Village, inner-city youth in Philadelphia, black middle class families, working poor in the inner city, and urban youth transitioning to adulthood.\textsuperscript{36}

While works of investigative journalism involve reporters going “undercover” in order to walk in the shoes of others, renting a motel room was never about “becoming” a motel resident.\textsuperscript{37} I never considered creating a cover story to portray myself as a sex offender, an individual on welfare, or someone down on his luck. To do so would have been unethical because those we study have the right to know they are being studied. As a social scientist, I had to decide what sort of membership role I would take in the field, once I had disclosed by purpose to participants. After considering the pros and cons of full participation, I decided that I wished to focus not on my experience, but on the experiences of true residents of the motel. There are two reasons why I took this approach.

First, I acknowledged early on that the ethnomethodologist approach would be to put most of my belongings in storage and move into the motel as if I were a new resident, making “a total commitment to becoming the phenomenon in order to study it.”\textsuperscript{38} This total commitment would require me to sever all connections to my former world, something that even the best ethnographers admit is almost impossible to accomplish.\textsuperscript{39} Reminded by these scholars to be aware of my beliefs and abilities when entering and taking on a role in the social setting, I knew that this sort of immersion was beyond my limits.\textsuperscript{40} I had a job on campus that required my attention and I worried about my ability to carry out the research without the activities that I relied upon to relieve stress.
My second reason for not going “underground” was purely logistical. Full commitment to the motel as a primary residence would require some set of rules governing how I would live. How much money could I spend each week? Would I give up my car? If many residents struggled without health insurance would I do the same? Could I stay overnight with friends and if so, how often? The only way to come up with guidelines about how to live as a motel resident would be to first understand how motel residents lived. It seemed to me that this understanding was precisely the point of the study, so total commitment would be put the cart before the horse.

Looking back on this decision, I am confident that it was the correct one. As I will show later in this chapter, once I made my presence as a researcher known, residents were quite aware of our differences. If I had tried to hide that aspect of my life and residents found out, it would have been met with disastrous results. In fact, as I will discuss, motel residents embraced my role as a student. More importantly, having an apartment to return home to during the study was a real blessing. There were several times when I felt the need to disengage from my research and reflect on events that had occurred. In some instances I simply retreated to my room, but when something particularly striking/exciting/stressful happened, I headed home to my apartment and the other social world that I inhabited. By not using the motel as a primary residence, I created sanctuaries of respite that relieved the stresses of my fieldwork.

*Collecting Data with Human Subjects*

Ethnographic research could not exist without the cooperation of those who live in the social settings under study. This participation largely depends on the relationships that a researcher builds with their human subjects. Establishing these relationships
requires the researcher to respect potential subjects during the recruitment process. Maintaining these relationships requires protection of what they choose to share. In the next paragraphs, I will describe the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved protocols that I followed to recruit participants and protect them from any potential harm that could have befallen them as a result of participating.

The population for this study included all motel residents and workers, as well as those with substantial connections to these individuals (such as friends and family). The caveat was that I did not view anyone under the age of 18 as a potential participant. Furthermore, when participants happened to leave the motel, I still considered them part of the study because it was important to observe their lives over time. Given the transient nature of the population, I estimated at the beginning of the study that I might have data representing around 100 participants from both sexes, of varying ages and ethnicities.

The reason I rented and maintained a room at the motel was to foster interactions between me and residents that would be non-invasive and for lack of a better word, “natural” because they would be based on the daily interactions of motel life. Instead of knocking on doors unannounced like a door to door salesman, I interacted with residents as they made themselves known to me through our daily routines. After making my status as a researcher known, I asked individuals if they wanted to participate, making sure to emphasize that: 1) participation was entirely voluntary, 2) there would be no benefits or compensation provided for participation, 3) they could withdraw at any time, and 4) that all identifying information would remain confidential. In order to assist with recruitment, I provided potential subjects with and read aloud from an IRB approved Informed Consent form, which summarized the purpose of the study and reiterated the protections
in place. When participants agreed to be a part of the study, they were not asked to sign this consent form because any link between their real name and illegal behavior would have created undue risk to them.

Once residents agreed to participate, I recorded our interactions and observations in the form of written fieldnotes. The notebooks containing these fieldnotes were either kept on my person or locked in my motel room. Participants were not asked for their full names and their real names were never used in the fieldnote data. Instead, “code names” were used to mask their identities. These “code names” were not street names, nicknames, or any other names that they used in daily life. Furthermore, all attempts were made to mask details of their lives in my fieldnotes, to the extent that their stories could still be preserved. For example, if a person worked at Burger King, I might record it as “Taco Bell” or another fast food establishment to provide additional protection.

When residents became comfortable with my presence as a researcher, I employed a digital audio recorder in certain situations with their permission. Using the recorder improved the validity of my observations in several ways. First, even when I did not use it to record conversations, I used it to record fieldnotes in spoken form. Before I used the recorder, I either used a notepad during interactions or rushed into my room to write down my recollections the best I could remember. Using the recorder allowed me to dictate events orally that had just transpired much more quickly than I could have done if I was writing. Second, as sociologist Robert Weiss states, note taking without audio accompaniment "tends to simplify and flatten respondents' speech patterns" and the content and “vividness of speech disappears." Because audio recording captured the actual words, phrases, and speaking patterns of residents, I did not have to rely on
memory and the data reflect what Weiss describes as 'respondents' false starts and stray thoughts and parenthetic remarks.'\textsuperscript{43} The recording of conversations actually benefited the residents who participated because their words were not filtered through my memory.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

I maintained a rented room at the Boardwalk motel, from June 6, 2012, through June 5, 2013. While it did not serve as my primary residence during this time, I spent 147 days in the field, interacting with 74 different participants over the course of 916 hours. These experiences generated over 800 pages of single-spaced fieldnotes.

I transcribed my handwritten fieldnotes as well as my field recordings. All of the electronic data that I generated during this study were stored on password protected computers and servers. The fieldnotes were then uploaded into QSR NVivo 10 software. NVivo is a program used for analyzing qualitative data that allows the user to create concept labels (called “nodes”) and then highlight and place portions of text into the nodes. Sub-concepts (“child nodes”) can be created under the broader concepts (“parent nodes”). Coding ethnographic data is a process that involves reading, thinking, questioning, and labeling data. A researcher looks at a piece of fieldnote data, asks a question about what is occurring, and then turns the question into a word or phrase that captures what is going on.\textsuperscript{44} This organizes data into categories that make them meaningful and pertinent to a topic, question, or answer.\textsuperscript{45}

Traditionally, coding qualitative data is a two-step process that involves reading an entire data set through line by line without any pre-established concepts.\textsuperscript{46} The purpose is to immerse the researcher in the data and open up “avenues of inquiry” to which the researcher returns.\textsuperscript{47} While I used NVivo to organize concepts, I did not
analyze my data by strictly following this two-step process. Rather, I followed Glaser and Strauss’ recommendation of beginning my data analysis while still in the field, so I immediately began to transcribe my written fieldnotes and recorded audio.\textsuperscript{48} I became even more intimate with my data when I used NVivo to code my fieldnotes based on the people I interacted with. By the time I finished that process, I had read and re-read my data numerous times and generated ideas and concepts based on my familiarity with what occurred during my year in the field. With these concepts in mind, I read through all of my data with more focus and coded the ideas which make up the chapters of this study. This technique of reading and re-reading data to generate codes has been readily accepted and employed by successful ethnographers.\textsuperscript{49} The result of using this technique was an evolution of ideas and concepts that I refined throughout my research process.

This process also allowed me to refine the broad research questions that I first entered the field with. As sociologist James Spradley writes, ethnographers spend time in the field “not to discover answers but to find which questions to ask.”\textsuperscript{50} As I spent more and more time observing behavior, recording this behavior as fieldnotes, and analyzing these resulting data, I generated more specific research questions that I address in the following chapters. First, what sends/brings residents to the motel? Second, how do residents socially organize in the context of stigma and external efforts to sanitize social space? Third, what survival strategies do residents employ to meet the exigencies of daily life? Fourth, how do motel residents interact with a local community opposed to their presence? Finally, what types of societal changes are required to best address the issues of culturally situated marginalization?
Because ethnography deals with human subjects and their behavior, there are three key limitations to this study. The first concerns selection bias of those who were recruited. Although I spent a significant amount of time in the field, because the population of the motel was so transient, it is almost certain that some residents moved in and out while I was not in the field. Because of this, my data may lack accounts of some residents who lived at the motel for very short periods of time. Furthermore, of the residents who I did encounter at the motel, some remained strangers because they rebuffed my attempts to engage them, or the opportunity never arose for me to talk with them, or I avoided them because my gut gave me a certain feeling that they were dangerous and/or unstable. It is also quite possible that some residents chose not to participate because of who they observed me socializing with. In these respects, there may be a bias in the data due to my own behavior.

The second limitation revolves around the depth of data that I gathered from participants. Because of different life situations and personalities, I became closer to some residents than others. This led to an abundance of data for some and what could be viewed as an insufficient amount for others. I address this by attempting to give a voice to all residents when appropriate, while admitting up front that certain residents provided richer data than others because of our relationships.

The final limitation to this study involves the use of narratives. As sociologist Lois Presser writes, “Ethnographic or field researchers collect and analyze narrative data for the express purpose or understanding people's interpretations of their world.” Narratives are inherently subjective because they are the public presentations of the narrator’s perspective. This is a concern because a good portion of this study consists of
resident narratives concerning their lives before the motel and events that transpired out of sight of the researcher. To address this validity concern, I attempted to verify information about residents and their lives using public records, as well as gather multiple points of view and sources of data about particular incidents and residents. Whenever possible, data are presented using this triangulation. During the presentation of data, I also try and make it clear when I present resident accounts of unobserved and observed action.

There is another important consideration concerning the use of narratives and that is their power to create and maintain identity and self. According to criminologist Shadd Maruna, the narratives that people form about themselves shape their present and future behavior.53 These autobiographical narratives are verbal accounts of behavior that actually form identity.54 Identity is a dynamic sense of self that relies on the meaning attached to the roles that society attaches to a person, and is the “lived social experience—the subjective past and present—as well as the desired future.”55

While I am concerned with the “factual truth” about certain behaviors and incidents, the more important aspect of motel life is the “truth” that residents presented to me and each other. Regardless of whether residents presented the “truth” to me, they presented information that they wished to be viewed as true in the context of the motel and our mutual construction of knowledge about motel life. Therefore, the narratives in this study are dynamic constructions of performed identity. My goal is to examine the identities that are presented, the motivations behind the presentation, and the effects on their audience.56 This facet of ethnography peels back complex layers of the culture being
studied to reveal the cyclical interactions between residents, the social setting they comprise, and society at large.

There is one final aspect of this study that deserves attention and that is generalizability. The findings of my study are not generalizable due to the selection bias of my sample and the unique population that my sample is drawn from. However, this should not be necessarily viewed as a limitation. As criminologists Kristin Carbone-Lopez and Jody Miller argue, inductively grounded qualitative research:

*does not have generalizability, or claims about causality, as its goals. Instead, the goal of inductive theory building is to help inform and refine theoretical models by uncovering social processes and patterns not always readily apparent in research that is deductive in nature.*

In this regard, the findings of this study cannot make claims about what processes should occur in similar environments. Rather, the merits of this study are the ways in which it attends to the complexities and organization of communities that are created by the intersection of criminal justice and social policies. Furthermore, I suggest that this particular study adds important contributions to our broader understanding of experiences of inequality and vulnerability and how they are exacerbated by social forces.

Residents of the motel created a social setting by interacting and performing with one another, and this presented a unique opportunity to observe those who were in many respects, disconnected from mainstream society by their lack of: stable housing, employment, bank accounts, credit cards, motor vehicles, and online identities. Next I will explain how I established myself in this community, who I met, and how I maintained relationships with the residents who chose to participate in my study. First, I will present thumbnail sketches of several participants who I encountered in the field. A
complete table of participants and selected demographic information can be found in Table 1 of the Appendix.

*The Cast of Characters*

The first person I encountered at the Boardwalk was Elizabeth, the manager who worked afternoon and overnight. She also managed the nearby Park Place motel, an establishment that not only shared the Boardwalk’s reputation, but its owner as well. Some residents often called her, “Ms. Elizabeth.” She was a short and chubby white woman pushing 70, with a round face and scratchy voice. When she was not wearing a reddish/brown wig, she wore a knitted cap and often shuffled slowly around the property with her 12-year old brown pit bull, Mocha. As I got to know Elizabeth, she oscillated between friendly and downright negative. Her greeting to residents who walked into the office was often a raspy, “Whaddya want?” However, I got along well with her because I rarely caused trouble and although she was reluctant to share many details about herself, she took my presence as a researcher in stride.

Roy was the first resident I met, a 43-year old black male who had been living at the Boardwalk for a month with his girlfriend when I moved in. He had a shaved head and a laugh that sounded like he was pushing the last bit of air out of his chest. I had a particular affinity for him because he engaged me immediately and loved to talk. After his girlfriend left him a few weeks later, Roy was evicted for falling behind on his rent, although the fact that he dealt drugs may have had something to do with it as well.

Biggie and Deirdre were a middle-aged couple who lived in a chaotic and cluttered room on the first floor, largely due to Biggie’s habit of scrapping metal. He was a 44 year-old black male, with a large belly and a scar running down the middle of his
chest. Easily excited, he was prone to talking so loudly that some assumed he was yelling. Deirdre was a white woman with thick glasses, who told me she was 53, although rumors abounded that she was much older and might have worn adult diapers. She spoke slowly and quietly in comparison to her partner, and often told the same stories over and over. They moved out in fall 2012 to a trailer, but rumors abounded that they lost it soon after.

Steve lived a few doors down from Biggie with a roommate who he had met at the motel. Steve was a white 57-year old chain smoker, around 6 feet tall with white hair, a beard, and a large nose. I enjoyed talking with Steve because he often asked me questions about my own life, such as what dishes my mother cooked that I really loved. However, because of his mental illness, Steve found it tough to care for himself and I often saw him wearing dirty and smelly clothes. Other residents worried about him and he was eventually removed in summer 2012 to an assisted living facility.

Avery and Elisha were a young white couple in their late 20s who stayed at the Boardwalk for four weeks at the recommendation of a friend. Elisha had a baby that occasionally lived in the motel with them, even though Avery was not the father. They interacted often with Biggie and Deirdre, and then eventually moved into a trailer down the street. Elisha returned in the winter when her mother, father, and teenaged brother, Clive, moved in after her father lost his job. They moved out in the cold months of early 2013.

Dee was a white, 36-year-old ex-stripper/escort and recovering drug addict who had lived with her boyfriend Toby at the Boardwalk for almost a year when I met them. She was a blonde when I moved in and then dyed her hair jet black. When she got excited
she spoke with a distinct New York accent. Her boyfriend, Toby was a quiet white man in his 40s with a shaved head, and also a recovering addict. I found it hard to get to know Toby so most of the data about them comes from Dee. Guy was a middle-aged white male with glasses who was Dee’s friend and former client and he continued to visit and pay her rent while she lived at the motel, although they did not engage in sexual activity. Dee and Toby moved out of motel with the financial help of family in early spring 2013.

Reggie was a 30 year-old Irish giant, standing around 6’5 with red hair and a moustache/beard that he often shaved off completely. He and his girlfriend, Sky had lived at the Boardwalk for a year and a half when I met them. Reg became a central figure in my study because his personality and tenure made him a feared and respected figure at the motel. Once he and I established our social roles (a process not without conflict) he became one of my closest friends. Sky was 29, short and overweight, and often wore glasses. She suspected that she was bi-polar because she was very depressed some days and bright and cheerful on others. Sky and Reg had a complicated relationship that underwent much stress during my time in the field. I helped them move out of the motel in August 2013.

Jake was close friends with Reggie and Sky and lived next door to them for much of the study. He was tall and skinny, 36 years old, with blonde/red hair and missing several front teeth. A lover of movies and Metallica, he and I bonded over conversations about films. He often wore t-shirts referencing cartoons or movie characters. At times it was hard to get to know much about his life before the motel, but I always enjoyed hanging out with him. He moved with Reg and Sky when they left the motel.
Fran was a friend of Sky’s who moved in with Sky when Reg was sent to jail. She was 41, considerably obese, and admitted to having bi-polar disorder. Her son was taken away from her for reasons unknown to me and one of her goals was to secure an apartment and lifestyle that would allow her to regain custody. In summer 2013, she ended up leaving the motel to spend a few days with a boyfriend and never returned.

Natalie was Elizabeth’s daughter, who started working at the motel in late June 2012 as a desk worker and housekeeper. She was in her late 40s with long red hair, large eyes, and a raspy New York accent. Her boyfriend Mike worked as a maintenance man at the Boardwalk for a time and also drove a cab in the evenings. In his mid-40s with a beer gut, Mike spoke loudly and had a deep belly laugh. Natalie and Mike disappeared for several months in fall 2012 after it was rumored that they stole from the motel. They returned in spring 2013 to live with Elizabeth in her house at the Park Place.

Ed was an enigma of a man, 52 years old, with brown hair to his shoulders. He arrived in late June 2012 and because he was often drunk or high, other residents worried about his well-being. Ed had a lower lip that stuck out, giving him a grumpy resting face, but he was always friendly with me and I enjoyed speaking with him. He disappeared in November 2012, and many suspected he had simply gone off the grid and died.

Curtis was a 31 year-old skinny male with brown hair, a beard, yellow teeth, and pale skin who came to the motel in early July 2012. He walked around without shoes or socks, and his gaunt face and sunken eyes made him look like a zombie. He had mental health issues and there were rumors that they were caused by a car accident or drug use. His father came to check on him periodically, as did a case worker, but the sentiment
among residents was that Curtis needed to go to somewhere where his behavior could be monitored. He was moved out by his family and case worker at the end of October.

Trim was a 61 year-old white male with an upper body full of tattoos and a flowing white beard. He moved in with his off-on-again girlfriend Ellen in late June 2012, and made a show of strutting shirtless to his room. Despite this aggressive performance, Trim was incredibly friendly with me. He claimed to work a construction job that sometimes took him out of town. A situation arose in the fall when his ex-wife from Utah arrived for a few days with her young son, because the motel was not supposed to allow children. Trim left in September 2012 to find a place for them.

Marc was a 24 year-old Guatemalan with a limited command of English who arrived in late July 2012. Fortunately, I possessed a limited command of Spanish so we were able to communicate. He moved from New Jersey to work at a car dealership near the motel and sent the money back to his family. Marc was very friendly, liked to do cocaine, and was quick to share beer and food. I tried to repay this by taking him to the store and buying his beer since he lacked a license. He eventually moved to the Park Place and was there when I left.

At almost 6’9” and quite thin, Sam was hard to miss. A 54 year-old black veteran who grew up in Chicago, he became one of my closest friends. We spent many hours sitting outside and I enjoyed listening to him rant about the treatment of blacks in America and his goal of leaving the motel. His wife, Justine did not live at the motel with him, choosing instead to live with her daughter in an apartment that was close to her job at a girls’ residential facility. Justine visited him often and they came to view me as a good friend who could provide an occasional loan. When Sam moved out in November
2012 we made plans to keep in touch, but he eventually stopped returning my calls and I worried that he had fallen back into selling/using drugs.

Cinque was a 35 year-old parolee with large dreadlocks that Sam joked made him look like the Predator movie character. He arrived in August 2012 from prison and although he never admitted it to me, Cinque was a registered sex offender. He was one of the few at the motel to have an on-the-books job, although he grew frustrated with it and was sent back to jail for selling marijuana in October 2012.

Ramòn was a 32 year-old Puerto Rican man who used to live at the motel and worked with Jake at KFC. He often visited on his bike and made jokes about being “Spic-tacular.” He and I hit it off immediately and I felt badly when I learned from Jake that he had fallen at another motel in the winter and broken his leg in several places.

Randy was a white male, 50 years-old, with a mullet and brown mustache. One of several sex offenders who lived at the Park Place Motel, he served as a maintenance man for both motels. Because of his skills as a handyman, he was often in demand and residents were friendly towards him. His room at the Park Place was significantly larger than others and more like an apartment. He kept two gas grills out back, as well as a tent and his pickup, which either caught, or was set on fire late one summer night. Randy was still living at the Park Place when I finished my study.

Darryl arrived at the motel in September 2012 when he was paroled as a registered sex offender. At 47 years-old, he wore glasses and resembled actor Ray Romano. Darryl became quite enthusiastic about the project and we spent a lot of time talking about the challenges he faced. He was a white man who identified as bi-sexual and fell in love with a 39 year-old black man named Digital. Even after Darryl moved out
in January, I spent a lot of time with them and Darryl even served as a guest speaker in a class at my university.

Larry was a self-identified drifter who arrived at the motel in early October 2012. He was a 55 year-old former Marine with blonde hair and blue eyes. Larry’s story was unique because he went from resident to part-time worker and this gave him an interesting perspective of the motel. When I left, he was living at the Park Place at a discount and still working at both motels.

Noonan was a white parolee in his 40s who lived at the Boardwalk when I arrived. He stood well over six feet and was stocky with a shaved head and occasionally wore glasses. After a few weeks he moved out of the Boardwalk to do union work, but returned in October 2012 and moved down to the Park Place shortly after. He and I were friendly when we saw each other and from what I gathered, he was still living at the Park Place when I ended my study.

Burt bore a striking resemblance to Noonan, and was referred to as “Mr. Clean” by residents. He was in his late 50s and when he arrived in September 2012 he immediately got on the nerves of others by asking them to turn down their music and be quiet in the evening, because he said he needed to work via phone in his room. Sam claimed that Burt was a liar and a pedophile, but I could find no records of this. I returned to the motel one day in November to find that Burt was gone and the rumor was he got kicked out for failing to pay rent.

Eric was a tiny white male in his 20s, who often wore a baseball cap and had blonde scruffy facial hair and small bug tattoos under his eyes, which I first mistook for tears. A resident of the Park Place, he had a habit of annoying residents, although they
often put up with his presence. I first encountered him in the office in October 2012 when he tried to sell me and Elizabeth a North Face jacket that I am sure was stolen. He was arrested in December 2012 when he tried to punch Elizabeth after an altercation with Noonan at the Park Place.

Dale was a registered sex offender, 41 years-old who walked with a slow purpose and wore his brown hair down to his shoulders. When I met him in September 2012 he wore aviator sunglasses and chewed tobacco. He was a divorced veteran and we made plans to move some of his belongings out of his father’s house nearby, but he moved out in December 2012 before we could. One of my most vivid memories was of him sitting on the landing one fall day in his sunglasses, jeans, and a cut-off white t-shirt, strumming an acoustic guitar.

Spike was a 37 year-old Puerto Rican man who moved into the motel with his girlfriend, Mary Anne in April 2013. Mary Anne was in her late 20s and became friends with Sky. Although he was quite muscular and imposing, Spike spoke very calmly and he and I had a good rapport. He wore several bracelets that promoted condom use, as an uncle and several friends had succumbed to AIDS complications. Spike and Mary Anne moved out at the end of May 2013.

Vito was a tall and overweight resident in his late 30s who used an electric wheelchair because he was bitten by a brown recluse spider on his birthday seven years prior. He moved in with his friend, Slash, also in his 30s, in March 2013. Slash was on parole so he made an effort to avoid drugs and alcohol. His goal was to become a tattoo artist and he claimed he had done several tattoos in prison. The first day I saw Slash he sat outside his room, drank a Pepsi, and worked on a Sudoku. He and Vito still lived in
the motel when I left the field, but I followed up with Vito and he told me that Slash was arrested for violating his parole and sent to prison in December 2013.

Tat was a 35-year-old registered sex offender who had previously lived in the motel and knew Reg and Sky. He returned from prison in early April 2013. Tat was Dominican, with a shaved head and like Slash, wanted to be a tattoo artist. Tat was very upfront about his sex offender status and eager to speak with me. He was kicked out in early May for playing his music too loud, and I suspect it may have had something to do with the fact that his neighbors, Spike and Mary Anne, were aware of his stigma.

Love was a while female in her 60s who moved into the Boardwalk in early May 2013 with her son Ben and his girlfriend Lisa, both of whom were in their late 20s. This makeshift family unit arrived at the motel in a pickup truck and Love immediately began to aggravate residents by complaining about the conditions and seeking out assistance with repairs. Although he laughed at Love’s aura of helplessness, Slash extended a helping hand by replacing broken light bulbs that were out of her reach. Love, Ben, and Lisa were still living at the motel when I concluded my fieldwork, but as I will show, they later left in a depressing turn of events.

Moving In

I decided that my best chance of meeting other residents would be to interact with them as they socialized outside of their rooms. On several occasions I drove by the motel and noticed residents sitting on chairs outside and gathering in the parking lot. To me it was imperative to start the project in warm weather when there was the greatest chance that residents would be engaging outside their rooms. A June start date gave me several months of sunny days and warm nights to establish relationships with residents.
I arrived on June 6th and Elizabeth gave me the choice of Room 30 or 34, both on the second floor near the middle of the motel. I opened the door to Room 30 and saw two beds inside. One had the sheets pulled back and upon inspection, what looked like flecks of dirt. A dirty towel lay between the beds and an empty Sprite bottle sat on the sink. The TV was tuned to ESPN and the room had the uneasily feel of being vacated mere moments ago.

Moving to Room 34, I tried the door and for a horrifying moment I worried that someone was inside, because it felt like the doorknob was actively turning against me. To my relief, the room was empty and had only one bed that looked fairly clean. The toilet was filled with blue cleaning liquid, which gave me increased confidence. I was so preoccupied with looking for health violations and similar sanitary issues that I did not register the absence of a fridge or microwave in the room. Faced with no better option, I decided that 34 would be mine.

After paying Elizabeth $205 in cash, she handed me a guest registration card, on which I filled out my name and vehicle information. She gave me a receipt and asked, “No kids right?” I said no and asked if someone would be cleaning the room every day. She replied no and said, “It’s up to you. It’s mostly men and people don’t like people coming into their rooms.” She said she would be around all night if I needed anything. I thanked her, we exchanged names, and I told her I would move my things in the next day.

*Soaking It In*

I was fortunate to meet a friendly face in Roy the day I picked out my room. He sat outside his room (29) talking on his cell phone and as I walked past, he nodded and asked, “What’s going on?” When I left Room 34, he engaged me in conversation. I told
him I was trying to decide which room to choose and he said that an old couple had just moved out of Room 30 next door to him and he made a face of disgust. I said I was taking the room further away from him because it was cleaner and I joked that he should not be offended. He laughed and told me it was okay. I stuck out my hand and we introduced ourselves and I told him I would see him the next day.

This relationship with Roy was quite beneficial during my early days at the motel. First, simply having casual and friendly conversation with a resident on my first day was a psychological boost that allowed me to feel much more comfortable and confident in my ability to meet residents during the course of my study. Second, I became aware that Roy was far from a loner, in fact, for a time he was the only active drug seller at the motel. This meant that he interacted with a number of residents and I felt that if they observed me and Roy speaking with each other, it might put them at ease and open up new avenues of communication.

Because my room was on the second floor, the landing that ran the length of the motel provided an ideal position for me to sit and observe the behavior of other residents. This is precisely what I did for the first 24 hours that I spent at the motel, acclimating myself to the environment as the Adler’s suggest, like a new resident would.58 I wanted to make my presence known so those around me would get used to seeing a 5’3, youthful and stocky Korean around the motel. At one o’clock, after unpacking and setting up my room, I grabbed a chair from inside and sat outside to watch and listen to the activity around me. No one else was in view, but I heard plenty of voices and the sound of doors opening and closing beneath me. In the parking lot, the driver of a linen truck loaded a hamper full of sheets into the back and drove away.
Roy found me sitting outside after an hour or two as he and his girlfriend returned to their room carrying several plastic bags. Wearing a tie-dyed t-shirt and unzipped hoodie, he waved at me and asked, “How’s it going? You made it here huh?” I waved back and he headed inside and left me to the summer sounds of the motel and its surroundings: birds chirping in the trees of the woods behind the motel, four-lane traffic on the street in front, the mechanical screams of tools from the autoshop across the street, even the chug of a school bus engine as it stopped in the trailer park next door.

Roy came out of his room a few minutes later and I offered him a cigarette, which he politely declined. He walked down to the first floor and I heard him talking to someone. Then he bounded upstairs holding two DVDs and triumphantly stated, “Gonna watch my movies!” Down in the parking lot I heard Biggie ask Steve to grab him some cigarettes. A little while later, Dee walked into the parking lot carrying several full reusable bags. Biggie and Steve called out to her and asked how she was doing. She went into her room on the second floor, came out with a basket and walked down to a room to the right and knocked on the door. The door opened and she offered the contents of the basket to someone in the room who I could not see, and then returned to her room with the empty basket.

By 4pm I had seen over 13 different people going about their lives. Biggie walked towards the bus stop calling back over his shoulder, “Watch the house for me yo, watch the house for me. Want me to get you anything while I’m there?” On the second floor, Dee’s partner Toby came out of his room shirtless and chased away an orange and yellow cat which had been meowing at their door for a good hour. I commented, “That thing’s
loud man,” and he muttered, “Annoying, Jaysus!” as he chased it down the middle set of stairs between us.

It was still quite sunny around 5pm when Elizabeth came out of the office walking Mocha. She asked if I needed any food and I replied that I was fine. We had a friendly conversation, with me asking simple questions and trying to establish rapport. She said one time Mocha got away and went into the woods behind the motel before there was a fence, “You can’t see ‘em but there are houses back there, nice houses.” Mocha lay on the pavement during our exchange, basking in the sun.

Around 6pm the sun started to set behind the motel and my seat had cooled off. I saw several people walking into the parking lot from the direction of the grocery store with plastic bags and take out containers. After another hour I headed inside to eat my own meal of beef jerky and crackers, and to write up my notes while watching TV. When I finished eating I went into the bathroom to wash my hands. This was when I discovered that the bathtub was filled with what looked like bedbugs, so I turned on the water and flushed them away. Fearing a greater infestation on the mattress, I slept inside my sleeping bag liner with the light on. I was mentally exhausted from my first day so I went to bed before the sun had set. I fell asleep listening to the sound of birds outside and insects, who I hoped were outside as well.

After waking up several times to the bright light bulbs in my room, I got out of bed the next morning around 7am and stepped outside to take in the sights, smells, and sounds of the bustling road. There was a chill in the air and low hanging fog covering the trailer park across the parking lot. I decided to explore the strip of road that the motel sat on so I walked to a local mall a few miles away. As I did, a woman asked me for a
cigarette and when I told her I did not have one, she asked me for a dollar. After I refused again, she looked at me and said, “You’re handsome.” I awkwardly mumbled my thanks and walked on before the conversation went any further. After this encounter I mentally prepared myself, realizing that it was probably the first of many requests that I would receive during my research.

On my return, the bus dropped me off a few steps from the motel. It was a gorgeous sunny day and I decided that I would take advantage of the weather to try and engage some of the residents who were outside. Biggie was sitting shirtless outside of his room as I walked by and he waved me over, almost commanding with his deep voice, “Come down here with me, I need some company!” I told him sure and grabbed a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from my room before heading down.

Getting In

Biggie sat in the shade outside of his room with a woman who he introduced as his girlfriend, Deirdre. Between them was a metal cabinet and sitting on top of it, a plate of two cheeseburgers, a few ears of corn still in their husks, a bottle of Heineken, and a ceramic pipe. We chatted casually and I let him dictate the topics, which was a wise decision because he spoke loudly, unabashed, and tried to dominate conversation. At one point we got to talking shoes and he said, “I got wide feet, just like my cock, it is wide. And it is juicy!” As he talked about the grill and some other items he wanted to buy, Deirdre attempted to get a few words in but Biggie looked over at her and said, “Oh, I’m sorry, I’m finished,” or, “Oh, was you finished?”

Eventually the conversation turned to me when he asked if I was in school, which was appropriate given my age and appearance. I told him that I was studying sociology.
and social inequality and that I wanted to write a book about motel life. \(^5^9\) He got excited and asked if he was going to be in it. I explained to him that I would like him to be but that it was entirely his decision and that he could change his mind at any time. I gave him and Deirdre consent forms and after he and Deirdre read them, they both agreed to participate. Biggie continued to talk about how much money we were going to make, and how we could go to parties and drink champagne together. I emphasized to him that I surely was not in it for the money, but rather to share the stories of people like him.

This form of disclosure occurred often when I interacted with strangers in my early days of research. My goal was to not only observe as much activity as possible, but make myself as visible as possible. This was a fairly easy task during the summer months because my first room not only lacked a working air conditioner but had a vent that actually produced hot air. Therefore, I spent many hours sitting outside my room reading a book while observing the activity around me.

When unknown residents and I passed each other either in the parking lot or on the stairways or landings, I made a conscious effort to make eye contact and say, “Hello” or, “How’s it going?” and I found that most residents responded in kind. However, this was not always the case, and there were several individuals who simply refused to acknowledge me. Reg spoke to this one day:

*Some people just don’t wanna talk to ya, like that couple upstairs, won’t even say two words to you. And that’s the way they want it and you let them keep it that way. You don’t bother asking hello, you don’t bother seeing if they need help, fuck ’em. It’s what they want. You gotta respect everybody and who they are. Doesn’t matter if you’re friends with ’em, doesn’t mean everyone else wants to be.*

I made mental notes about residents who spurned my advances and left the ball in their court for future engagement. In other instances, residents made it well known that they would not welcome any interaction. One afternoon I noticed a man walking into the
parking lot and started to walk towards him, hoping to simply acknowledge him in passing. As I approached he began to rap, “I catch you in my fucking house, I leave your body on the cement. That’s a fuckin’ promise, and a fuckin’ threat.” I mentioned this later to Roy and he got very excited and exclaimed:

*He’s crazy. Stay away from that dude. You see him at the bus stop, he shadow boxes the air, like [Muhammad] Ali. I see him at the bus stop. Fighting the air, he’s knocking out the air, he’s fucking the air up!*

When residents chose to engage me, I employed a few tactics to facilitate conversation. Since it was summer time when I began and quite warm out, I made sure to keep a stock of cold bottled water and cans of cheap beer. I also assumed (correctly) that cigarettes would be a valued commodity among residents, so despite the fact that I did not smoke, I kept a pack of cigarettes and a lighter with me at all times. Reg was quick to educate me about cigarettes, “You will learn, at this motel do not take a pack of cigarettes out in the open, you will be giving them away.” One day I explained my strategy to Digital and he laughed, saying it was “manipulating” and that I was “cheating.” I asked his romantic partner, Darryl for his opinion and he stated:

*I think it’s strategic and smart. But, it is manipulation, there’s no doubt about that. But it’s a good too, ‘cause alright, unfortunately, a lotta the transients you’re gonna meet, are either drug addicts and alcoholics, or prior drug addicts and alcoholics and most ‘em [sic] have a habit a smoking. So it’s a good way for them, to you, to build a quick trust, so that they’ll at least start talking to you. Oh wait, he’s gonna give me a cigarette. But there’s a psychological benefit too, but then, you know, and then you’re just tryin’ to be nice and kind, ‘cause you know, ‘cause people are shorta money, people are shorta this, and you’re tryin’ to give ‘em a cigarette, which are expensive.*

When I disclosed my role to residents and informed them of my study, I always made it very clear that there was no compensation for participating. For example, when Biggie got excited over the prospect of money, I told him that there was no money to be made. While I often gave cigarettes to residents when I first met them, I never stated
implicitly or explicitly that cigarettes would be given for participation. As I will demonstrate later, I firmly believe that participants never felt pressured to participate for fear of losing out on cigarettes/beer and those who participated never expected any sort of material compensation, but participated because they enjoyed the experience. Moreover, the sharing of cigarettes can be viewed as part of the reciprocal exchange that other researchers have found characterizes poor communities. To that end, I was also the recipient of many gifts, usually involving food, and as I will show, these communal interactions were a key part of life at the motel, and ceased to be simply a research strategy.

During initial conversations, I tried to keep things casual, such as talking about the weather (as silly as it may seem, nice days were highly valued at the motel). Then I would steer the conversation by asking how long someone had been at the motel and what they thought of it. I disclosed my role and asked for consent when I felt that the other person was opening up to me or when they asked a question that could easily lead to my disclosure. Usually those questions came after the person had shared some background information about what brought them to the motel. Sometimes the question was something simple such as, “So do you go to school?” Other times, it was more direct, as in the case of Natalie, who asked when I went to pay my rent one morning:

Natalie: Hey, let me ask you something, serious.
Me: Yeah?
Natalie: Nah.
Me: You gonna ask if I’m a cop? No, tell me. What?
Natalie: You seem pretty intelligent. Why are you hanging out here with these guys?

In these early stages of involvement and disclosure I treaded slowly and carefully for several reasons. First, it was obvious that the social setting had established social
circles and I wanted to ease myself into them through invitation, rather than intrusion. Fortunately, those who I became close with were quick to put me at ease, as I found out one day when I saw Jake and Reg sitting outside of Jake’s room, listening to music blaring from inside. I walked down from my room to throw out some trash and decided to break the ice by asking for a light. Jake gave me one and said, “Take a seat man.” I made a comment about not wanting to intrude and Reg said, “You’re not intruding, we’re hanging out. If we wanted privacy we’d go in our rooms.”

Second, I had seen evidence that not everyone at the motel got along, as Biggie stated when I first met him:

*Some people here are good and some you wanna stay away from. Some people come from the right side of the tracks and some people come from the wrong side, you know what I mean? But others are cool, if you need something to eat or drink or anything you just knock on the door. All the people from me down, they are good.*

Not wanting to put myself immediately in the middle of any feuds (although that proved unavoidable in the long run), or in danger, I tried to be wary of who I talked to and what we talked about.61

Finally, I was concerned about how the nature of my project would impact my relationships with residents. I initially framed myself as a graduate student conducting a study about motel life, masking the facts that I was a criminal justice student and that my target population was registered sex offenders. Early on there were several jokes made at my expense about being a cop, or someone sent by the owner to investigate people. One day Mike pointed at me and said, “Policio. He’s policio. Let me see your badge. Bend over, let me see your badge!” When I moved into a room next to Reg, he joked, “Just ‘cause you’re a cop doesn’t mean you can’t live next to me!” However, I never felt that
Residents were truly suspicious of me and people quickly realized that I had no affiliation with law enforcement when drug use and drug sales occurred around me without repercussion. It then became a running joke with Reg, who would occasionally introduce me as an “undercover brother” and tell people, “He’s investigating us!” or, “Don’t mind him, he’s the neighborhood cop.” This continued public portrayal of me as a cop (even if it was in jest), helped participants retain their power as research subjects.

Reg: The Bull and the Gatekeeper

The turning point in my project came one evening at the end of July. I was drinking beer with Reg and Marc as we sat at the base of the second staircase. Reg had become my gatekeeper of the setting for several reasons. First, he had lived there for over a year, which was quite a long time relative to other residents. This tenure made him an expert on the motel’s culture. Second, he was the most social resident and I noticed that when there were instances of community and conflict, Reg was often involved. Third, he was an imposing physical presence and if there was one person who I did not want to aggravate, it was him. These factors made it clear to me that in order to successfully carry out my study, Reg would be someone that I needed to get to know.

It was this evening that I decided that to disclose my full status and intentions to Reg. The endeavor did not go quite as I expected when he exclaimed, “I knew it! I knew it was criminal psychology!” He continued, saying that he knew I was holding back and that he had me figured out. When I tried to explain, he told me that he was not stupid and knew something was up from the start. Fearing that I was about to get either beat up or kicked out of the setting, I told him that I meant no disrespect and simply did not think it was wise to walk into the motel and announce that I was studying criminal justice and sex
offenders. He looked at me and spread his arms wide, disclosing his status as a sex offender by declaring, “Who do you think you’ve been talkin’ to all this time?” My worry increased as he made what could be perceived as a threat, “I’m the bull around this place. You shouldn’t forget that.” I apologized and he instructed me not to, saying that he hated it when people did because it meant you did something wrong. Without much to say, I let him tell me that I had seen his world and now he wanted to see mine. We made plans to “talk sober” over the next few days because I was completely overwhelmed by this turn of events.

After meeting with my adviser, I headed back to the motel with a plan to strengthen my relationship with Reggie. It was a sunny Friday morning and as we sat outside, I gave him a peace offering: a copy of *Tally’s Corner*. I told him that not only was it considered a classic but it was what I hoped my book could be. We talked about the other night and he assured me that he was in a sense “messing with me” because I was drunk and he thought it was funny that I kept apologizing. Reg said that he understood why I did not want to tell people I was studying criminal justice, and that he liked me since we first met. In response to his request to see my world, I invited him and Sky to come see my campus office and have lunch with my adviser.

In early August, I picked up Reg and Sky at the motel to bring them to campus. Reg made several jokes about wearing a wire, and bringing a camera and notebook. Despite this, Reg was admittedly nervous, saying he needed a few beers to calm down. I had a rule about smoking while riding in my car, but I made an exception on this trip because Reg kept mentioning his nerves. At one point during the trip, Reg told me that he did not want to be just part of the dissertation and that when the research was done he
wanted to hang out and go camping. I told him that I viewed him as a friend and I would be sure to hang out after my research was complete.

When we got to campus Reg commented again about his nervousness. I told him to just be himself and he replied, “When am I not?” I first took him into my office and showed him some copies of *Criminology*. He looked through them and said, “Now I have a better idea of what you do and I believe that you’re really a student.” As we left my office and I locked the door he jokingly assured me that there was nothing inside that he wanted to steal. We walked over to a lab space where my adviser was sitting with another professor. I introduced Reg and Sky to them and my adviser offered some information to Reg about her ethnographic work with active drug sellers.

What happened next was almost a blur. Reg quickly took control of the conversation and called me out on the mistakes I had made in the field so far; that he had called me on “my bullshit,” how I would come and go which made people think I was a cop, and how I wanted to study sex offenders and did not know that I was talking to one all along. At one point, he reiterated to my adviser why he and Sky were on campus, “You wanna study me? I wanna study you. I wanna see a day in your life.” He commented several times that he knew what I was about, that something was not quite right, and that he had me figured out. Reg had dressed me down when the actual disclosure occurred, but this was even more embarrassing because it occurred in front of my adviser and another professor. I could do nothing but stand sheepishly and silent off to the side as he continued to assert himself in front of his audience as a smart, perceptive person who was always in control. He finished by saying, “People at the motel look to me
as a leader and gravitate towards me. I don’t know why ‘cause I’m not a leader!” I brought myself back into the conversation by saying it was my job to find out why.

After Reg had said his piece, we all headed to lunch at a local tavern. During lunch, my adviser made it clear that she was treating everyone and Reg made sure ordering the French Dip for $10 was okay. After she assured him that it was, he made a show of taking out several bills from his wallet and choosing some music on the jukebox. When we left the tavern, Reg went out of his way to give money to a black man sitting in the grass near campus. The man did not explicitly ask for it or even look particularly destitute, but Reg later mentioned to me that he hoped my adviser was not offended by this gesture and that he liked to “help out people who don’t have much.”

The Researcher Role

After this experience with Reg, life at the motel took quite a turn. Reg shared the details of his visit with others and people accepted my role as a researcher. Several residents took it upon themselves to disclose my role to others and actively recruit people for my study. Reg introduced me to Mike, telling him that I was in college and writing a book with the goal of telling peoples’ stories. He further explained that I did not use real names and that I was a “good kid.” After Sam and I had established a good rapport, he actively recruited Larry for the study, “I went up there and asked him. I said, I said Chris don’t force it on nobody, it’s all voluntarily. He said, what’s in it for me? I said nothin’, shit in it for you. He said, yeah Sam, I’m interested in tellin’ my story.” People began viewing me as both a researcher who respected them and a friend who they enjoyed spending time with. Sometimes our behaviors reflected my role as a college student
conducting a research project. Other times they were more oriented towards friendship and my role as a part of the community.

My role as a college student led to several behaviors on the part of residents and myself. When greeting me, Biggie would say something like, “What’s up college kid?” Others would comment on my career path, such as Ed who told me one day, “Well I’m impressed man. You’re doin’ good.” Sitting nearby, Jake chimed in, “You’re goin’ places Chris, lemme tell ya.” Residents kept tabs on me and Larry would ask, “You getting everything you need for your uh, project?” Sam sometimes started rants by saying, “Write this shit down Chris,” and when Eric found out about the book, he got excited, “Write a book about me. Here’s this little white kid. There’s this little kid named Eric. There’s this crazy kid Eric, he’s always drinkin’, he’s always doin’ crazy shit.”

Some residents often asked about my connections to the college party scene and Asian women. After Eric asked me to take him to a party and hook him up with “a hot Asian chick,” Reg piped in with, “Why does everyone around here ask you the same question over and over again?” He then turned to Eric and asked, “What is a good, well-to-do college girl gonna want with someone like you? No job.” Similarly, one night Biggie called out, “Hey, you! One of these days you take me to one of your college parties man!” Sam tried to explain that those kids were fresh out of high school and that at age 29, I did not party. Biggie responded, “What? Wait a minute, wait a minute. You lie! What kind of hookup is you then? You can’t hook me up with no college chicks? I thought you had some connections.” Later Sam said to me, “Could you imagine taking Biggie to a college party? Don’t you ever do that!”
While my role as a researcher was perhaps my most prominent (as it distinguished my social position from true residents of the motel) most of the time I spent at the motel consisted of simply “hanging out” as a friend. When I first described my project to Darryl, I made a point to say that there were good people living at the motel and Jake offered me a fist bump in response. On several occasions Reg reminded me, “We all like you.” I was invited to birthday parties, barbecues, introduced to family members, enjoyed a communal meal on Thanksgiving, and was given gifts on Halloween and Christmas.

Most residents lacked the money or transportation to engage in activities away from the motel so their days consisted of watching TV and during warmer days, sitting outside talking, drinking, listening to music, drinking, and doing drugs. I often joined in and while I did not partake in illegal drug use, residents were comfortable discussing, buying, selling, and using drugs in front of me. I did make it clear that I would not be involved with handling or storing drugs, or using my car to transport them knowingly or unknowingly. This first arose when Reg texted me one day asking for a ride to a town about 20 miles away and I responded with, “How long will it take and for what exactly? I can’t facilitate anything illegal, no offense intended.” He texted me back, saying that he needed to pick up his disability check and that nothing illegal was involved. On the ride there I explained my position and he said:

*Just so you know so you can always ease your mind, I would never get into a car with drugs on me with you. I would never put drugs in your car, I would never have you bring anything to do with drugs or anything illegal. ’Cause I respect the fact of what you are. You’re a clean, good working, fricken studying whatever, you’re good people all together. And I’d never do that to ya.*

Another day Cinque asked me for a ride downtown and Reg spoke up, saying that I would not drive him and I would not “have it” in my car. He then said:
I put a stop to that for you before he even asked. I wouldn’t let that happen to you and if I knew someone was askin’ you for a ride for that I’d tell you in a heartbeat. Your career ain’t worth fuckin’ up over drugs.

Later, I had to clarify to Cinque when he asked if he could store “something” in my room if parole came by and what I would do if he threw drugs in my room and walked out. I told him in no uncertain terms that we would not talk anymore and that I would not be involved.

Because I had a car, people often asked me for rides. On most occasions it was to the grocery store and back, but occasionally I was asked to venture further from the motel. Giving people rides was something I was careful about and I attempted to get to know an individual before I drove them somewhere. However, there were occasions when I did drive relative strangers because I believed it would be an important piece of data. When I became close with several residents, I drove them to unemployment hearings, other housing locations, and family residences. I never asked for anything in return, but when I was offered beer, food, or a few bucks, I accepted graciously.

Residents also asked me for loans, which I expected, but was not sure how to deal with until it came up. I wish I could say that I had hard and fast rules, but borrowing money was common among residents and often I had to decide fairly quickly whether I would help them or not. If I had a few dollars on me I obliged and I did not keep much cash on me for this reason. My biggest decisions came when residents asked for more substantial sums, as Sam did when he asked to borrow $30. No one asked to borrow sums that large unless we had grown close and I often decided that it was in my best interests to avoid the possible fractures in our relationships that could come from not loaning. In these instances I always asked residents to not share the fact that I was loaning money
and while I did not hound anyone to pay me back, I made it clear that I could not loan like amounts until earlier amounts were paid back, as I did not want to be seen as a walking ATM. Cell phones with minutes were also highly valued at the motel and I consciously did not use my phone in front of residents I did not know and it was rare that I let a stranger use my cell phone.

Ultimately, my role and relationship with residents most closely resembled what the Adler’s refer to as a “peripheral” membership role. This role was a result of the limitations I imposed on myself by not fully committing to the motel experience. Like many researchers who take on peripheral roles, I used gatekeepers such as Reggie and Sam who came to trust me and then sponsor my project among other members. Participants came to regard me as a “researcher-member” and interacted with me on those terms. The most apparent aspect of this role was that I was free to come and go from the field whenever I wanted/needed; a facet of the experience that sometimes made me feel guilty and awkward. One day in September I was driving with Reg and I apologized in advance for an absence due to a family reunion. He replied, “Dude, we don’t worry about you, we know you have a life. Unlike the rest of us, we know you have a life.” This made me uncomfortable and I said, “You guys got lives, come on.” Reg tilted his head and smirked:

Dude really? We drink, we hang there, we live there. You think we have a life? You get out, you go do things, you go to college, you go to work, you go do things. You have a life. I don’t take it offensively, I know I don’t have a life man.

Despite my coming and going, I was able to observe intimately the ways in which residents of the Boardwalk Motel went about their daily lives. Because of the strong relationships that I formed, I sometimes found myself taking on a more “active”
membership role by taking part in some of the “core activities of the group” that involved exchange of food, material goods, loans, and transportation that I described earlier.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Study Overview}

My role allowed me to gain insights into motel life that were only granted to members of the social setting. The following study is an exploration of the Boardwalk Motel told through the perspective of those most qualified to tell it: the residents themselves. I conceptualize these residents as “social refugees” – persons who have been forced or impelled to relocate within their own country of citizenship due to the influence of social context and/or social policy. By using their voices and experiences, I analyze what it was like to live in the intimate world of the motel, as well as the surrounding community. These residents faced stigma and stereotype from each other, and the citizens of Dutchland who feared for the safety of their homes and children. My goal is to show the reader how these social contexts influenced resident status, identity, and behavior.

Ultimately, I argue that motel residents were strongly affected by their experiences at the Boardwalk Motel in ways that were unique to the setting. My findings make the case that despite the social stigmas surrounding motel residents, they represented some of the most vulnerable individuals in society and their vulnerabilities were only exacerbated by their living situation. These social refugees were often precariously close to living on the street, a fact which was largely ignored in the public perceptions of the motel. The reality is that the story of the Boardwalk is a story of vulnerability and these vulnerabilities were created by social systems.

These vulnerabilities are more importantly a symptom of the larger social issue of homelessness.\textsuperscript{66} While the intricacies of homelessness are outside the scope of this
dissertation, writer Jonathan Kozol provides a simple lens through which to view the Boardwalk Motel. In his book *Rachel and her Children*, Kozol writes, “The cause of homelessness is lack of housing.” The following analysis examines how social forces created a lack of housing that necessitated the existence of the Boardwalk Motel.

When the dust around the public discourse over the Boardwalk finally settled, what remained was the harsh reality that those living at the Boardwalk Motel were in need of housing and if they could not find it at the Boardwalk Motel, society would push them to a similar location on the margins and out of the public eye. In this respect, the story of the Boardwalk is the story of society’s response to marginalization and inequality as manifested through the outcome of homelessness.

Chapter 2 places the study of the Boardwalk Motel in the historical context of the rise and fall of the American motel industry. It uses that lens to describe the setting and how it acquired its infamous reputation. In Chapter 3, I use life histories to adopt a framework of relativity in order to analyze how residents viewed the motel’s conditions as a result of their previous environments. Then I examine other life events to uncover histories of vulnerability and instability that existed long before residents arrived at the Boardwalk. Chapter 4 explores the issue of stigma and allows narratives to illustrate how residents formed identities and boundaries as a resistance to stigma. In Chapter 5, I dive into the subculture of the motel that revolved around what I call the cycle of community, conflict, and fragility. Specifically, it examines the ways in which residents sought to address their deprivations through social interaction, and how the consequences of those interactions gone wrong often left residents more vulnerable than when they arrived. Chapter 6 then turns its eyes towards the ways in which concerns about “quality of life,”
“civility,” and “order” dominated perceptions about the motel, and how these concerns were or were not realized through resident behavior in the local community.

Finally, my conclusion examines the historical and political significance of the Boardwalk Motel’s existence. By examining what happened after I left the field, I show how meaningful policy changes can be made in order to address the many societal failures that plagued life at the Boardwalk Motel. It is a call to action and a call for a new way of looking at the many forms of marginalization, not just of homelessness, but that of class and social structure wielded by powerful groups in attempts to “sanitize” their social space.

There is a common thread woven throughout this study that I will lay claim to before I proceed. Ethnographers find themselves in the unique position to observe the lives of others in deeply intimate ways. This gives us the power to show the other side of the coin, so to speak. My goal in this study is to tell the motel’s story in the words of those who know it best. It is a presentation of alternative history because without it, the only record of the Boardwalk would be the accounts written by those who were not even there. Throughout these chapters, I attempt to present a counterforce to the sort of stereotypes and stigma that are often wielded as the truth. The concern with these stereotypes and stigma is that they fail to take into account the social forces that affect human behavior. Sociologist Erving Goffman writes, “Any item of a person’s behavior is, therefore, a sign of his social position.” Therefore, the meanings behind behavior are lost when stereotypes and stigma prevail. Ultimately, I believe that by presenting the perspectives of motel residents in relation to their behavior, they can lay claim to their significance as human beings with distinct and valid social positions.
Chapter 2: Biography of a Residential Motel

The Life and Death of the American Motel Industry

While the word “motel” was never uttered in Ancient Rome, it was there--an
epicenter of commerce and travel--that gave birth to what is now the modern motel. Inns
were constructed to house visitors coming into the city on foot or horse. In what was
perhaps foreshadowing of modern day views, innkeepers in Rome were given the same
social status as gamblers and thieves. As the world evolved, so did the inn, which then
became the respected lodging for stage-coach travelers and nobles across the world.¹

When America became accessible by the highway system, a lodging location was
invented to satisfy the need for hospitality on the road, taking the name “hotel” from the
French word for host. In 1910 there were 10,000 hotels in the U.S. and in 1920,
construction of hotels reached its all-time high, with occupancy rates of 85%.² The word
“motel” was coined in 1925 when a California architect named Arthur Heineman
designed a location near San Luis Obispo which allowed guests to drive up to the door of
their rooms (Figure 2).³ He decided to call his lodge a “motor hotel” and then shorted it to
“motel.” At the time of its opening, rooms at Heineman’s Mo-tel Inn cost $2.50 a night.⁴

About a decade after Heineman built his motel, the American Automobile
Association estimated that 40 million people took car trips that required lodging each
year.⁵ Then the post-World War II increase in prosperity, coupled with the emergence of
Arthur Miller style traveling salesmen, put motels on the map. In 1950, lodging
occupancy was at 80% and that decade saw the creation of the now familiar chains such as
Marriott, Ramada, Howard Johnson, and Holiday Inn.⁶ By 1960, there were 2,400,450
rooms available and the typical hotel was an independent and locally owned operation with an average of 39 rooms.\textsuperscript{7}

This boom for independent operators was somewhat short lived, as by the late 1960s, travelers concerned with safety and reliability were choosing to stay in chain hotels and small motels were slowly dying.\textsuperscript{8} By 1988, extended stay chain hotels were opened by Residence Inns and Homewood Suites.\textsuperscript{9} These businesses were designed to house business travelers whose frequent travel often required stays of between five and 30 nights.\textsuperscript{10} In November 2000, the American Hotel & Lodging Association removed the word “motel” from its title after marketing research advised the change.\textsuperscript{11} With this move came the death of the motel that Arthur Heineman and millions of others once knew. Emerging from the ashes were the skeletal remains of once respectable and thriving motels, their decomposed frames now reanimated as low-end residential lodging.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Residential Motel Life}

Known by way of popular culture as “no-tell motels,” these locations gain notoriety through their services and clients. Scholars often refer to these locations as single room occupancy (SRO), a term that originated in New York City to refer to tenement apartment buildings that were converted into individual living quarters for the urban poor.\textsuperscript{13} Scholars now use the term SRO to refer to travel-oriented lodging locations used for a non-traditional purpose. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to these motels as “residential motels” and “residential lodging” because they provide a semi-permanent residence for social refugees and may provide services and amenities above and beyond those found in true SRO locations.
The “underbelly” of residential motel life existed long before places like the Sugar Bowl Court Motel began selling rooms in 2003 at a rate of $17 for three hours with condoms available for $1. In his 1936 book aptly titled *Hotel Life*, sociologist Norman Hayner writes that “problems of urban culture […] are found in an accentuated form in the hotel.” What has defined motels, hotels, inns, and taverns since their inception is that they are attractive to people who want to or need to live a transient lifestyle, a hidden existence, or a combination of the two.

It could be argued that prostitution is the activity most associated with residential lodging. In 1905, Raines Law hotels in New York City were viewed as a public nuisance and targeted by activist groups in an effort to clean up the city. These hotels existed due to a law that allowed hotels to sell alcohol on Sundays, while saloons could not. Because hotels were defined as any location that had a restaurant and 10 bedrooms, saloon owners began serving lunch and adding on 10 bedrooms which they rented to prostitutes. In the 1940s, after his encounters with Al Capone, the famous prohibition agent Eliot Ness was hired by the government to mount an effort against prostitution in hotels around military bases. Hotels offered the “ideal locale” for prostitution and their policies of “hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil” created a culture where clandestine encounters led to high rates of venereal disease among American servicemen.

Scholarly work on prostitution in lodging has uncovered complex worlds of social interaction involving unspoken rules between hookers and desk clerks, the screening of potential customers, and symbiotic relationships with the police. Like Japanese love hotels that cover the license plates of cars in their garages, some motels that cater to prostitution also make significant efforts to keep the identities of their clients safe.
ways in which these locations display themselves to the public is also worthy of mention. At one motel, researchers were reprimanded for throwing around a Frisbee in the parking lot because the owner felt it made the location look like a family motel and might scare away potential customers.\textsuperscript{20} This motel maintained its public image despite crackdowns on other locations by not advertising in travel guides and carefully shielding the lobby’s collection of pornographic movies from anyone walking by.\textsuperscript{21}

However, it is misleading to characterize prostitutes and their clients as the most significant group to use residential lodging. The majority of residents are what Harvey Siegal calls the “socially terminal” or people deemed problematic by mainstream society.\textsuperscript{22} They are often poor, transient, with histories of drug abuse, mental illness, and criminal behavior. Described in detail by studies of “skid row” populations, these individuals now find shelter in a variety of residential lodging locations.\textsuperscript{23}

Past studies on urban residential lodging locations give great insight into the kinds of people who use them and the social worlds they inhabit. For the most part, these dwellings provide a great sense of autonomy for their residents. Because identification is rarely requested and privacy from the outside world is respected, if one chooses to play along with the accepted conventions of behavior, it is easy to blend in and do whatever one pleases.\textsuperscript{24} Residents are free to engage in drug activity, sexual behavior, gambling, and lives of recluse with few barriers from staff. However, that is not to say that owners and desk clerks are not mindful about those they rent to. Some managers instruct their staff on how to screen potential customers, and staff often know many details about the lives of long-time residents.\textsuperscript{25} Architecturally, some locations have large lobbies which encourage socializing, while others are devoid of furniture to discourage any sort of
public transactions. Owners and managers walk a fine line between protecting their clients from too much exposure and encouraging some sort of community.

Customers, although diverse in many respects, are drawn to residential lodging for several common reasons. First and foremost, the alternative for many of these impoverished individuals would be homelessness, or some sort of institutionalization. Others arrive because locations cater to their needs, an example being the elderly with few social supports who find that some hotels/motels provide easy access to similar residents, affordable nutrition, and services such as laundry and barbershops. Low-income families find that residential lodging affords them “family independence, social engagement, a sense of safety and a connection to a community context.” In other cases, residential lodging provides the privacy needed to do drugs, turn tricks, or run numbers. However, this “hidden” aspect of residential lodging can cut both ways. Many of the Chicago residents who perished in the 1995 heat wave lived in SRO locations and although these environments offered the isolation these residents craved, it led tragically to their abandonment and eventual deaths. Finally, because the markers of success and respect are different in residential lodging locations than the middle class world, life there provides important opportunities to establish social status.

I have described a history that culminated in the creation of modern residential lodging locations that provide shelter for a wide variety of residents who for one reason or another, have been pushed to the margins of society. This study is an examination of how the residents of one such motel went about their daily lives. At the core of that examination is the life of the motel itself. In the next section, I will turn the historical spotlight on the Boardwalk Motel.
A Post-Mortem of the Boardwalk Motel

The Boardwalk Motel sits on the edge of Main Street, occupying a rectangular parcel of land measuring .87 of an acre.\textsuperscript{32} The Boardwalk is located almost at the midpoint of Main Street, about 7.5 miles from the city of Riverfort and 7 miles from the city of Pinewood. In 2011, this part of Main Street saw an average of 23,000 daily trips with peak evening rush hour traffic volumes of 2,400 vehicles.\textsuperscript{33} The motel itself is located within the county of Riverfort, in the town of Dutchland. Figure 3 shows a Google Maps aerial view of the motel and its local boundaries.

Table 2 shows the demographics of the city of Riverfort and the town of Dutchland drawn from U.S. Census data. While both localities have similar sized populations, they differ in many key areas. Dutchland is mostly white, with a miniscule black population compared to the city of Riverfort. Residents of Dutchland are also far wealthier than those of Riverfort, as indicated by Dutchland’s high home ownership rate, high median household income, and low percentage of residents below the poverty line.

According to an inventory study conducted by the town of Dutchland, Main Street was completed as gravel covered stone road in 1801, connecting downtown Riverfort and downtown Pinewood at the expense of $118,610. It was called the Riverfort Pinewood Turnpike and by 1803 it was a heavily traveled stretch of road, as evidenced by the 28 taverns and inns between the cities. In 1901 a trolley was constructed, charging riders $.25 for a 45 minute one-way trip. The Turnpike was given its Main Street name in 1946 when the trolley was removed and the road was turned into 5-lane, 40mph highway. According to the study, the same post-World War II economic and automobile boom that lead to the rise of the American motel had a similar effect on Main Street, changing “the
corridor from a major regional transportation link to one of the first American suburban auto strips. In the midst of this local prosperity, the Boardwalk Motel emerged.

Figure 4 is a postcard for the Boardwalk Motel representing its early years. The weekly rate sign is now gone, as well as all the lighted signs in the office, which looks open, well-lit, and inviting in the photograph. I was told by a local parole officer that at one time, there was a dining and lounging area for guests, and this photo seems to support that claim, or at least lends credence to the idea that the lobby was at one time quite welcoming. The back of the postcard advertises the Boardwalk as:

Modern spacious rooms with individual climate control, & Color TV’s. Commercial, & Weekly rates available. American Express, BankAmericard & Master Charge Accepted.

Records from the Dutchland building department and assessor show that the Boardwalk Motel was built in 1960 and initially owned by Hans and Rachel Schurrle. In 1967 it transferred ownership to a local corporation called Orange Estates Inc. As of 1970 it was listed in local records as a two-story, 29-unit motel. A canopy was added in 1973, along with the sign on the roof and nine additional rooms. In 1977 the motel transferred ownership to the Boardwalk Inn Corp. (formerly Orange Estates Inc.), which was owned by Emil and Judith Schonfeld. Ownership was then fully transferred to Judith Schonfeld in 1978. In 1982, Judith sold the motel for $285,000 to the current owner, an Indian entity called Tarsem Corp, run by a Mr. Singh, who also owns the Park Place Motel and Home Cooking buffet restaurant. A year after this purchase, a vehicle crashed into the portico of the motel, causing $9,000 worth of damage. Repairs took eight months to complete and were not initiated until over two months after the initial accident, after a town order. In retrospect, this attitude of neglect was a warning sign of things to come.
The motel was damaged by fire in March 1986, which led to the evacuation of all guests and the partial collapse of the second floor.\textsuperscript{36} Later that year, a local newspaper published an unflattering portrayal of the direction that the Boardwalk’s new owners were taking: “Obscenities are scrawled in the dust on the office windows and hand-lettered signs disclaiming liability are stapled to the wallpaper.”\textsuperscript{37} An industry expert explained that the rooms were kept at $22 to $28 a night because of low overhead, lamenting, “But often that is at the expense of the family-like coziness that was once the trademark of these motels.” The owner of the nearby Paulson Motel commented, “This strip was simply much nicer before they bought in. The biggest problem is that they don't screen the people they rent to.” This owner went on to say that the Boardwalk owner may “tolerate a bad element.” In his defense, the owner of the Boardwalk stated, “big hotels are tough to compete with.” This evolution, or devolution, of the Boardwalk Motel continued in the years to come.

In April 1988, the Boardwalk was damaged by its third fire in two years, which displaced 30 guests and resulted in the arrest of one resident for drugs and weapons.\textsuperscript{38} Later that year, police arrested a cat burglar who fled to the Boardwalk, while a resident of the Park Place was arrested for shoplifting.\textsuperscript{39} In 1990 a Boardwalk resident was charged with raping a 14 year-old girl at the motel.\textsuperscript{40} 1991 saw the arrest of another fugitive at the Boardwalk.\textsuperscript{41} In 1993, several residents of the Park Place were arrested on drug charges stemming from a Grateful Dead concert and five undocumented Polish asbestos workers from Brooklyn were arrested at the Boardwalk.\textsuperscript{42} In 1995, the resident/manager of the Park Place was arrested after stabbing her boyfriend – another resident - in a domestic dispute.\textsuperscript{43}
The culture of these motels garnered increased attention in the local media, earning the name “desolation row” in a 1996 news story about one resident’s death. This article drew a stern rebuke from a local business owner who claimed that the “second rate” motels were disappearing and that Main Street was slowly being revitalized, citing the fact that the buffet owned by the Boardwalk’s owners used to be such a motel. January 1997 brought about another controversy when local police cited an unwritten agreement with motel owners that encouraged them to report illegal activity without fear of gaining a reputation as a drug haven.

As early as 2002, the Boardwalk motel was used by the Riverfort County Department of Social Services (DSS) to shelter individuals for $125 a week. The Pinewood County DSS also used motels to house otherwise homeless individuals at this time. While viewed by some as a misappropriation of public funds, the use of the Boardwalk as a home for displaced individuals went largely unnoticed by the public until summer 2007. That July, a local legislator in Riverfort County released the details of an investigation she had conducted at the behest of her constituents. She found that the Riverfort County DSS had been housing families with children at the Boardwalk, which also housed registered sex offenders. During a press conference outside of the Boardwalk, the legislator claimed that residents of the homes that bordered the motel’s back lot were afraid to let their children outside to play. The presence of sex offenders was not the only reason that placing children at the Boardwalk was ill-advised, as inspections uncovered the plethora of code violations mentioned in Chapter 1.

In August 2007, the legislator proposed a resolution that instructed the Riverfort
County DSS to: 1) discontinue placing families with children or any other individuals at the Boardwalk or Park Place, 2) remove any families with children or other individuals who were placed at the Boardwalk or Park Place from these locations, and 3) cease placing families with children or any individuals at the Boardwalk or Park Place until the code violations were addressed. While this resolution was defeated 22-17, the legislators did pass an amendment to the resolution by 38-1 which required the Town of Dutchland Building Department and Department of Fire Services to make sure that the Boardwalk and Park Place were made immediately code compliant. Nothing about the conditions of the Boardwalk and Park Place were deemed so egregious in the ensuing inspections that residents were removed or the buildings shut down.

A 2008 audit of the Riverfort County DSS by the county comptroller’s office did nothing to quell concern over the Boardwalk’s use. The audit found that from 2005 to 2006, 14 families with children were placed at the Boardwalk while sex offenders were living there, despite claims by DSS that they did not house families with sex offenders. DSS also claimed that families were only placed at the Boardwalk in emergency situations and that the majority were moved the next day. The audit contradicted those claims as it found that 12 of the 14 families were not moved the next day. While the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance was required to carry out inspections every six months of locations where families were placed, these did not occur and an August 2007 fire inspection of the Boardwalk found violations in each of the 24 inspected rooms. Even though the county lacked any sort of written contract with the motel, the DSS paid the Boardwalk $31,816 in 2005, $114,412 in 2006, and $157,164.60 in 2007, for a total of $303,392.60 over a three-year period.
The results of this audit created a firestorm over where to place registered sex offenders in need of housing. In 2009, despite the fact that a 1000-foot residence restriction existed within Riverfort County, a bill was proposed in the Town of Dutchland that would prevent Level 2 or 3 sex offenders from living with 1500 feet of each other. This failed to pass, but local legislators grew increasingly concerned about the number of sex offenders within Dutchland Town limits who were not originally Dutchland residents. Police admitted that in July 2009, there were 125 sex offenders in the town, up from the 60 recorded 18 months before. In August 2009, Dutchland passed a law that limited the number of registered sex offenders who could stay in motels and required motel owners to purchase licenses in order to rent to sex offenders. At a board meeting, residents claimed that they and their children were in danger and felt like they were being watched. The law forced a motel under 50 units, like the Boardwalk, to pay $1,500 a year in order to rent to sex offenders whose cumulative risk levels did not exceed 6 points (e.g. two Level 3 offenders, three Level 2 offenders, or similar combinations). Specifically, the Town of Dutchland code stated in section 119-3:

No person shall engage in the business of owning or operating a hotel or motel as defined herein that accepts placements, referrals or payment by or on behalf of any federal, state or local government or any subdivision thereof, or from any not-for-profit group, association or entity of any type or nature, on account of providing accommodations to one or more registered sex offenders without first obtaining a license therefor for each hotel or motel owned or operated by the said person from the Town Clerk of the Town of Dutchland as hereinafter provided.

Furthermore, the law required any licensed motel to keep for a period of three years, a register which detailed the name, residence, and date of arrival and departure for all persons who are given a room.
The passage of the law did reduce the number of sex offenders in the area. Two months later, there were 20 fewer sex offenders within the Town of Dutchland and within four months of passage, only two motels, including the Boardwalk, had applied for the license. In early 2010, the Boardwalk was the only motel in Dutchland that had a license to accept sex offenders, because the other motel owner received a refund when the license hurt his business.

This is not to say that the law’s passage was a flawless execution of its intentions to reduce the number of sex offenders in Dutchland motels. The owner of the Boardwalk claimed that he was paid $45 a day to house sex offenders, but that a separate stream of people on welfare might also include sex offenders (a claim that is supported by DSS.) Additionally, the motel would only know the sex offender status of those sent to the motel by the state; sex offenders paying out of their own pocket would not be counted against the motel’s tally.

This crackdown did not satisfy the town. In July 2010, Dutchland passed a moratorium on the building of new motels on Main Street that would run for two years, after officials raised concerns about the saturation of motels like the Boardwalk. As if to drive the point home, town buildings records show that in October 2010, the owner of the Boardwalk demolished a one story portion of the motel containing rooms 16 to 22, which were deemed uninhabitable because of asbestos. In a May 2011 Dutchland meeting, a local businessman requested that the moratorium be lifted so that he could refurbish an existing motel that had gone to ruin. Board members worried that it would have state-funded short-term rooms for homeless sex offenders and felons. Residents of the surrounding communities voiced concerns about their children, sex offenders, and
property taxes, with one remarking, “I, too, am against sex offenders and all that.”\textsuperscript{66} Not surprisingly, this request was denied in a unanimous decision. The moratorium was supported by a June 2011 Main Street Corridor Inventory Study conducted by the Planning and Economic Development Department of Dutchland. This study was a direct response to the motel controversy and found that the Main Street Corridor was saturated with 20 motels. It advocated for increased zoning for single family residences and recommend that land used for motels not be allowed to increase.\textsuperscript{67} All of this policy discussion ignored the simple fact that the Boardwalk Motel was a very attractive settlement for social refugees. In the next section, I will explain why.

\textit{The Main Street Ecosystem and the Boardwalk Motel}

The ecosystem of businesses and amenities within walking distance of the Boardwalk provided what urban sociologist Mitch Duneier would call a “sustainable habitat.”\textsuperscript{68} While the surrounding middle class community publicly condemned the location of the Boardwalk, residents of the motel viewed its location as ideal because it was part of a sustainable habitat of businesses, services, and transportation. As Burt, also referred to as “Mr. Clean” told me, “If you’re coming from jail or prison, this is a palace. You got a Giant Foods right here, you can jump on the bus right out front. Uh, you know, so you, you, you can’t really complain too much.”

Many motel residents used public transit to travel into surrounding cities. A westbound bus stop to Pinewood is located on the sidewalk mere steps from the office and directly across the street is another that heads east into downtown Riverfort. Even if residents proceed on foot, there is a variety of locations in the surrounding area that are
accessible by a short walk. Figure 5 and its respective key show the Boardwalk and the locations that make up the local ecosystem.\(^69\)

A tenth of a mile west of the Boardwalk is the Save More Inn, a two story motel that was once home to several current Boardwalk residents. According to these residents, the Save More is slightly more expensive for the week ($220 compared to $205), but much nicer. Judging by its exterior appearance and website, this seems to be the case. Just past the Save More is a church which serves as a food pantry every Thursday. Many residents of the Boardwalk visit this food pantry on a regular basis. Between the Boardwalk and the Save More are an Indian restaurant (which sits directly next to the Boardwalk) and a Japanese restaurant.

If one travels east on Main Street from the Boardwalk they will immediately encounter a trailer park with over a dozen trailers.\(^70\) The trailer park and its residents serve multiple uses to the motel population. Biggie went through the trailer park looking for cans and scrap metal, while Reg sold drugs to residents, and other motel residents wandered over for company on nice days. Other times, relations between them got testy, as Reg claimed that they called the cops on him during a fight and someone called Sky a “bitch” over the fence. When we saw the police knocking on the door of a trailer one day, I asked what had happened and Reg scoffed, “Who knows, they’re all fuckin’ crazy.”

Sam and Reg often talked about the trailers and how they felt it was too expensive to live there. Sam based his opinion on a conversation he had with the owner:

*I told him he was outta his rabid ass mind so he don’t wanna talk to me no more. Who would give you $1300 for any one of these goddamn trailerparks? He said all his appliances were new. I said, I wouldn’t give a fuck if everything in that motherfucka was spic and span new. It still ain’t worth no $1300 a month. This ain’t no goddamn condo. That’s a damn trailer. And a stationary trailer at that. Ain’t like I can pick it up and move around in it. I pay $1300 I wanna travel in it.*
About a tenth of a mile east of the trailer park is the Boardwalk’s sister establishment, the Park Place Motel. The two motels share an owner, manager, and maintenance staff. The Park Place is two long rectangular buildings separated by a parking lot in the middle. Attached to the rightmost building is a two-story blue painted house, part of which serves as the office. This house is home to manager Elizabeth, while her daughter, Natalie, and maintenance crew members Mike and Larry all spent periods of time living there with her.

According to Elizabeth and Natalie, the Park Place does not accept welfare payments so residents must pay cash. The Park Place is much less expensive than the Boardwalk, with a weekly rent of $150, compared to $205. This price cut does come with a downside, as the living conditions at the Park Place are much worse than the Boardwalk. The Park Place doors have an institutional feel, with painted square mesh doors. At the end of the parking lot is a mess of debris such as mattresses and small charcoal grills. During the winter, I noticed a large coat stuffed in the window of one room for insulation. Bernie, one of the residents, complained that he had a “giant hole in the roof of my room with a soda bottle with my sock on it so no squirrels will come through, ‘cause if I was a squirrel I wouldn’t wanna smell my feet.” Noonan, the tall parolee with a shaved head who moved down to the Park Place from the Boardwalk, told me one night in December as we stood in the parking lot of the Boardwalk:

*I wanna come back here [the Boardwalk], because it’s [the Park Place] really, it’s not...it’s awful. I was in the shower the other day, I burned my chest. The water went from absolutely warm to fuckin’ scalding hot, like. I turned the hot water off, and it’s still coming out boiling, scalding hot. I’m like, what the fuck? Turn the cold water off, water’s still comin’ outta the thing. I told Randy about it and he’s like, pshhh. The first room I was in, it smelled like sewage. All the pipes under the ground are broken so when you flush the toilet, it just goes into the dirt.*
underneath the building itself.

The residents of the Boardwalk and the Park Place interacted on a regular basis. Reg told me the two motels were “like this” and twisted his fingers together, even though according to him, the sets of residents were not supposed to associate with each other at the behest of the owner. However, the Boardwalk residents did make a distinction between themselves and those at the Park Place, characterizing the latter as violent drunks and the location as “worse.” As Reg told me, “They get drunk and fight over nonsense like a book of matches. They start drinking Milwaukee’s Best in the morning and that makes them get wily.” Natalie echoed this when she told me, “People at the Park Place are worse than up here. They’re all drinkers. No drugs. They just drink from sunup to sundown.” Sam, the tall black veteran, commented one day, “The people at the Park Place are alcoholic ass motherfuckers.” I asked Ed if he liked hanging out at the Park Place and he replied, “No, they’re crazy.”

These sweeping statements were not entirely without merit. Late July 2012 saw a stabbing at the Park Place. As Biggie and Reg described it, two men were arm wrestling and the loser decided to start a fight with a winner. The winner’s wife came to his defense and slit the other man’s throat with a box cutter. Reg and I walked down to the Park Place to speak with Randy about the incident. The rumor was that the victim was sent to the hospital after he was sliced from behind his ear, down the side of his neck, across his throat, and down his chest. Almost proud of his Park Place residency, Randy smiled and mused, “You come here, you leave in a body bag.”

Across the street from the Park Place is the Paulson Motel. Residents of the Boardwalk claimed that DSS sent women and families to this location, as Sam stated
when he said, “single ladies go to the Paulson.” I asked him who came to the Boardwalk and he replied, “Everybody, all the fucked up ones.” Darryl echoed this when he said, “Say you and your girl have a kid, they’re probably gonna put you over at the Paulson, ‘cause they’re not gonna put a child in one of those shelters.”

Directly past the Park Place is the Home Cooking buffet, which serves a variety of American comfort food. The parking lot is consistently packed, in stark contrast to the parking lots of both motels. During my stay at the Boardwalk, Home Cooking was a de facto celebration spot where residents and I went to have an $8.99 all-you-can-eat lunch when we wanted to treat ourselves or each other. On one of these visits I noticed that the chairs in the rooms of the Boardwalk were the same as the chairs at Home Cooking.

Just past Home Cooking is an Asian hibachi and sushi restaurant and about 50 yards further down Main Street is a Chinese buffet restaurant and motel. This part of Main Street is home to the first traffic light and crosswalk that residents from all three motels encounter. The reason for this is a large shopping center across the street. This shopping center is home to several locations frequented by residents of the Boardwalk: a local pizza chain restaurant, laundromat, Big Sales discount store, dollar store, tobacco shop, Chinese take-out, and Giant Foods grocery store. Residents bought loose tobacco and empty cigarette tubes at the tobacco shop for much less than packs of brand name cigarettes.

Proceeding down Main Street from the shopping center to the next intersection of Main Street and North Road, a person will encounter a McDonald’s, SSK discount department store, and a Getty gas station. If one walks from the Chinese buffet to North Road, Main Street offers a dance/ballet studio, pawn shop, and a CVS pharmacy. Across
the street from the Getty is an Acme Pharmacy. Further down Main Street past the North Road intersection is a small shopping plaza with a video game/movie trade in store, and further down the street on the opposite side is another plaza with a Taco Bell, bagel shop, KFC, and other stores.

These commercial locations and city amenities allow residents of the Boardwalk motel to satisfy many of their material wants and needs. The dumpsters behind the businesses lining Main Street provide assorted treasures such as scrap metal, cans, and thrown away items that motel residents reuse. Potential residents considering the Boardwalk motel may be encouraged by the locations within walking distance, especially the commercial establishments which could provide a convenient place of employment. However, once residents move in, their enthusiasm may be dampened quite quickly.

_A Portrait of the Boardwalk Motel_

The Boardwalk Motel is a 2-story L-shaped structure, made of red brick and white horizontal siding, with the base of the L facing Main Street. Figure 6 provides a close up Google Maps aerial view of the property and Figure 7 shows a building department sketch detailing the exact dimensions of the structure. A parking lot extends along the length of the motel, past the end of the structure and ends at a thick grove of trees. Across the parking lot is a long rectangular patch of grass nestled against a fading red wooden fence separating the motel property from the trailer park next door. In the height of summer, the dandelion-patched grass grew to around a foot high. This grassy knoll was a favorite of Elizabeth’s pitbull Mocha, who used it as a restroom during warm weather, as well as a spot to sleep and roll around in. One day Spike, who wore wristbands promoting condom use, and I watched Mocha in the grass and he said, “I guarantee you, when
Mocha dies, they gonna bury her in the yard right here.” I never saw any residents spend any time here, although Larry built a snowman there during the winter.

The parking lot has faded white parking spaces and in the wintertime, a pickup truck with a plow would drive into the lot and clear the snow, while also taking huge chunks of concrete out of the ground. Over the course of the winter, these holes would fill with water, freeze, and then expand into larger holes. I remember looking out my window at the end of winter and seeing a half-dozen potholed puddles and a huge mound of snow. The snow melted in the coming months to reveal a black treasure of concrete nuggets. Larry attempted to fill some of these potholes with a concrete mixture, but the owner did not supply enough to fill all of them.

In the middle of the parking lot are two grapefruit sized sewer pipes, which until quite recently, were not capped off. Their exposure to the air created an awful stench that wafted so often throughout the parking lot that it was a frequent topic of residents who happened to be sitting outside, as illustrated by this exchange with enigmatic Ed and Jake the movie buff:

*Ed:* What is that smell? Is that smell from your bathroom?
*Jake:* From my ass.
*Ed:* What’d you eat?
*Jake:* Your mom’s pussy.
*Ed:* *smiles and laughs heartily*
*Jake:* I’m gonna shit on you.

Finally, Larry decided to put an end to it by screwing bright red caps on the pipes, which did seem to help.

At the end of the parking lot sits a giant green metal dumpster that is emptied weekly by a waste management truck. On several occasions I saw Randy drive his rusty red pickup truck over from his home at the Park place and toss trash in. I also observed
the motel owner’s wife do the same, albeit with a much nicer BMW. This area was the location of what I call the “shopping cart graveyard.” When residents returned from the local supermarket, dollar, and discount stores with shopping carts full of items, they rarely returned them, so the carts were simply pushed to the end of the parking lot and left to rust (Figure 8). Reg said he offered to bring them back to the local stores for a fee, but they hired someone else to come by in a pickup, throw the grey, green, and orange carts in the bed, and return them to their rightful owners. This happened on a fairly irregular basis, so each time the man arrived, there were usually half a dozen carts awaiting his arrival.

Behind the rear of the motel structure is another graveyard of sorts. This one is home to a variety of items such as mattresses, tables, chairs, and a wheel barrel. These examples of disarray and decay overshadow perhaps the motel property’s most startling feature, a garden along the back left fence of the property. The garden is a rectangular bed of plants and black plastic with strings roping off the plants from the grass. Reg told me that Kelly and Rudy from Room 14 started it, and when they moved out, he and Natalie’s boyfriend Mike started tending it. I went back there on several occasions and watched them pick large red tomatoes and small hot peppers. Reg and Mike claimed there were cucumber plants as well, but they never ended up producing. One day Reg gave me several small green hot peppers from the garden to take home and I ended up using them in burgers. On another day he picked a yellow pepper and dared me to eat it, a challenge I stupidly accepted. Mike and Reg got a great laugh as they watched me cough and cry from the heat. When he decided I had suffered enough, Reg offered me a glass of milk, which I accepted with relief.
The part of the L closest to the road is actually the office, which according to
town building records, is part of a 992 square-foot apartment. Eventually Natalie,
Elizabeth, and Larry let me inside the apartment and several people told me that it was
originally the house of a previous owner, although they and I could never verify which
owner it belonged to. A portico extends from the office out into the parking lot where it is
secured by two poles sitting in large flowerbeds. These white wooden flowerbeds are
stuck in a concrete median, along with a third flowerbed that is not used for anything.
Elizabeth made a habit of parking her car under the portico’s nine-foot clearance.
Between these supports hangs an American Express sign, although the motel does not
accept credit cards anymore. Hanging from this portico is a small, red, neon “no
vacancy” sign. It always said, “vacancy” even on occasions when I knew the motel was
full. Above the portico, attached to the side of the second floor is a giant red sign with
white lettering that vertically spells out “Motel” with bumblebee arrows pointing to the
building. Sitting on the curb to the right of the office door is a regularly stocked local
newspaper dispenser and the shell of a public telephone booth. On nice days I often saw
Natalie, Elizabeth, and Larry sitting in a chair outside the office with Mocha close by.

To enter the office one goes through two tan doors, both flanked by two levels of
square windows with siding beneath them. These windows also display stickers for
American Express, Visa, and Mastercard. Upon entering the office one is greeted by a
small wooden table to the left, on which sits a small ash tray and sometimes coupons or
menus. On the left hand wall is a large mirror, which is in fact two-way, and often
whomever was working sat behind the mirror in a chair watching television in a separate
room with a view of the office. Along the right wall of the office is a large grey hamper
where residents place soiled towels and sheets. In the center is the counter where the transactions take place. The counter is dark wood and there are consistently food menus for a local Chinese restaurant and pizza place on the left side, as well as a small woven basket where residents can pick up mail, and a stack of HBO program guides.73

Separating the clerk’s portion of the counter and the main office is a large pane of glass that has a few inches of space at the bottom for money and other items to be passed through. Larger items such as new towels and toilet paper are given to residents through an often-locked door to the right of the glass. Behind this clerk’s alcove and visible through the glass is another doorway with no door that reveals the living room of the apartment with its two couches and a table. Also visible through the glass is a green carpeted staircase to the right that leads up to the second floor.

The clerk’s counter has a phone and usually a notebook and several pieces of paper. Elizabeth, Natalie, or Larry sat on a round stool and when I came in to pay my rent they would swivel it to check the calendar behind them. From what I observed, they used the notebook to keep track of who had paid, what rooms were being used by social services, and which rooms housed sex offenders. Receipts were made on carbon paper from a generic receipt book and then stamped with an ink stamp which displayed the name of the motel, the address (with incorrect zip code), and the phone number.74

While no observer would mistake the Boardwalk for luxury accommodations, several pieces of information displayed in the office make clear the low-budget nature of the setting. The most deterring is the sex offender occupancy license posted high and to the left of the clerk’s window, almost as high as the ceiling. The motel is required to have this license by law and it states the name and address of the motel, how many occupancy
points they are allowed (in this case 6), when it was issued and when it expires.75

Hanging on the left side of the clerk’s glass is a framed piece of paper with red and black type that states:

“No phone calls from the office, office use only!”
“No outgoing calls, incoming only!”
“No children allowed!”
“All weekly payments must be made in full, no partial payments allowed!”
“Not responsible for any items left in room for one night or one week! Take everything [sic] with you when you live!!! [sic]”

Also taped to the inside of the glass is an 8x11 sheet of loose leaf paper with the handwritten words, “No phone calls!” although this disappeared midway during my fieldwork. Finally, there is another framed piece of paper with the black typed words, “No hanging out in or around the office!”

A sidewalk extends from outside the office, around the corner, and down the length of the motel. Around the corner from the office is a black metal 2-level stairwell that leads to the second floor. There are two other identical stairwells, one at the middle of the motel near Room 30 and another at the end near Room 38. Above each stairwell is a small fire exit sign. At the bottom of the first stairwell is a Coke machine which is well stocked and used by residents of the motel and trailer park. Underneath this stairwell is a hodge podge of debris, such as two by fours, wood panels, small plastic trash cans, and the occasional bike. Sitting near this first stairwell is a large green trashcan. A similar black trashcan sits at the base of the second stairwell, along with a collection of a half dozen bikes that Reg accumulated over time and locked to the metal.

On the first floor of the motel are Rooms 1 through 15. The exterior of these first floor rooms is red brick and each room has a large rectangular window with smaller thinner windows that open outward on each side. These windows are painted with a sea
green trim that matches the color of the room doors. The door handles are silver and on the bottom of the doors are rectangular gold plates, while the room numbers are small black plates with white numbers. Mounted into the brick next to each room are black light fixtures which come on around 8 in the evening with dim yellow lights.

The interior of a first floor room is distinctive from the second floor. First floor rooms have a front living area and back bedroom area that are separated by a floor to ceiling wall that juts out into the entire space, creating a “C” of floor space. This wall has a large square window cut out of it that one could easily climb or pass large items through. These rooms come with carpets and curtains. In the back left or right corner of each room is the bathroom, which contains a toilet, shower stall, sink, and mirror. The bathroom ceilings are square foam tiles, while the main room has a solid stucco ceiling. In each bedroom area is an air conditioner/heater unit or as is sometimes the case, the space where one would be.

Although rooms on the first floor are numbered 1 through 15, that is not to say that the first floor has 15 habitable rooms. For the duration of my stay at the motel, room 1 was never occupied. This was likely due to the fact that the green curtains were pressed up against the window with cardboard and in between this cardboard and the window were dozens of small dead beetles, their brown skeletons crushed and falling apart. Room 6 at one time belonged to Marc, who worked at the car dealership, and for a time being Jake, who moved in with him to save money. However, their stay ended in February 2013 when the ceiling tiles of the bathroom caved in due to a leak. At the end of my research in June 2013 this room had still not been repaired to rent. The same can be said for Room 5, which belonged to Jake, then me, and was left uninhabitable from December through the
end of the study due to a plumbing problem which I will elaborate on later. Room 8 is actually a storage room with no windows that was at one time locked with a padlock. Inside that room are boxes upon boxes of soap made in Korea, sitting unopened because they are not distributed to residents as intended. Down a small set of stairs and sitting on a dirty floor in the back of the room are a water heater and a set of breakers. The presence of these breakers is the reason for the missing lock, because residents constantly blew fuses and needed to reset their breakers. Reg showed me this trick when I blew the fuse after running my fridge, TV, microwave, and space heater all at once. Rooms 11 and 12 are also used as storage and visible through the large windows are several rolled rugs, broken air conditioning units, siding, chairs, and other random items.

On the second floor are Rooms 23 to 42. Rooms 16 to 22 were part of a rear section of the motel that was demolished in 2011 due to asbestos.76 A landing with creaky wood paneling extends the length of the motel from the first stairwell to the last. This landing is covered with a very thin green carpet the shade of an unkempt miniature golf course, and is torn in several places, exposing the wood below. Lining the landing is a black metal railing about waist high. Early on Natalie warned me not to lean on it as it did not seem safe and as time progressed I told other new residents the same. This landing was often littered with chairs placed outside rooms, as well as small tables, empty bottles and beer cars, and other debris such as eggshells, TVs, and coffee cups.

Unlike the first floor, rooms on the second floor have three tall rectangular windows, the left and right of which open outward. The doors, exterior lights, and window trim are the same as the first floor, as is the brick exterior. These rooms are smaller than the first floor rooms, lacking the front and back sections. Each of these
rooms has at least one bed (several have two) and a bathroom in the back corner with a toilet and tub. The sink is outside of the bathroom with a mirror above it. Mounted on the back wall between the bathroom door and sink is an air conditioner/heater or the location where one used to be. There are also air grates on the right or left walls of the room. The carpet in most of these rooms is the same blue as downstairs, although I saw several rooms with tan carpeting. Room 32 is not inhabitable, because it is used as storage and filled with shelves, toilets, a microwave, and other materials. Despite the differences in appearance between upstairs and downstairs rooms, the costs are exactly the same.  

Living Conditions of the Boardwalk Motel

While the preceding description presents a visual depiction of the motel property, its rooms, and local neighborhood, the conditions of individual rooms are perhaps its most defining physical characteristic. In order to illustrate the living conditions that a new resident might encounter, I will describe the living conditions that I experienced during my stay at the motel. These conditions were significant because they created stress among residents who often had to address them using their own precious resources.

The first room I moved into was Room 34 on the second floor. Even getting into my room was a chore because the old locks in the rooms sometimes failed to work and I spent several minutes putting the key in the lock, wrestling with it, and begging it to turn. There was no obvious solution to this problem, so I would just remove the key and wait a minute or two before trying again. I saw other residents struggle with this same problem and early on I worried that if I ever needed to quickly access my room as a safe haven, the lock would be my undoing.
When I moved into Room 34, the furniture included: one bed, two small wooden desks with one large drawer and a storage space underneath, a wooden chair with worn red cushion, wooden table with a phonebook atop it, and a wooden dresser with four drawers and a bible and TV sitting on top. There was a pair of blue/green/grey curtains against the window with vertical tan lines that could have been stains from long ago or part of the design. The top left portion of one curtain was not attached to the curtain rod so I had to keep the desk pushed up against the window to hold the curtain in place. The walls of the room were a fleshy white and on the left wall, about 4 feet up, was a working smoke detector, as well as a golf ball-sized hole, and a large square of peeling wall. Above the bed was a framed painting that could be found in just about every room of a lake surrounded by trees. On either side of the painting were gold wall mounted lamps with off kilter and peeling shades. The dark blue carpet was so worn in places that there was tan thread exposure. Next to the dresser was a non-functioning lamp that was practically falling out of the wall, as well as a full length mirror.

The sink had a large fluorescent light above it which was harshly bright. A set of white towels sat on the counter. The basin of the sink itself was a sickly yellow with rust near the drain and hair on the rim. When I turned on the cold water it came out with a bit of force, while the hot water came out slower, but got scalding hot almost immediately. Underneath the sink were exposed pipes and a hole that appeared to go down into the ceiling of the room below. A thin wooden panel was set against the counter to cover the hole, but it could be easily moved and I worried about rodents or insects crawling into the room from the hole (Figure 9). Next to the sink was a broken air conditioner, more of an
exoskeleton really, as there were no knobs and the interior cover was missing, exposing a dusty interior with nothing inside that resembled anything in working order.

The bathroom had a toilet filled with blue cleaning liquid and there was a plunger sitting next to it. A light switch turned on both the overhead light and ceiling fan. The floor was white tile while the walls were white and tan. A white shower curtain white with a square pattern and several brown stains lined the tub and there were also ceiling tiles missing in several places.

In some places the floor creaked uneasily as I walked over and I worried that at some point I might go crashing through it (which actually happened later to someone else). There was no fridge, microwave, phone, or trash can in the room and none of these items were standard in any room. While other rooms had peep holes in their doors, mine did not. Fortunately, I did have a chain lock that appeared fairly sturdy. Unfortunately, the locking bolt did not always fit into the locking part of the door frame. The bracket itself was damaged and even when the lock did catch, the door itself could be pushed in several centimeters, which meant that someone could generate enough force to break the chain lock with a kick or shoulder charge. On my first night I told Elizabeth and she called Randy from the Park Place, who appeared a few hours later and fixed the bracket.

I ended up moving out of Room 34 on the 29th of June because the summer heat made the room unbearable without air conditioning. Other residents used fans and opened their windows during the evening, but I worried about someone entering my room through an open window when I was asleep. When my first friend, Roy moved to Room 14, his old room with a working air conditioner opened up so I moved in. Room 29 was similar to mine, however the layout was flipped so the bed, sink, dresser, and bathroom
were on the opposite side of the room. Also flipped were the hot and cold water handles so I kept turning on the hot water by accident and scalding my hands. The room came equipped with a black refrigerator and a TV, although the volume did not work so I switched it out with the one from Room 34 as well as the remote that I bought from the SSK department store and programmed for the TV. I learned that the light switches near the door also operated the outlet that many people plugged their refrigerators into so I made a note to never flip it off.79

My stay in Room 29 was incredibly comfortable in terms of temperature. I biked to and from the motel on nice days and was happy to arrive at the motel and enter a cool room. Unfortunately, another ailment of the room emerged after a month. One night in late July I was watching TV after a Burger King dinner. I was resting my eyes when on the edge of my vision, I saw a small yellow spider about the size of an M&M, but far less appetizing. I brushed it off the bedspread and then saw another one, which I disposed of just as quickly. Wondering if perhaps they hitched a ride from my old room, I shook out my bedspread. About ten minutes later I saw two more, this time on the other side of the bed. I dealt with them and sat wondering where they were coming from. I worried that if more appeared they would blend in so well with the bedspread that I would not be able to find them until they were crawling all over me. At this time I made the awful mistake of looking up towards the ceiling and in a horror movie moment of traumatic comprehension, I saw that the spiders were crawling on the ceiling and had been dropping onto the bed. The resolution of this mystery was too much for me to handle, so I retreated home for the night to choose my next course of action.
Luckily for me, Jake moved out of his room on the first floor a few days later so I took over his old space in Room 5. Jake left me a blue couch, a fridge with some crumbs and dark brown liquid floating around inside it, and two wooden tables, one of which had a brown crust all over the top because he and Reg ate oysters off it one evening. He also left me a power strip because none of the outlets along the right wall actually worked, as well as a green trash can. The bathroom was absolutely disgusting, with mold, dirt, grime, and who knows what else on every surface including the cracked tile floor of the shower. A gallery of dead bugs hung suspended from the cobwebs in the window. The toilet also required some DIY ethic from me when I noticed that it was improperly sealed to the floor and the water that was supposed to run into the tank, ran onto the floor in the form of a puddle when the toilet was flushed. I fixed the toilet with some caulk that I bought from Big Sales and was happy to see that it stemmed the flow of water onto the floor. The room also lacked a working air conditioner, but I remedied this with a purchased fan. I found out in the winter that the room also lacked heat, and I addressed this with a space heater.

My time in Room 5 came to an end in the middle of December. I returned to the room after a few days away and when I opened the door my nose picked up the scent of decay, sending me scrambling to find whatever died inside my room. It turned out that the source of the smell was a pool of water an inch deep covering my bathroom floor. I was not able to discern where the water was coming from, but it had already soaked the carpet near the bathroom door and the room was clearly not inhabitable. Larry attempted to fix the problem by running a vacuum through the shower drain, where he drew up sand and rocks. He also sucked up the water from the floor and dried it with towels. After an
hour, water still rose through cracks in the floor and around the shower stall, and seeped into the bedroom. Larry called the city water and sewer department and when they arrived they could not access the pipes. The next day the motel owner brought in a plumber who told Larry that he needed to fix the toilet, which he did, but the water continued to pour in. At this point I asked for a different room and moved into room 27 upstairs, which at one point was inhabited by the tall and skinny Sam.82

I stayed uneventfully in Room 27 until the end of my research in June 2013. Upon reflection, I realize that I was incredibly fortunate to be able to disengage from the motel and resume my life of comfort. The reality is that for the residents of the motel, the conditions I encountered were par for the course and they were well aware of the deterioration that they dealt with on a daily basis. These conditions were the result of attitudes held by the owner and staff that grew in response to the type of residents who were given rooms by social services. Elizabeth stated as much when she complained about the amount of effort that Larry put into cleaning and maintaining the rooms:

*I told him, this ain’t a suite, just fuckin’ do the room, get it cleaned, paint it, patch up the holes and paint it. You know he does it, eh. Yeah but it’s not gonna stay that way. You’re only getting guys from social services, they don’t give a shit, just. The owner don’t give a shit and he doesn’t wanna spend a lot of money and here you wanna say, you need all these fuckin’ tiles here and they cost money, they cost like $50. He says they’re dirty or something, just paint over it, you know? I said look it, the owner ain’t gonna go hire you to build a house for somebody, just fuckin’ do the, do the, do it the best ya can. This ain’t a…you been up in that fuckin’ one room a week. But it doesn’t matter, nobody gives a shit. All the owner wants you to do, patch up the holes and hurry up and paint it. I tried tellin’ him that, I said you gonna learn. It ain’t like the owner’s gonna give you a cookie, he don’t give a shit. You will learn! Do it the cheapest way you can.*

Natalie echoed this when she said that the Boardwalk and Park Place used to be nice and that the owner simply did not invest in them. According to her, the owner let the Boardwalk go when he started taking sex offenders because they guaranteed him money
no matter what the conditions. Tat gave his own version of the fall from grace one night:

*I was here when this shit was like brand new. This shit was immaculate, this shit was immaculate bro. The only thing bad, was the parking lot, that’s the only thing bad about the whole shit. We had phones, all, every TV had a remote control. But niggas, beatin’ it up, beatin’ it up a little bit. Then once that new law for the sex offenders shit passed, you know that sex offenders could live anywhere but hotels are limited, to only have so many, that’s when he started taking welfare recipients in. These nigga, they just started rippin’ phones out the thing, takin’ refrigerators [sic] wid dem, know what I mean? Sellin’ refrigerators for two hits, like yo.*

To be fair to Elizabeth and the owner, I did see similar behavior from residents during my stay. Biggie shamelessly scrapped a television and refrigerator from an upstairs room when it was vacated and when I moved out at the end of my study, Larry called me to make sure that the fridge and microwave I had taken from the room were indeed mine.

*The Boardwalk Motel and an Era of Hostility*

The quotes from Elizabeth and Tat speak volumes about the tumultuous existence of the Boardwalk. While it is not quite clear whether the chicken or the egg came first, the Boardwalk deteriorated due to a perpetuating and self-fulfilling prophecy. Ownership took a position that the residents did not care about the condition of the motel and residents took the position that because of the conditions, the owner and staff did not care about them. The result of this mutual hostility turned the Boardwalk Motel into an epicenter of cultural conflict; a dumping ground for those deemed socially unacceptable, and a lightning rod for criticism from the local middle class community.

The characteristics of Riverfort and Dutchland presented in Table 2 shed light on the causes for community backlash against the Boardwalk. Perhaps the reason that the Boardwalk Motel was so controversial in Dutchland is because it represented the very elements that people seek to escape by moving to the suburbs. Recall Hayner’s assertion
that “problems of urban culture [...] are found in an accentuated form in the hotel.” The Boardwalk Motel brought the city to the suburbs.

To the residents of Dutchland, the knee-jerk reaction was to stereotype the Boardwalk Motel and its residents while adopting a mentality for sanitization. This course of action is much less time-consuming than the alternative, which would be to understand who the residents of the Boardwalk are, what the motel means to them, and how the state of the Boardwalk is symptomatic of societal problems much bigger and more complex than “sex offenders and all that.” In the next several chapters I will use my observations and whenever possible, the words of the residents themselves, to answer two important questions. Who are the residents of the Boardwalk Motel and what role did the Boardwalk Motel play in their lives? It is my hope that the answers will show the many dimensions of the Boardwalk’s residents, who are far more than stereotypes.
Chapter 3: Pathways to Motel Life

To understand residents of the Boardwalk Motel in greater depth than what is presented in popular discourse, it is important to understand how they arrived there in the first place. Residents of the motel can be conceptualized as “social refugees.” Social refugees are persons who have been forced or impelled to relocate within their own country of citizenship due to the influence of social context and/or social policy. While there are dramatic differences between refugees fleeing war-torn countries and those living at in a motel, the literature on global refugees and internally displaced citizens provides an intriguing framework for understanding motel residents.

There are two phases of movement and migration to consider from the refugee literature: that of “flight” and “settlement.”¹ Flight is the phase of voluntary or involuntary displacement that creates a migrant in motion.² Settlement is the act that ends a migrant’s flight.³ Movement can also be viewed in terms of “push” and “pull” factors. The “push” factors of an old home environment provide migrants with causal motivations to leave, while the “pull” factors of the new home give migrants a purpose and wish to migrate.⁴ These migratory patterns and their relation to social refugees can be clearly seen in studies of migratory workers on the frontiers of America.⁵

The story of the Boardwalk begs the answers to two questions. Where did residents live prior to moving to the Boardwalk Motel? What were the push and pull factors that brought residents to the Boardwalk Motel? In this chapter, I will use this social refugee framework to describe the factors that influenced settlement at the Boardwalk.
One important point to keep in mind is that much of the information in this chapter comes from resident narratives that cannot be verified as fact. However, I treat these accounts as narrative presentations of self. The details of these accounts, however true, are meant to help the teller make sense of their lives and present an idealized self to others. Therefore, whatever the factual veracity of these narratives, residents presented them as truthful accounts when they interacted with each other on a daily basis. The presented idealized self (if not our “true” self) is the self that we want to be, and understood as such, tells us a great deal about the storyteller. In that respect, narratives are crucial to understanding motel life because they were intended to influence residents’ daily lives and aid in the negotiation of their world.

*Previously Environments*

On a simple level, this chapter is concerned with how residents got from points A to B. A represents their previous environment while B represents the Boardwalk Motel. Pathways to the motel can be categorized based on how the living conditions of the motel compared to a previous environment. The motel was not universally experienced as a horrible place to live, but rather was assessed in relation where an individual came from and where they expected to go. Residents arrived at the motel via one of three trajectories that were dependent on their social position. Many sex offenders and other parolees came to the motel directly from prison, which made the motel a unique location because it lacked the institutional authority present in prison. Other residents viewed the motel as “stepping up” from their previous homes, while for others the motel was a “step down.” By showing how residents viewed their move to the motel, we can get a sense of the meanings that these social refugees attributed to events in their lives.
For those returning to society directly from prison (which included Ryan, Slash, Noonan, Patch, Sonny, Cinque, Dale, Darryl, Price, Tat, Walt, Jasper, and Harry) the motel was not a step up or step down, but a completely different environment. Sociologist Erving Goffman describes prison as a “total institution” that is both designed and administrated in order to protect the public from those inside.\(^7\) Prison is a unique housing environment because it is custodial and inmates in prison have little to no control over their living situations. Because the immediate goal of prison is community protection, the welfare and care of inmates are not priorities for prison administrators.\(^8\) Rather, according to sociologist Gresham Sykes, the prison experience deprives inmates of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security.\(^9\) The ex-prisoners who resided at the Boardwalk Motel recognized that prison was a fairly unique environment, as the dread-locked Cinque told me, “It’s its own world.” However, some aspects of prison culture did seep into motel life. Darryl, a registered sex offender, brought his prison mindset to the motel and when I asked how he adjusted to the motel, he said, “Just like prison. You scope out the place, pay attention to what’s going on, then decide who you wanna talk to. The same thing, there’s no difference whatsoever.”

When inmates left prison they arrived at the Boardwalk Motel in the context of reentry. Criminologist Joan Petersilia describes reentry as “all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and to live as law-abiding citizens.”\(^10\) Those who have not faced reentry themselves lack knowledge about the hardships it presents. One of the biggest challenges for reentering ex-offenders is finding housing and motel residents released from prison were often
released without a viable housing option.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, the primary role of the Boardwalk was to provide ex-offenders with a roof over their heads.

When parolees were released from prison, they provided parole with a proposed residence. Often, these proposed residences were not viable for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of stability or other residents with criminal histories. In these instances, like any other individual in need of shelter, the parolee applied for emergency housing at the Riverfort DSS office. DSS then worked with onsite workers from the Homeless and Traveler’s Aid Society (HATAS) to place them in emergency housing. HATAS is a DSS funded service that is intended to centralize intake of all homeless individuals and coordinate housing placements for DSS. This housing included shelters such as the city mission within the city of Riverfort, or motels such as the Boardwalk that were designated as an “emergency shelter.” Those in need of housing after DSS had closed were immediately referred to HATAS and then approved through DSS the next business day.\textsuperscript{12} Although homeless parolees and registered sex offenders were sent to locations other than the Boardwalk, the Boardwalk was particularly viable because it did not violate the New York State Sexual Assault Reform Act’s 1000 foot residence restriction applied to Level 3 sex offenders or those with victims under age 18.

Cinque had 14 months of parole left when he was released to the Boardwalk. He thought the motel was “alright” and told me that DSS put him there because he “didn’t have a place to go.” Like other parolees who arrived directly from prison, Darryl was placed at the Boardwalk by social services and told me about the day he was released:

\textit{I didn’t get to Riverfort until ten-thirty at night. They made me go to the city mission, to call HATAS, then HATAS had me to go the Boardwalk. And I asked, so how am I s’posed to get out there? That’s not my problem, walk. Luckily the buses were running when I had to come up. HATAS will call the Boardwalk and ask if}
they have a room and tell ‘em they have someone coming in. They got their own little thing mapped out.

While the Boardwalk provided housing for ex-offenders, it did not satisfy the important need for employment. Most residents (regardless of whether they stepped up or stepped down to the Boardwalk) were working to find stable employment and move out. Parolees were often required to find jobs and get off of DSS within a specified time frame, or they risked being sent back to prison. This added another element of pressure from the criminal justice system. In some ways, the location of the motel made it an ideal first step in reentry because the sustainable habitat was filled with places that in theory, provided job opportunities. Unfortunately, the job prospects for those with criminal histories are quite bleak. A criminal history substantially reduces the likelihood of job callbacks, and in terms of race, whites with criminal histories may actually have better prospects than blacks without.¹³

DSS and parole wanted residents to get legitimate jobs, and residents wanted any sort of income to help them live day to day. A month after Darryl’s release, Jake and I were hanging out on the stairs and Darryl mentioned that he had put in over 40 applications around the area and had not been offered a single job. He lamented, “18 years in prison and I’m twisted. No one wants to hire me, fuck ‘em.”

Without legitimate employment, the pressure to find other sources of income grew. Parolees with histories of criminal behavior wrestled with whether or not to continue criminal careers at the motel. Many claimed to have been involved with crime from a young age and because of this salience the temptation of criminality was enduring. Cinque’s justification for his early entrance into criminal behavior was, “I’m a product of my environment” and he spoke highly of the drug dealers that he saw in his
neighborhood as a kid, “I’m seeing new mitts, new sneakers, I’m seeing fresh stuff every
day. So in the back of my mind already, that’s what I wanna be. Bam! I was like 11, 10.
Wanted to be that right there.” This criminal activity had a direct impact on his transience
because he was released from prison for drugs and weapons charges, not his sexual
offense. When he came to the motel, he got back into selling marijuana to earn more
income in order to move out of the motel (because he did not get enough hours at his job
at Waste Management) and was eventually sent back to prison in October for this
behavior.

Like Cinque, Reggie’s friend Tat had a history of selling drugs and he reflected,
“I kinda fucked up my whole entire life with that.” When Tat got out of prison he knew
that he could make easy money by going back to his old ways, but Tat was determined to
move on and told me, “But, right now, God is givin’ me another chance. If I don’t die by
some miraculous lightning strike, you know what I mean? Um, then uh, I will keep
steppin’ my right foot forward.” He was still looking for legitimate work when he got
kicked out of the motel a few weeks later for playing loud music.

Darryl also claimed to be involved with crime from a young age:

I grew up in a very criminal environment. Eight years old I was moving drugs,
nine years old I was given a .22, a girl, and a blunt for my birthday. Uh, by the
time I was twelve, I was doin’ robberies, burglaries, cons. I’m one of nine kids,
the youngest of seven boys, every one of my brothers has been to prison. Family
business.

He chuckled and said, “Boy, I really did a lot a foul things didn’t I?” These foul things
included being a drug mule in New York City when he was 11, and later, laundering
millions of dollars by having senior citizens go to Atlantic City and exchange $9,500
cash for chips and then cash the chips out in the form of a check. Darryl told me on
several occasions that he should not have been sent to prison for the sex offense he was convicted of, but could have served similar time for any number of other crimes. Upon release from prison, he had old friends offering him drugs and guns to sell in order to get back on his feet. Darryl turned these opportunities down because he felt that the prison experience had changed his life goals:

Don’t need anything, I need a job, a place to live, that’s it. I don’t need money. I need, I need enough money to live on, I don’t need to be rich. I don’t need to own everything in sight. What I need is a nice little job, enough to pay my bills. And my bills are simple. Give me someplace to live, and I pay the gas and lights, lemme pay for cable, have some food in the house, and pay for my phone and, the bus. And then let me find a mate, a significant other. That’s it.\textsuperscript{14}

These experiences highlight how problematic it was to place ex-offenders at the Boardwalk. Much of the motel culture revolved around drug use and because of this, when parolees had difficulty finding work, their parole-approved housing situation provided a tempting black market for those looking to become suppliers. This is just one way in which the parole experience at the Boardwalk left much to be desired.

The stigma attached to parolees was certainly a cause for the dearth of employment opportunities given to those at the Boardwalk, but this was not the only stigma that hampered reentry. At the motel, all parolees were viewed as potential sexual offenders, which added another landmine that reentering ex-offenders had to navigate when dealing with other residents. In the juvenile justice system, youth released from placement contend with a “dual transition” from placement to community and from youth to adulthood.\textsuperscript{15} For parolees at the Boardwalk, they faced a dual stigma as parolees in society and parolees living at the Boardwalk

Cinque, Dale, Darryl, Price, Tat, Walt, Jasper, and Harry, were all registered sex-offenders released to the motel on parole. Their convictions ranged from adult rape to
child sexual abuse and they were all considered Level 2 and Level 3 offenders, or at medium or high risk of re-offense respectively. The NYS Sex Offender Registry did not list Level 1 offenders (low risk of re-offense) on the public registry and I did not encounter any parolees who admitted to being Level 1 offenders (although Reggie was a Level 1 sex offender who was not on parole).

Cinque was convicted in 1997 of attempted sexual abuse against a 13 year-old girl. He was sentenced to a maximum of three years in prison and after that release, was caught with weapons and drugs, and sent back to prison for 10 years. He and Darryl were required to wear GPS ankle bracelets at all times, although Darryl told me he did not mind because parole could never claim he was somewhere that GPS did not register at.

Like Cinque, Darryl was coming out of prison for a conviction other than his sexual offense. He was in prison from 1994 to 2011 for sexual abuse and sodomy with an eight year-old boy, a crime that Darryl vehemently denied. After being released in April 2011, Darryl lived in a rooming house in Riverfort and he told me:

*Well the first time around it was overwhelming, coming outta jail after seventeen years everything changed. Cell phones, listen, people walking around in flip flops. This is going to sound a little bit crazy, but I actually have problems adjusting back to society. It was great to have peace and quiet and not have to talk to people, but after three weeks the peace and quiet actually started to bother me. You have a lot of free time in prison, you hang out with people. Then you’re out here, you’re running around looking for a job, but you really don’t sit down and just, talk. You just don’t converse.*

He was sent back to prison in August 2011 for violating his parole:

*What happened was two friends came over, they missed the bus, ended up spending the night. Parole knew they were there. Next morning I left at eight o’clock, they left, nine o’clock they broke back into my room, they got into it with the day manager, the day manager called DSS. DSS sanctioned me for 30 days, parole violated me for 13 months.*
When I met Darryl upon his second release, his parole had been extended until 2019. I asked him after a month and a half if he expected to be where he was and he said, “It’s hard to say ‘cause last time I was at this point, and I didn’t get nowhere else.”

The many challenges of reentry wore on Darryl as he attempted to navigate the world of work, housing, and parole. He claimed that DSS threatened him and told me, “my case worker she said if I don’t find an apartment for $350 a month by next week she’s gonna kick me off DSS for 30 days.” Jake exclaimed, “Where the fuck is there an apartment for three fifty a month? Nowhere! If there was, I would be there.” Darryl worried about finding housing because if he lost his DSS benefits then parole would violate him and send him back to prison. DSS told him to go on Craigslist and look for housing but Darryl was not allowed to use a computer and his parole officer would not let him live with another person, which made a rooming house or single-room occupancy the only affordable option. More importantly, his sex offender status made many locations off limits because his parole conditions prohibited him from being (and therefore living) within 300 yards of places where children congregated and 1000 feet from schools.

I encountered several other parolees who agreed to participate in the study, but offered no more insight into their lives other than telling me they were on parole. Darryl, Tat, and Cinque were the only ones who disclosed significant details and socialized with me on a regular basis. There is good reason for this because parolees put themselves at risk by being around drugs and alcohol or other activities prohibited by their conditions of parole. Therefore, the safest course of action for many was to stay to themselves and try to move out as soon as possible. They recognized that the motel was not a step up or step down, but rather a thin sheet of ice that had to be carefully navigated if they wanted
to keep their heads above water.

**Stepping Up**

The residents who viewed coming to the Boardwalk Motel as “stepping up” migrated from environments that were viewed as undesirable for a variety of reasons. These conditions acted to push residents out in search of settlement. In this respect, the Boardwalk was a step up because it pulled residents from poor living situations and gave them what they considered to be a better home. There were two qualities that made the motel a step up: independence/autonomy and safety, which often went hand in hand.

Many residents stepped up to the Boardwalk from locations specifically designed to house the homeless. These locations included shelters and rooming houses. In the context of stepping up, these environments provided little autonomy and safety, so the pull factor of the Boardwalk was quite strong. Burt or “Mr. Clean,” previously lived in such a rooming house in downtown Riverfort where he shared a bedroom with eight other men. The move to the Boardwalk was a step up because it afforded him more privacy and security than the boarding house and he told me, “If I leave things here, it’s still there when I come back.” For Burt, the safety of his possessions was paramount and the Boardwalk afforded him the peace of mind to leave belongings in his room.

Moving to the Boardwalk was considered a huge step up by Dee and Toby, recovering addicts who had previously lived apart in separate shelters for the homeless where they lacked safety and independence as a couple. When Toby had accrued the maximum allowed 30 days at his shelter, HATAS placed him at the Boardwalk. Because DSS was only paying rent for Toby, Dee had to sneak into the motel because she
technically was not supposed to be staying with him. I sat with Dee and Toby one day in
January and Dee recalled:

"Um, our first night here was like sanctuary. Like, we were scared we were gonna
get caught ‘cause I wasn’t supposed to be here. Yeah so for the first two weeks, I
would sneak in, um, yup, I would sneak in and it was like sanctuary, it was so
important that we had a room to ourselves ‘cause we had to live homeless
separate. So to actually live together, it was, it was utterly phenomenal. Oh yeah,
we were mixed with, with happiness and joymnt, but yet we were scared. Scared
that it’s gonna be taken away from us, like how long are they gonna let us stay
here and then what can we do to keep it?

And then our unemployment kicked in and we had decided, we had two ways to
go. Go back to where we were, stay in, in homeless places, like I’d stay with Guy
[her former john] and he’d be at the shelter, stay there, save our unemployment
‘til we get an apartment. Or, stay here where we’re together. Right now, we are
together and that’s where we feel safe and comfortable. Nobody wants us ‘cause
we’re drug addicts, like like, let’s just face facts. Nobody wanted us.

Dee and Toby were pulled to the Boardwalk because it represented a safe place for them
to live together. As a couple, they desired a location that felt like a home, instead of a
warehouse full of the homeless. The psychological comfort that they gained from sharing
a living space between only the two of them was so important that they risked DSS
sanctions until they could pay for it on their own.

Many single men came to the motel from the city mission and like other shelters
for the homeless, the mission lacked independence and safety. Darryl’s romantic partner,
Digital found the mission intolerable because he did not enjoy being around large groups
of people in confined space. Therefore, the motel was a considerable step up because it
allowed him to live in relative privacy and avoid conflict that he feared could land him in
jail. After his first night in the motel, he smiled and said, “It was great, it was peaceful
man, bed’s comfy. It’s better than the mission.” Riley also came from the mission and
though he did not plan on staying for long, he said, “This is nice, I have independence, I can do what I want to do.”

Other residents faced a lack of autonomy and safety in environments not specifically sanctioned for the homeless. Biggie and Deirdre lived with a friend in downtown Riverfort and were looking for an alternative that they could afford on their disability and retirement benefits. The fact that they lived in a dangerous neighborhood with regular shootings served as a substantial push factor. After looking at alternatives, they decided to move to the motel because as Biggie said, “it was peaceful and without drama.”

They also desired independence that was missing in an apartment leased to someone else. Living in a shared apartment threatened Biggie and Deirdre’s identities, particularly Biggie’s role as a successful provider for his partner. Biggie acknowledged the motel’s pull, “I love this motel, best thing about it, it’s not the best, but it helped me get my mind back together, all about taking care of me and my girl. I wanted to be finally independent and even though I’m doing it out of a hotel room I’m doing it now.”

Larry, a veteran, moved to the motel in October in another considerable step up that was rooted in a desire for independence. He had been living out of his tan Chevy Lumina while waiting for his next unemployment check to be issued. Larry said that when it finally arrived:

_I says, you know what, I wasn’t brought up like this you know, and uh, I’m not gonna, I’m not. Whatever it costs, to get a room, which is 200, out of my 400, and I says, I’m just doin’ it. I’m just tired of it, you know? I mean, you gotta go ask people where you can shower and, you know. Anyway, this is how I ended up here._

He looked at other motels but decided on the Boardwalk because it was the cheapest.

There were rooms available closer to Riverfort, but they required sharing a bathroom and
Larry was “not big into that.” While Larry could have stepped up from his car to a rooming house, chose not to because it provided less independence than the motel. For Larry, the motel gave him the feelings of independence that allowed him to feel more in control of his day to day life because he did not share amenities with other people.

These examples of stepping up to the motel illustrate that transient living is subject to a large degree of relativity. The prior housing situations of many social refugees were often quite dire. Compared to the inside of a car or a shared room at a shelter, the Boardwalk Motel was tantamount to a safe haven. Outsiders’ judgment of the Boardwalk Motel as a terrible living space masks the fact that it was in fact, better than what some residents experienced previously. Stepping up to the motel required a social refugee to live in an environment that they considered “worse” than the Boardwalk. For many in the middle class, living somewhere “worse” than the Boardwalk is almost incomprehensible, but the residents who stepped up realized that because some living situations instilled more desperation than others, a move to the motel was the best option.

Stepping Down

Other residents “stepped down” from housing that provided more autonomy, safety, and relative comfort. Residents who were pushed from these situations stepped down to the Boardwalk in order to regain footholds in lives that had become suddenly precarious. In this respect, the Boardwalk represented a middle ground on which social refugees settled before possibly stepping further down to starker forms of homelessness.

Sam, the tall and gregarious veteran who grew up in Chicago, and his partner, Justine stepped down to the Boardwalk from an apartment in Riverfort when he lost his job and could not afford the rent. When we spoke about the move to the motel Sam said:
Well it served its purpose, we didn’t have nowhere to stay and we found this place. So you know we found this and it offered us shelter for the time, mostly for me, not for her [Justine]. Mostly for me. I was grateful for it. They coulda said we ain’t got no room. I could went to the shelter or whatever. God knows where I’d be right now. I’m glad I was here, it gave me a chance to get things together, so I ain’t so mad you know. And the owner ain’t real funny. Sometimes we be late a couple times with the rent and he didn’t make a big thing about it.

Sam appreciated the bigger picture and realized that while the Boardwalk was not as nice as where he came from, it was better than where he could be. Sam’s move was out of desperation and he acknowledged that when he said, “hard times make a monkey eat hot peppers.” Such hard times brought Sam and Justine to the motel despite its reputation.

One day, Sam explained the mindset that he brought to his search for housing and how he prepared himself to deal with certain situations:

Chris, when you’re in the elements, you gotta think about survival. People don’t think about that. Sam, I’m put you next door to this guy, he’s a good guy but he hurts people. That’s the only room I got available. Chris, the wind howlin’, got snow on the ground, where am I gonna go Chris? But I got enough money to pay for this month. I’ll worry about next month when it comes. I can either go back out there in the snow and cold and keep trying to find a place or I can live next door to the murderer. I’ll take my chances, I’m a military guy, I’ll take my chances. He a murderer, he did his time, he’s out. See what I’m sayin’, I have to look at the whole picture. He ain’t hurt nobody lately. He’s got a swastika on his goddamn arm and chest, I don’t think I wanna live right next door to him, but you know, to get out the cold so.

When he finally arrived at the Boardwalk, he was not placed next to a murderer, but still had to reconcile with living near registered sex offenders:

We came here, you know, Miss Elizabeth told me we got a room. She told me you know, we got pedophiles here, can’t have no kids, she explained some a da rules, I said okay. My girl’s like wow Sam, says whatchu wanna do honey? I say baby we can take it for now, hopefully we be outta here in a month or two.

Stepping down was a marker of residential instability because it was usually the result of being pushed from a previous environment, rather than being allured by the
prospect of the motel. Ed and I sat outside drinking beers one day and I asked him what he thought of the motel. He touched his long hair and mused, “It’s a dump, no room service or anything, no maids.” Before coming to the motel Ed was placed at a boarding house in Riverfort by his adult services caseworker. I asked what brought him to the motel from there and he raised his beer and said, “This, they didn’t allow drinking. But I drank anyway. They have rats, other people who live there, tell the manager what’s going on.” Ed did not plan on staying at the motel long and found its location somewhat inconvenient, “I’ve got a, all my business and stuff is in the city, you know. So I gotta walk half a fuckin’ mile down there to get the bus stop and half an hour on the bus, you know, pain in the ass.”

The young couple of Elisha and Avery lived in an apartment rented by Avery’s parents, but fights between them and Elisha made the situation untenable. The two moved out and decided on the Boardwalk at the recommendation of a friend. When asked what he thought of the move, Avery mulled the question, then shrugged and said, “It’s not what I’m used to. I stick to myself, make sure my room is clean so I got that.” In a strange twist of circumstance, Elisha’s parents and her brother, Clive moved into the motel in the winter after Elisha and Avery had left. Clive told me that his father had lost his welding job and he justified their presence at the motel by saying, “We’re tight on money, that’s the only reason we’re living here.” The need for Clive to provide a reason for living at the Boardwalk spoke to his view that the motel was a step down.

Many residents moved to the Boardwalk from other motels or hotels. Patch was staying at a motel used by DSS as an emergency shelter when he was kicked out for having a woman in his room. This violated his parole conditions as well as the emergency
housing stipulations provided by DSS. HATAS then placed him at the Boardwalk where Tat and I encountered him the night he arrived. Patch was on the phone with HATAS trying to get moved because he felt the Boardwalk was an obvious step down. He explained his situation to us:

*But they fuckin’ kicked me, I was fuckin’ right down there man in this nice ho-fuckin’ hotel man. Fuckin’ kicked me out man. I’m tryin’ to call HATAS man, so I can tell these motherfuckers, that I’m, that I’m here. That’s there’s mice and all this shit up in here so they can move me the fuck outta here. I had it good down in that hotel man. I had it fucking good down there man.*

Roy and his girlfriend arrived at the Boardwalk from a motel on Main Street closer to Riverfort. They spent several days at that motel but ended up moving to the Boardwalk because Roy could not justify paying $250 a week, “It was too much, and it was too small. It was okay for a day or two, but not a week.”

Many residents migrated from the Save More Inn, only a hundred yards away on Main Street. Jake lived at the Save More and met Reggie and Sky through work at KFC. They talked Jake into moving to the Boardwalk to be closer to them and to save $20 a week in rent. While at the Save More, Jake had a brand new mattress, box spring, and air conditioner. He told me, “They actually keep the place up around there. It’s nicer than it is here.” Jake chose to move to the Boardwalk, but it was a step down because the Save More offered better living conditions.

Other residents viewed the Save More as more reputable because of its clientele. Reggie said, “It’s family oriented. They don’t house no fricken pedophiles…yeah they’re decent down there, good people.” He and Sky lived there for four months before moving to the Boardwalk. They were pushed out of the Save More because the owners found out about Reggie’s sex offender status, which is somewhat ironic given Reggie’s earlier
statement. As Sky told me, “Then they found out about Reg’s thing. We don’t house that type of people here.” They were not able to get the money together for an apartment so they moved into the Boardwalk.18

Love and her son, Ben arrived at the Boardwalk from the Save More in late May with their belongings in the back of a red pickup truck. When Love moved in she was immediately put off by the conditions, which she claimed were worse than the Save More. She complained to Larry, who then vented to me and Spike:

*This room is clean, there’s nothing wrong with it! Where the fuck am I gonna get curtains from? It is what it is, they’re all nasty! Motherfucker, she says it’s worse. How could it be worse? I cleaned every fucking thing. I tried to be nice to her. I said, I’m sorry, I was, I got a little upset. Then I asked her, I said is this better than that other place? No, it’s worse. Well then move the fuck back then!*

Vito and Slash lived at the Save More Inn with Vito’s sister. Slash was on parole for a drug charge, but unlike the other parolees described in this chapter, he did not come to the motel directly from prison.19 However, when unspecified consequences of Vito’s sister’s drug addiction led to them losing their room, Vito and Slash moved into the Boardwalk. Ramòn and his girlfriend lived at the Save More before coming to the Boardwalk and he told me, “Honestly, we only left, whatever the case ‘cause the room we were in at that time had an issue. They didn’t have another room for us and they said you can come back in like a week. But we didn’t have nowhere to go so we came here.” Like Clive, Ramòn felt the need to justify why they came to the Boardwalk.

The concept of having “nowhere to go” requires some elaboration. Terri Lewinson calls this similar emotional struggle among residents of a higher tier extended-stay motel, “liminal living.”20 While Boardwalk residents who stepped down sometimes did have other places to go, these options were viewed as less desirable or unacceptable so residents felt as if they had no other option. Unmarried couples without children who
went to DSS faced the prospect of being sent to separate shelters. The few residents with cars could have lived out of their vehicles, but that was hardly a stable situation. Those who stepped down viewed the Boardwalk as the one place to “flop” (or sleep) that was not on the streets. Jake and Sky acknowledged this one day as we sat outside and Jake muttered, “This place sucks.” Sky nodded solemnly and said, “But if you got no money and no place to go.” Sam summed it up when he ranted, “This is like the last stop motel, it really is. This is one fucking stop from the hell hole. They either fight to get back up on your feet or you get sucked down here.”

**Histories of Transience**

The experiences of stepping up, stepping down, and returning to society from prison offer insight into the housing situations that immediately preceded settlement at the Boardwalk Motel. As I will show, the path to the motel for many refugees was not a simple A to B movement. Instead, residents arrived at the motel after pinballing around a variety of housing locations. The push factors that led residents to the Boardwalk from their previous environments were only the most recent destabilizing events in what were histories of transience. When I asked residents what brought them to the Boardwalk, some of them chose answers that masked previous bouts of residential instability. For example, Vito and Reggie both told me that they used to live in apartments of their own. It was only after getting to know them that I learned that they came from the Save More Inn. These attempts to hide the past speak to the presentation of self. Living in one motel could be presented as the result of bad luck, but a history of homelessness was harder to publicly justify. Therefore, in order to understand how living in the Boardwalk influenced resident behavior, it is important to dive deeper into their transient lives.
Residents gave both brief and detailed glimpses into histories of homelessness that preceded their arrival at the Boardwalk. Trim, the tattooed construction worker, mentioned that he lived in a tent in Las Vegas several years prior and Cinque alluded to living in a shelter and other motels during a prior release on parole. Burt had a history of living in shelters through DSS and bounced between them because he could only stay in each for 30 days. He eventually moved around to different motels, including one that was $88 a week where he killed 12-15 roaches a day and could hear rats gnawing under the floor boards, “It was just uh, it was, the worst of the worst.” Roy lived in shelters in Alabama and described them as very unpleasant:

*Down South it was horrible [sic]. If you go to any other state but New York you will hate how they treat you. Breakfast at 4:45am, they said you eat breakfast and go find a job at 5:30 in the morning. What’s open at 5:30 in the morning? I started watching to see where everyone was going, they were going to the beverage store, oh, I’m just trying to get some change for some beer. At 5:30 in the fucking morning?! Oh no.*

Sky’s friend, Fran had an incredibly traumatic experience in a motel. She lived with her husband in a motel north of Pinewood and he passed away from illness while living in the room. Fran told me, “After my husband died, that killed me, ‘cause he died in the motel room we were staying in. And I had to go back to the motel room and sleep in the same bed we slept in.” She worked Burger King at the time and her co-workers told her to take time off, but she kept working because she did not want to sit in the room all day long.

Staying with friends was a common living situation in the histories of motel residents. Biggie and Deirdre lived in the Save More Inn, then the Boardwalk, before moving out to a friend’s in a rough section of downtown Riverfort. One night, Biggie took the time to reflect on their relationship while he watched Deirdre sleep and decided,
“We goin’ back to the hotel.” Larry was staying with a friend who rented an apartment in Riverfort, but Larry got the feeling that the landlord did not want two people staying there, or wanted more money. He then moved in with another friend and stayed for a couple months before it became stressful:

*After that you know, it was just kinda like, he really didn’t want me there. He kept sayin’, this is a temporary thing. I said, if you don’t want me here just tell me, ‘cause there’s nothing worse than not being wanted someplace you know. So eventually I just got so tired of it, I left.*

From there, Larry lived out of his car and then moved to the Boardwalk.

Other residents stayed at numerous hotels/motels before settling at the Boardwalk. Roy and his girlfriend lived at the Park Place because it only charged $150 a week compared to $270 and $250 a week that other motels charged. They stayed at the Park Place for three months and the experience definitely stuck with Roy:

*The Park Place would not pass inspection, someone needs to, you wanna tell somebody, tell ‘em about the owner, man he is an asshole. Go into the office, the blue thing, oh my god, the piss, the funk, the gnats. Elizabeth in the office, she had nothing to offer. I ask her, how is this a motel? She said, we don't care about this motel, this is a pedophile area. I'ma tell you something Chris, the worst three, four months of my life were at the Park Place.*

They moved out and lived at a similar motel several miles down the road for several days before turning to the Boardwalk for a cheaper room.

Jake had a particularly chaotic and extended history of transience that involved motels and rooming houses. It began by moving into his sister’s house after his father passed away:

*Then time and time and time went on, I was stayin’ there. And then okay fine, I went back to Lincolnburg, got in a roomin’ house there. That’s when I met Jelly, and we got an apartment together, and that was goin’ good. But, not good but. Jelly moved out and I took the apartment over, then, I can’t really fuckin’ do this by myself, so I ended up in Westford. In a nice fuckin’ roomin’ house, fuckin’ all brand new shit, you know, um. Ninety bucks a week for a fuckin’ two room deal.*
Had like a little room, my bedroom and shit. The thing is, it was like all past GE and shit and there’s like no bus that runs out there so it’s like a half hour bike ride to get down to the city and in the winter time I can’t fucking do that so I had to move back in with Jelly after his friend Dave moved out. And then he fucking, wasn’t you know, like payin’ his part of the shit and whatever.

And uh, I went to sister’s house for Thanksgiving, for like fuckin’ three days and then I came back and he’s like, well I’m runnin’ power offa [sic] the people upstairs off their fuckin’, box down in the basement. And I’m like, and obviously of course the landlord had to come for something and fuckin’ see that shit. And fuckin’ I’m like, dude. And then we fuckin’ stay at his sister’s house, fuckin’ um, Snyder’s Lake, and then her daughters, his sister’s daughters came home from college and shit.

I had to come back to my fuckin’ sister’s house. And then I ended up down there at Save More for a while after I stayed there for a while. And then I went back to their house. Then I came here [the Boardwalk] for a week. Then I left again and went back down there [his sister’s]. Then I went to the guy that owns fuckin’, Lucky Club [a strip club] up there, he got those fuckin’ rooms and shit. And I was fuckin’ up there for a while for a week. Then back down to their house [his sister’s].

Jake moved back to the Save More and was living there when he met Reg and Sky.

Reg and his girlfriend Sky had an equally intense transient history. As Reg put it,

“Me and her have been through hell and back, six fuckin’ years.” Sky met Reggie in September 2006 at a soup kitchen near the town of Derby, about an hour north of Riverfort. She was living in low-income housing with her brother and Fran. Reggie had been living with his cousin and Sky was in an abusive relationship. Sky told me:

*I met him [Reg] at a soup kitchen in Derby. He heard from, ‘cause I was hangin’ out with his cousin at the time and I didn’t know it was his cousin. And he had told him that my ex-boyfriend was beatin’ the shit outta me. And so he would go to the soup kitchen every day waiting for he and I to show up. He didn’t know who it was, all he heard was a woman was being beaten. He beat the crap outta him.*

Reg claimed that Sky was mad initially, but they got drunk together, hooked up the next day, and had been together ever since. Sky said:

*First night we hung out we stayed up ‘til like four or five in the morning just talking and watching cartoons. Then Fran and my brother got in a fight, she tried to kill herself, she slit her wrist with a, a broken liquor bottle. So I had to leave*
and DSS put me up in a motel for the weekend ‘til Monday when I could go get DSS and find somewhere to go. But by then everything was all said and done at Fran’s house and Reg ended up comin’ stayin’ with me in the motel room and I stayed another week in a room down the way where his cousin was stayin’ with him.

Sky then got fired from her job at Giant Foods in Derby and she and Reggie spent several months living out of a small red convertible, then a Ford Contour, and then a minivan with a mattress in the back. A friend of theirs owned some property so they drove the van onto the property and parked in an area with trees overnight. As Sky put it, “All we had to do was go outta there and two minutes down the road was Stewart’s [a convenience store] so I could get up and go pee in the mornin’.”

When I asked where they ate she said, “We were goin’ to like um, free places, free lunch places, he still had food stamps at that point. So we were able to eat, but, when it came to getting money for cigarettes or his alcohol, it was just non-existent.” They also perfected small scams to get free food from places like Taco Bell and Sky proudly told me, “We’d tell ‘em we came through, something was wrong and they’d replace the order. We got 10 soft shell tacos outta Taco Bell one time.”

After three years together Sky and Reggie moved to an apartment north of Pinewood. One night, Sky and Reggie were sitting in the living room and a woman drove a pickup truck through their wall. Given their proximity to the crash, they were lucky not to be injured. With the apartment uninhabitable, they moved in with Sky’s mother. This situation turned sour when Reggie accused her of stealing $1500 from him. He told me, “I ended up going outside and broke the fuckin’ windshield on the fuckin’ car. You wanna cost me that money? Now take that money and spend it on a new windshield. At
least I know where it’s going now.” Sky’s mother then kicked them out of the house and they were forced to live on her porch. Reggie recalled:

_We weren’t even stayin’ in the house dude, we were sleeping on her porch. I’d sit in the kitchen to drink and eat and I’d use her bathroom to shower and shit. I stayed on. A. Porch. We lived, on, a, porch. Not a room. And I’m still handing you a hundred a week, that’s how we get done dirty and I loan you a shit ton of money and then you fuckin’ play us again after you stole from me. That’s why I had so much animosity towards her mom, me and her mom we do not see eye to man._

They then moved in with Reggie’s uncle, who Sky referred to as a “crackhead.” Sky complained, “You know how many times people tried to break into my bedroom? With me in there?” Soon after moving in, Sky got transferred to the KFC on Main Street near the Boardwalk. Given the situation with Reggie’s uncle, they moved into the Save More, which allowed Sky to be closer to work. After four months, the owners of the Save More found out about Reggie’s sexual offense and told them to leave, at which point they moved to the Boardwalk.

**Biographical Determinants of Fragility**

What can explain this glut of transient experiences among motel residents? By examining resident narratives, I will show how episodes of transience were influenced by cascading events that increased fragility. Fragility was the lack of material goods and social capital that left residents vulnerable to unexpected or self-inflicted disruptions to short and long-term goals. Residents faced a cacophony of self-inflicted and unexpected life experiences that disrupted their goals to the point where transience became almost inevitable. In the next part of this chapter, I will explore the biographical factors that residents presented as context for their social refugee careers.

*Traumatic Experiences*
Many residents were scarred by traumatic experiences that occurred in childhood and adulthood. In several instances, the loss of family was a significant catalyst for residential displacement. Roy was living in Alabama when his father fell ill back in Riverfort. “My dad got sick in July, August of last year, they gave him twenty-four hours to live man. He ended up dying six months later. But my dad got sick and I was like, I'm gonna go see my dad.”

Roy’s father lived with a female partner and Roy and his girlfriend stayed with them when they moved back to Riverfort. When Roy’s father passed, the woman kicked Roy and his girlfriend out of the house, “Auntie came and got me. I'm not going to no shelter, we was broke.” That displacement began the Riverfort-based transient careers that eventually brought Roy and his girlfriend to the Boardwalk.

Jake’s biological father died when he was four months old. The man who then took on the role of Jake’s father was killed in a violent crime a few years before I met Jake. We were enjoying beers out in the parking lot one day in May when he explicitly stated that his homelessness began “When that dumb fuckin’ nigger killed my father.” I asked if he could elaborate on what happened and he said:

_The old man, he was murdered by the fuckin’ two bit nigger next door. I was at work that night. The fuckin’ cops came and got me, you gotta come wid us. I’m like, what? And then I go down there and oh yeah, he was killed and shit. And then fuckin’, well, he walked away scot free. ‘Cause they were sayin’ that I let ‘em in the fuckin’ house and it’s fuckin’ three against one. And I’m like, fucking, well, well, what? I’m not goin’ to fuckin’ jail for fuckin’ shit I didn’t do. So I’m like fine! I assume if I go along with them, fine, he’s gonna get his fucking ass locked up for the rest of his fuckin’ life. So I did that. And then, I got dragged through the mud and he fuckin’ walked away scot free. Oh yeah, we knew him. He lived right next door and we fuckin’ hung out with him and shit. One I day I went to work, and that’s what fuckin’ happened. And fuckin’. And now I’m fuckin’ not happy._

Jake threw his beer on the ground and stormed inside his room. Reg came out and asked,
“What’s Jake’s deal?” Sky shrugged and said, “I dunno, he started, I guess he talked to Chris about the guy who killed his dad and now he’s in a bad mood.” Given Jake and Sky’s reaction, I was inclined to take Jake at his word.

Reggie lost both his parents due to illness and that experience along with other events turned his life upside down. Prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, Reggie and his parents traveled up and down the East Coast as part of a traveling carnival. After the attacks, attendance at the carnival dipped to the point where his parents were forced to sell $500,000 worth of equipment for $150,000 to pay their crew of workers, draining their savings in the process. Shortly after, Reggie’s father died of cancer and his mother passed away due to a stroke. Losing his parents had a profound effect on Reggie and he took the holidays particularly hard. He hated St. Patrick’s day because it was his mother’s birthday, and felt the same about Christmas and Thanksgiving “because it’s all about family. What kind of family I got?” Reggie kept several mementos in his motel room that reminded him of his mother, including a blue angel that he brought to her in the hospital and a pumpkin craft that she made for him on Halloween when he was six.

Biggie’s parents were not deceased, but for all intents and purposes he lost his father and mother during a tumultuous childhood filled with abuse. One summer day, Biggie and I sat outside his room and he recalled details about his upbringing. Usually very loud and animated, the shirtless Biggie got very quiet as he told me about these experiences. He grew up in the south and when at two years old his family moved to Riverfort because his father got a job working at a meat plant. His mother moved out when Biggie was seven years old due to domestic violence, “My dad used to beat the
crap out of my mom and he used to beat me too. His favorite thing was an extension cord.”

There were also several instances of sexual abuse that stained Biggie’s childhood. Shortly after his family moved to Riverfort, an uncle from the south moved in with them and molested Biggie until he turned 13. At age eight he witnessed what he thought was a case of sexual abuse at the hands of his brother:

Going back to my childhood though, I was more depressed than anything else. One day I’m out playing baseball, I’m eight, my mom had just left. Out there playing baseball, uncle just beaten, molested me the weekend before. Best friend said, we need something to drink, we need some water. I go and go to get water and my brother’s at home. Knock on the door, what’s taking so long? A little girl come to the door, no older than four. What you doing? I’m playing house. You know how old she is? I put the little girl out, told her never come back. I never told her parents, I never told anyone though, just she was okay.

Biggie also claimed that he was molested by a female cousin at age 14. He reflected that these early experiences were certainly not what he envisioned for himself when he was younger, “I used to have dreams, dreams of getting married, having kids going to college, a wife staying at home, a good job. I used to dream about bein’ a bus driver.” He claimed that the abuse he suffered in his childhood led to the development of multiple personalities. While I never saw evidence of multiple personalities, it seemed to me that Biggie had bi-polar disorder, as his moods often swung quite drastically and he received disability payments for reasons that he did not share.

Darryl also endured traumatic abuse in his childhood. We sat in his room one winter day and talked about his community involvement with Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Darryl mentioned that he enjoyed speaking about his past in NA because, “By doing your story over and over again to different groups, it gives you a chance to…’Cause like sometimes, alright, like.” He shifted in his seat and sat silent for several
seconds before he continued:

Alright. I got molested when I was eight years old. Alright, and, it was kind of my fault, because I forced my parents into putting me into Cub scouts because I was a sick kid alright. I’ve gotten over that. That really doesn’t affect me anymore. But what I haven’t gotten over and what I still have an issue with, is that when I told my parents after three months, my parents said to me, see, that’s what you get.28

These traumatic experiences increased fragility in profound ways. In the case of Roy, Jake, and Reggie, their experiences were related directly to their transience because they lost their housing as well as emotional connections. These causal episodes speak to the social situations of these residents because for individuals with established independent households, the loss of a parent does not create a loss of housing. Biggie and Darryl experienced abuse in their adolescence at the hands of authority figures which may have affected their abilities to relate to authority figures (particularly in the social service and criminal justice systems) that they encountered in the future. Darryl even went so far as to convince himself that the abuse was his fault. While it is impossible to quantify how the abuse affected Darryl and Biggie, the narratives that they presented indicated that the impacts were long lasting. At the very least, the events damaged their relationships with their parents, who otherwise could have played nurturing and supportive roles during their upbringing.

Substance Abuse

Residents arrived with significant histories of substance abuse and the use of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs such as cocaine and opiates was rampant at the motel.29 As Ed mentioned earlier, alcoholism led to his removal from his previous living situation and he took Ambien and Xanax for years. He was often seen at the Boardwalk crushing these pills and snorting them. Curtis, the skinny resident who others called
“tweaker,” had worked in construction for seven years before he went into a spiral of LSD and told me, “My brain fizzled out, on acid. Too much acid.” Elisha’s brother Clive was on probation for four years because of drugs, but still smoked marijuana with Reg and others. Biggie was also an avid user of marijuana and referred to it as his “medicine.” His partner Deirdre did not allow him to use harder drugs because her family had a history of deaths from cocaine and heroin. Marc, Reggie, and Jake had histories of using crack/cocaine and a variety of pills. Rob, whose father was a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service, regularly inhaled the aerosol from whipped cream canisters and was yelled at many times by Larry and Elizabeth for filling his room with empty cans.

Some residents attributed their drug use to specific incidents. Roy linked the start of his drug use to his father’s death, “I love my daddy so much, when he died, I did drugs, I kinda went into the Devil's web. My dad died, it was um, I was sad for just weeks, sit at home and eat, do drugs, shit I normally wouldn't do.” Dale was a registered sex offender who served in the Army for 12 years as a nurse and was involved in the first Gulf War. He claimed that the war experience led him to alcohol abuse:

I used to drink three liters of whiskey a day, was in a blackout twenty four hours a day man. Drivin’ around, so glad I didn’t kill somebody. I came home from the service in October, at 200 pounds. That next February, I was admitted to the VA at 98 pounds. Just drinking, I went crazy, PTSD, I just wanted to die.

Being on parole meant that Dale could not drink alcohol, but after five DWIs and his VA experiences, he had no interest in drinking anyway and steadfastly turned down alcohol whenever it was offered.

Elizabeth’s daughter, Natalie fought a battle with pill addiction that had raged for over twenty years. Before working at the motel, she was a nurse in a doctor’s office and was fired for writing fake checks to fund her addiction. This prevented her from getting
future employment in medical environments, so she moved into a room at the Boardwalk and began working at the desk and cleaning rooms. After getting caught stealing from the motel office in October, she found a job at Bruegger’s Bagels as a cashier. I saw her in March 2013 after she had been working for five months. She seemed determined to keep working and told me, “I can’t afford to fuck up. ‘Cause jobs are just too hard to come by and it took me a while to get that shit place!” When I asked about the temptation to steal she said, “There are a thousand cameras and if you do anything there you are the most retarded person.” Unfortunately, Natalie could not keep on the straight and narrow and was fired in fall 2013 for stealing money from the register. This most recent relapse wore on Elizabeth, who vented her frustration to me one day:

> You’re better than this, you did have a good job, you are, you’re not a dummy, you’re smart, alright, now you got a job. It’s beneath you, you’re not makin’ six hundred a week, you’re makin’ two. But they put your trust in you, but you’re not gonna outsmart anybody. Come on, knock it off with that shit. So she had a job, and what did she do? Of all stupid places. You’re not smarter Natalie, they got all the fuckin’ cameras. I don’t know what to say, I can’t say I know how it feels, I know you’re in pain, but then. You can’t do what you’re doin’. She won’t wanna go to rehab ‘cause she’s scared of the pain of withdrawl.

I felt badly that Natalie relapsed because when I spoke to Natalie in March, she celebrated her job, “This is the longest I ever went, not pattin’ myself on the back, but since I lost my other career, I’ve had these little bullshit jobs. Dude, I’d last maybe a month or two, you know? I haven’t missed a day yet, and that’s a record for me.”

Unfortunately for Natalie, even though she realized that trying to steal from Bruegger’s was a losing endeavor she could not help herself when confronted with the power of her addiction.

Recall that Dee and Toby were recovering from alcoholism and heroin/cocaine addiction. They drank copious amounts of coffee because as Dee put it, “We’re both ex-
drinkers, ex-alcoholics. So we covered it up with coffee.” When I spoke to Dee about her history, she painted a complex picture of drug addiction, prostitution, and transient life.

In her eyes, her drug addiction led directly to her work as prostitute:

*It was always to get drugs. Because you knew it’s only an hour of my time or whatever. Close my eyes and get it done and over with. I rarely fucked people though, I’d give a thousand blowjobs, but rarely fucked somebody. You know, I wasn’t the hundred dollar whore. I did turn into one, you know, in a bind, like, when I was all cracked out and shit like, okay let’s go do this, just get it over with, ’cause I wanted my drugs and I wanted ‘em now.*

The need for a location to turn tricks and then subsequently use drugs, led Dee to lodging locations that included the Boardwalk Motel:

*I had an apartment in Ash Lake, which is fuckin’ like an hour from here. And I would get in my car and drive. My dealer was in downtown Pinewood, so I would drive like an hour, hour and twenty minutes, three times a day sometimes, to come and get my shit, yeah. Or I would, I would have my own apartment but I’d stay in the motel ’cause I knew I wouldn’t have gas. Because all my money needed to go on drugs. I would have the guy get the room, and then I’d be like, um are you using this room? You don’t need this room do you? And then I’ll keep it, I’ll just stay here. Or, I’ll just take a shower, you gotta go don’t you? You know, little tricks to keep the room wherever I was, you know.*

*But yeah, for actual sex, I kinda held onto that, thank God. Not to say it never happened. In the beginning it happened a lot. ’Cause I was uh, supporting myself single, on crack. So, I was suckin’ and fuckin’ everything that came near me. But always for hundreds of dollars. You know? Cause I’d have to stay to smoke crack at the Hilton. I wasn’t smoking crack, here. You know? I wouldn’t do a show here, which turned into, I would never party here, or I’ll do a show here but I’ll never party here. Which turned into, well I’ll party and do a show here but I’ll never live here. Which turned into, this is home.*

Because drug use was so rampant at the motel, some recovering residents were quite concerned about relapsing. The temptations to engage in drug and alcohol use were widespread because it was a key part of the motel’s culture. I forged inroads with residents early on by sharing beer and I was told on several occasions that establishing relationships at the motel was always easier when alcohol was involved. For recovering addicts placed at the motel by social services, or those who migrated there with plans to
improve their lives, the fact that substances were used as social currency proved problematic and they had to remind themselves constantly of their long term goals.

The tattooed Trim dealt drugs for five years in Las Vegas and Sam used crack in the past, and was trying to wean himself off of a ten year smoking habit at Justine’s request. In September, Sam and Tat sat outside and had this exchange about drug use by Reg, Jake, Marc, and others:

Sam: I was peekin’ in the room last night and they were sniffing stuff that the guy from 23 gave them.

Trim: I told them I had pot for sale but they didn’t want it. I’m so used to seein’ that shit it doesn’t even bother me anymore. That’s how we used to be years ago.

Sam: That’s how I used to be, I used to be just like that.

Trim: I just look at them like their fuckin’… that was me about 20 years ago. Now I got too much goin’ for myself I just can’t put myself in that predicament. My girl’s comin’ up, my son’s comin’ up. They be here next, uh Wednesday. Then I gotta move outta here.

Sam: We moving out too.

Trim: Yeah I gotta move on with my life.

Sam: That’s what we doing too, it be too long.

Trim: When they start fuckin’ callin’ ya by name and wantin’ to hang out with ya, even though you don’t do no shit man, you know it’s time to go.

Sam: Same thing with me, same thing with me. I don’t carry all these keychains for nothing [meaning those from Narcotics Anonymous]. I don’t knock my friends, that’s what they do, but I chose another path I wanna be on man. My girl the same way, we make a good combination ‘cause for so many years, she tried to get me to stop Chris and I wouldn’t. I had to smoke weed, I had to have cocaine, I had to have a beer. And I worked my ass off and she still didn’t do nothing, didn’t even smoke a cigarette. She watched me spiral out of control ‘til I went to prison. And she still hung with me, she still stuck it out with me. Today we laugh, ‘cause now I can see what she was tryin’ to get. I wish I had been much smarter then, but as men we macho, we don’t want to see that. Shut the fuck up, don’t tell me I can’t have another beer, then I go out and buy another twelve pack, just to make her mad.

Trim: You can’t have no more cocaine, I go out and buy another eight ball.

Sam: And all they tryin’ to do is help us, trying to keep us alive.
Both Sam and Trim were over 50 years old and their age helped push them away from relapses. Sam’s connection to his partner Justine and his desire to find employment in order to move on were strong motivators in overcoming the temptations of the motel. Similarly, Trim focused on the future with his partner and son to avoid relapsing.

Criminologists Robert Sampson and John Laub argue that strong adult social bonds inhibit criminal behavior, and in the case of Trim and Sam their attachment to their partners and children played a strong role in their desistance from drug use.³¹

Before even arriving at the motel, many residents’ addictions led to the loss of jobs and engagement in criminal activity. The “anything goes” atmosphere of the motel made it very easy for these residents to find and use substances. For residents like Sam, Dale, and Trim, their histories of drug abuse made the motel a treacherous living situation because they were surrounded by temptation. However, they learned from their pasts in order to plan for their futures and avoid relapse. Others, such as Dee, Reggie, Jake, Natalie, Marc, and Ed, continued to let drugs reign over certain aspects of their lives; sapping their resources and increasing their fragility in the process.

*Criminal and Deviant Behavior*

Part of the Boardwalk’s reputation came from the fact that it housed individuals returning from prison. However, these individuals were not the only residents with criminal histories. Early involvement in crime was a common theme at the motel. After his father pulled a gun on him at age 15, Biggie grabbed his father’s shotgun and told him, “That’s the last time you pull a switch on me, a gun on me, next time I’ll shoot you.” Already scarred by abuse, Biggie left his home and ventured to downtown Riverfort in search of his mother. He found her working as a housekeeper at a local...
hospital, but she wanted nothing to do with him. Biggie then found solace with other youth from broken homes, “I hung out with anyone who could get me beer, drugs, and cigs. Because we come from broken families, none of us had parents, more like showing the parents that kids coming from broken homes didn’t need parents.” Biggie referred to this group as a gang and claimed that they stole, used/sold drugs, and slept in shelters and abandoned buildings together. Biggie also alluded to serving time in jail because of this, but would not elaborate.

Love’s son Ben was involved with drug dealing that led directly to his residence at the motel. He lived in an apartment given to his girlfriend Lisa by DSS, and was then caught selling marijuana. Bent went to jail and Lisa was sanctioned by DSS for having drugs in the apartment. When Ben returned from jail, he and Lisa moved in with Love at the Boardwalk because they had no other options.

Dee’s criminal history involved shoplifting and working as a prostitute. Her shoplifting increased her fragility because she had to pay fines, attend counseling, and go to numerous court dates at her own expense. Her involvement with prostitution led to both unexpected benefits and strain with Toby when she formed a strong bond with a client named Guy:

*We went down to shelters, like he [Toby] lived in a shelter, I lived in a shelter, you know? I didn’t stay, I didn’t stay, ‘cause I had Guy. I only did it ‘cause Toby was like, well how I come gotta stay in a shelter and you get to stay with Guy? So I was like, it was, either break away from Guy and go live in a shelter. Or, fuckin’ lose your relationship with Toby. Bottom line is he could not stand the fact that I had a place to go. Which pissed me off, because again, I’m a girl. Why do you want your woman in a fuckin’ shelter? You fucking scumhole. Especially ‘cause Guy was bringin’ me downtown every day to see Toby. And I would see Toby between, like I dunno, 6 and 8, and then I’d have, and then Guy would come back down and pick me up. ‘Cause Guy knew Toby was number one. And even with that, Toby was jealous.*
Once Dee and Toby moved into the motel, Guy played an important role in their lives as Dee told me, “Guy’s paid our rent, maybe 12 times, 12 weeks. But that’s a lot and especially when we need it, he has helped us.” I asked if her continuing relationship with Guy at the motel was a problem with Toby and she replied:

_Toby just doesn’t care, as with any of my mates, has ever cared, as long as them bills get paid. You know, once they see the money, and what, they gotta deal with Guy for a couple minutes out of a day? They don’t give a fuck, you know what the fuck you do. If you live with me and you get to know me, then you know where my virtue is. One, I’m not gonna tell you, I’m gonna convince you that I’m not fuckin’ him. Or two, I’m gonna tell you and you’re gonna deal with it. It depends on what kinda relationship ya know?_  

However, prostitution also placed Dee in a significant amount of danger. In 2011, she was living in the Boardwalk and was called out to do a show:

_I was actually living here and I went out and I didn’t wanna do the show. A girl, like crackhead, woke me up early in the morning and, like, I was quitting crack and I didn’t wanna do the show. So I went there and I was like tryin’ to get the show goin’ so I could come fuckin’ home and I’d have a couple hundred bucks in my pocket, or at least a hundred. Ended up turning into just a crack show, so he’d give me crack as my payment, and then I was like, well gimme my payment so I can leave. Which turned into, I’ll get more crack, so I stayed. Every time I wanted to leave it was, I’ll buy more crack. Which turned into cocaine psychosis, after you smoke a while the guy thought I was fuckin’ robbing him, and just beat me fucking blind, but I kept fighting back.  

So he held me in there for like, five hours. I ended up screaming at the top a my lungs, the police came, I was taken in an ambulance. The, I remember the police officer at the scene asking me, are you working? And I was like, yeah. And so, it’s not like they met me at the hospital. They just, brushed it off, or I don’t even know if the guy was charged. You know, and I was bringing it up in groups and stuff, and it was like, they passed that crack pipe by me once, no. This is a crackpipe we’re talkin’ about, I’m a crack addict! Pass it around twice, no! And the third time that sucker came around, I don’t think it got all the way to me and I had it in my mouth. I was like, fuck, yeah, let’s go! Um, but, therapy, they were like, Dee, do you really wanna bring this up and try and find this guy and drag it out and ask for the officer and press charges, or do you just wanna let this go? You’re safe, you’re not injured.  

_And then, you see on TV, like Law and Order, half the rapes, I wasn’t raped, thank God. Thank f-, he wanted to rape me, bad. I just fought, I fought and I kicked and I fought and I punched. And the heaters that were on the floor, he tried_
yankin’ out the cord. He was gonna whip me with it, so I fuckin’ attacked him. It’s like, there’s no way you’re getting that motherfuckin’ cord outta the wall. You know, and uh, I had to be careful of the telephone, he busted it up. Thank God he didn’t think to choke me. You know, but uh, let’s see. That was really hard for me to get over.

These narratives of criminal careers speak to several factors that influenced residents’ lives. Many residents portrayed their criminal behavior as the result of early experiences and because of that, it played a significant role in their lives at the motel. Early involvement in crime was used both as a status symbol as well as a set up for future behavior and identity creation. In these constructions criminal behavior directly or indirectly led residents to the motel, and this set the stage for a battle of will once residents arrived. Some, like Cinque, could not resist going back to the drug game and others, such as Darryl and Tat, were determined to not fall back on criminal enterprises for much needed income. By presenting narratives of either overcoming the allure of crime or relying on it, residents overcame engrained behavior or fell back on it because they were good at it and felt that society had given them no other option. What is clear is that the criminal careers of residents were complex and intertwined with other life events to the point where criminal behavior could often not be disentangled from early childhood experiences, substance abuse, and the potent ways in which the motel environment encouraged a variety of behavior. Unfortunately, criminal justice and social policy had a hand in creating a criminogenic environment at the Boardwalk Motel by bringing vulnerable individuals together without offering the supports that they needed. Sociologist Joan McCord and her colleagues refer to this as “peer contagion” and find that some interventions actually reinforce criminal behavior during peer aggregation of high-risk populations.  

Disabilities
Because the Boardwalk was home to many individuals receiving disability and retirement benefits, there was an abundance of mental and physical disabilities among motel residents. Many residents who were clearly suffering from mental disabilities chose not to participate in the study so in that respect, the experiences of the most afflicted were not captured in this analysis. That being said, many participants were affected by mental and physical disorders. Mental health issues were the catalyst for much of the conflict that occurred at the motel because many residents often found themselves unable to control behavior that created conflict, and likewise, they lacked the ability to defuse conflict through non-violent means.

Darryl’s partner Digital was an example of a resident whose mental health issues made him ripe for conflict with others. He found the motel to be better than a shelter because he had his own room and did not have to be around other people. When I asked why this was such a problem, he explained:

My um, I got this thing where, I get, I kept getting’ arrested, getting inta [sic] fights and stuff. Um, one day the judge was like, you know, he’s like, somethin’ wrong. He sent me to a psych evaluation and they came back with a diagnosis for me. And um, you know, I tried it for like about a month, the medication and stuff that they was givin’ me. I’m like, I couldn’t live like this, I couldn’t do it. So I said screw it, I’m not gonna do it. I got in trouble a couple years later and it was suggested that I strongly give the treatment a try for six months.

I agreed, and um, during that six months you know, I found out a lotta stuff, that, ‘cause they was tellin’ me, and my pride was like, there ain’t nuttin’ wrong with me, I’m fine. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah! And it turns out that all the problems I’ve been having were because of this same shit so. And one day my doctor’s like look. I told him, I said I can’t keep takin’ these medications. I’m 330 pounds, this shit got me fat. Every fuckin’ three months you’re switchin’ medications on me, I’m takin’ like four to six pills a day, I’m like, I don’t wanna be on medication anymore. He said okay, he sent [me] to this um, group therapy program to learn copin’ skills. He said, I’ll make it so you won’t be on medication, he said, but I don’t want you working. He didn’t want me in a small environment where I would
have to be with other people. Otherwise I’ll end up in jail again or back there again.”

It’s psychotic disorder NOS [not otherwise specified], um, but it has a, it comes with a buncha symptoms, and one of ‘em bein’ mostly is um, anti-socialism. I mean, you put me in a room by myself and give me a task, I’m fine, I can work all day long. Put other people and other personalities in that small space with me and, I, just. I can’t function.

This condition was so severe that Digital received SSI compensation for not being able to work. Fortunately, Digital realized the scope of his condition and actively avoided any contact with other residents whenever possible. Other residents, such as the knife-carrying Nolan and the zombie-like Curtis, did not exercise this discretion and found themselves testing the patience of other residents.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affected several residents. Dee claimed that her PTSD began when she went through basic training with the Army and suffered “culture shock” during the training. Ed never elaborated on how he developed PTSD, but alluded to a career of military service and received disability. Darryl was beaten up and raped in prison because of his status as a sex offender. He also claimed that he was diagnosed as anti-social and bi-polar, and when he was released in September he saw a psychiatrist in Riverfort on a weekly basis. By November, he had stopped visiting the psychologist and told me it was because he simply did not have the time, “Parole wants me to look for jobs 35 hours a week.” When I asked him about the treatment he told me, “I mean it helped to a limited degree, I don’t think much is gonna help me to a great degree to tell you the truth.” PTSD also affected Dale, who earlier described his battle with alcoholism after the first Gulf War.
Depressive disorders affected Dee, who claimed to be bi-polar, and Fran, who told me that she had attempted suicide in the past by slicing her wrists and mixing anti-depressants and alcohol. Fran’s described her first attempt to kill herself:

*I looked at my mom. I’m like, I’m going to kill myself. I was 17 at the time. She was like, go ahead, ’cause if you die I’m going to leave you on the floor. Without thinking I grabbed the bottle of Advil. It wasn’t even open yet. Opened it, swallowed the entire bottle of pills. My mom left, twenty minutes later, she comes back and says, are you dead yet? I go, no. And she goes, damn.*

Fran’s depression was so severe that she received disability and did not work anymore.

Remember that Biggie claimed enduring a history of abuse caused him to develop multiple personalities. He also told me that he had mental health problems for his entire life and showed me the scars on his wrists from past suicide attempts. Because of these issues, Biggie was involved with a program whose mission statement read:

*Working collaboratively with individuals, families and the community _____ Programs empowers and enables children and adults with neurologically based learning disabilities, autism and other developmental disorders to live independent, productive and fulfilling lives.*

The program gave Biggie a case worker who visited Biggie and Deirdre at the motel and took them to programming and on errands such as grocery shopping. Sometimes the program would also bring him food or Giant Foods gift cards.

Like many residents, Biggie suffered from physical health problems. Biggie had a history of heart attacks and had a large surgical scar running down the front of his chest. He tried to lose weight to take the pressure off of his heart and told me, “My heart can’t take no more stress, my mom already passed away and my dad’s in the nursing home.”

His daily regimen of medication consisted of Nexium, Divan, Aspirin, Lipitor, and Seroquel. Deirdre was on medication of her own for high blood pressure and had to limit her exposure to the sun because of the side effects.
Darryl suffered from a bad esophagus and had two major surgeries on it. Doctors put a tube down his throat every eight months to stretch it out because it closed to the point where nothing could get past, making it impossible to eat. To deal with acid reflux, Darryl took a double dose of Nexium and a quadruple dose of Zantac every day. I once heard Darryl on the phone with his case worker, claiming that he sometimes threw up five to six times a day and could get the urge to throw up out of nowhere. Darryl showed me a form that his doctor filled out for DSS and it listed Darryl’s ailments as back and stomach issues, with a recommendation that he be considered “permanently disabled.”

Reggie was also bothered by indigestion and claimed that he had acid pockets that needed to be popped on an infrequent basis. He received disability because of a physical condition that he said rendered him unable to work, “I was 13, walking across a railroad trestle. Needless to say rotten railroad timber. Whooosh! Fell twenty feet to the concrete.” As a result, Reggie underwent three surgeries and had two metal rods inserted in his right arm. Both Reggie and Sky also had poor dental hygiene. Sky blamed her mother who wore dentures and never taught Sky how to brush her teeth. Reggie had his teeth removed in early October 2012 and Sky had hers removed in summer 2013. They intended to get dentures once they had the funds, but had not as of this writing.

Mental and physical afflictions contributed to vulnerability and fragility among residents. Those battling mental disorders faced thoughts of suicide, abused prescription drugs, and as will be seen in later chapters, found it difficult to interact with other residents. When physical or mental issues made it impossible for residents to work, this hampered their ability to gain enough financial traction to improve their living situations and move out of the motel. Because of this, it was not surprising that the Boardwalk
housed so many residents with these issues because they could not afford more stable and expensive housing.

One overarching consequence of childhood trauma, criminal behavior, drug abuse, and mental health disorders was the loss of family and friends. On several occasions, residents asked me for favors because they had “no one else left to ask.” This loss of social capital was particularly punishing because residents lost access to networks that provided valuable financial and social resources. Some residents had family they could count on (Jake and Larry spent time with their sisters, Sam often went into Riverfort to see his daughter, and Darryl visited his mother on a weekly basis) but these relationships were the exception and not the norm.

The social refugees of the Boardwalk Motel were displaced from their previous environments due to a combination of factors that affected their social status. Some residents viewed coming to the Boardwalk as “stepping up” or “stepping down” based on their prior housing situations. For parolees who were sent to the Boardwalk, the environment was their first taste of freedom and some struggled with the many challenges of reentry in the context of motel life. The resident narratives that I presented reveal complex histories of fragility and transience. Because of these histories, it is clear that motel residents were social refugees long before they set foot inside the Boardwalk and in many cases their fragility was the result of a harsh combination of factors within and out of their control. In the next chapter, I will examine how motel residents drew on their histories to create identities that managed the stigma of motel life.
Chapter 4: Managing Stigma and Identity

Sociologist Erving Goffman describes stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting.”¹ By virtue of simply living at the Boardwalk Motel, the social refugees in this study were given one discrediting attribute that opened them up to numerous stereotypes of varying degree. The Dutchland community viewed motel residents as drug addicts, drug sellers, prostitutes, child molesters, and welfare queens. This shared residence exposed individuals to what Goffman calls “courtesy stigma” or a stigma acquired simply by being associated with a stigmatized person.² These courtesy stigmas extended to residents regardless of their actual legal/behavior status and were viewed as significant threats to self and identity.

In his study of Harlem crack dealers, sociologist Philippe Bourgois asserts that street culture “offers an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity.”³ What is of sociological importance is how residents created such a forum at the Boardwalk Motel. In their search for personal dignity, motel residents created identities that resisted the psychological damage of stigma and protected residents against the discrediting attributes associated with the Boardwalk Motel. Sociologist Victor Rios notes that resistance as a response has the power to “radically alter worldviews and trajectories.”⁴ Therefore, resistance at the motel was a valuable life strategy.

A key part of this resistance among motel residents was the creation of identities that were based on those less or more stigmatized than them.⁵ As sociologist Michèle Lamont argues, “groups that find themselves in relatively similar structural positions can draw very different lines” and this “boundary work” creates symbolic divides within a community that on the surface, seems quite homogenous.⁶ Sociologist Lois Presser writes
that “the self cannot be known without reference to other people.”7 At the Boardwalk, residents alleviated the harms of stigma by creating boundaries that referred to motel residents based on particular traits.

This chapter is concerned with how those in the Boardwalk Motel community went about resisting the courtesy stigmas attached to them. Narratology tells us that “our selves, including our preferred selves, are always still in the making.”8 By presenting narratives of preferred self, residents created boundaries between other residents and resisted particular stigmas. I will begin by describing how residents resisted the stigma of criminal identities (particularly that associated with sexual offending) by creating boundaries between themselves and sexual predators, and used what criminologist Shadd Maruna calls “redemption scripts” to redefine their identities into those of desistance.9

Resistance Against Criminal Identities

As I illustrated in Chapter 3 when I discussed the pathways to the motel, criminal histories were common among residents of the Boardwalk. In fact, jail and prison time were often celebrated as status symbols and as is often seen in certain subcultures, motel residents turned the middle class stigma associated with criminal behavior and criminal histories on its head.10 However, like the prison subculture, the one criminal behavior that drew disdain was sexual offending against children. Because many residents at the motel did not distinguish between types of sex offenders, a sex offense conviction was automatically equated with victimization of a child.11 Therefore, parolees and those with sexual offense histories took different steps to resist the stigma of their offenses and create boundaries between themselves and the pedophile label.
Many sex offenders at the motel tried to resist their stigmatized identities by hiding them from others. Price, Dale, Jasper, Cinque, Walt, and Harry disclosed their status as parolees, but hid their sex offense convictions under the belief that if no one knew of their scarlet letters, stigma could not be applied. Unfortunately, because they were Level 2 and Level 3 offenders, they were listed on the public sex offender registry and therefore, their Goffmanian attempts at “passing” were neutralized because their convictions were visible to me and anyone at the motel with Internet access.12

After Cinque moved in, I encountered Mike and Natalie looking up the registry on their cell phones as they sat outside the office. Mike looked at me, shook his phone and said about Cinque, “It will tell you what level it is right here. There he is right there, mugshot right there. She was thirteen years old. That tells you everything right there buddy.” Natalie claimed that Cinque told her he was in prison for drugs and weapons charges and mentioned nothing about his sex offense conviction.

Similarly, Reggie attempted to hide his sex offense conviction from other residents to avoid stigma. When he was 18, he and his good friend had consensual sex with a girl who was 15 years of age.13 After being arrested, he spent a year in jail and had to register as a Level 1 sex offender. The girl later had a child by him and for a time he viewed her as his “wife.” Reggie’s sex offender status made finding a residence quite difficult and it was the factor that forced him and Sky to leave the Save More Inn. The task of hiding his status from those at the Boardwalk was made somewhat easier because he was only a Level 1 offender and therefore not listed on the public registry. When Reggie disclosed his conviction to me, he claimed that no one else at the motel knew about it. This turned out not to be the case, because Dee told me that she was aware of his
status and said, “He thought it was this big secret.” Vito told me that Elizabeth had outed Reggie as a sex offender, though he admitted it was hard to believe. Elizabeth mocked Reggie about his attempts to mask his status after he had moved out:

*He’s a sex offender, he tries to say he’s not, he is. Stupid, a make fun a other ones, you’re one yourself! ‘Cause the guy [meaning a detective] comes around, you know he has a list a all the guys that are sex offenders. I dunno if he’s a level one or two, but anyway he is one, he tries to say he’s not.*

In a way, Reggie’s attempts to hide his status to avoid stigma only ended up directing more attention towards it when others found out.

In addition to trying to hide his sexual conviction from others, Reg created other boundaries between himself and sex offenders. Because his offense involved his then-girlfriend, he did not view himself as predatory and his insistence that the girl was 15 served to portray himself as someone who was not attracted to young children, thereby distancing him from predatory pedophiles. In fact, he went out of his way to show his contempt for those whom he considered pedophiles and told me that he had no problem being violent towards the “sons a bitches who touched kids.” When he returned from jail in April 2013 he talked about his experience working as a runner and claimed, “So fricken, every fuckin’, pedophile scumbag up in there dude, spittin’ in their fuckin’ trays, havin’ fun wid ‘em.” He also explicitly referred to Darryl as “that fucking pedophile” on several occasions. Social psychologists refer to this type of behavior as “reaction formation” which can be described as “a means of defending against esteem threat by exhibiting an exaggerated or extreme reaction in the opposite direction.”

Reggie exhibited distaste for sexual offenders in the same way that social psychologists find that “people respond to the implication that they have some unacceptable trait by behaving in a way that would show them to have the opposite trait.”
Tat was the Dominican tattoo artist who arrived after Reg went to jail, and he took a different approach by disclosing his status as a sex offender. Hours after we had first met, we stood in the parking lot of the motel, trying to keep warm in the January evening air. I mentioned that the Boardwalk used to be a very nice place and Tat claimed that it was before the motel started renting to sex offenders. He then said:

*Me, I’m a keep it a hundred [percent honest], I put it on first street. Me, when I was 25, in 2005, when I was 25, I fucked up and got drunk and had sex with an underage female. No, she wasn’t my daughter, nope, she wasn’t nobody in my family, ya understand me? It happened to be the neighbor’s, daughter’s, friend. Then I got home around 2 o’clock in the morning, drunk, hammered. And they come over. They’re like, yo, can we drink wid you? I’m like, yeah sure! I went and grabbed a root beer, I said here, one for you, one for you. And I kept on drinkin’ my rum and coke. They was like, nah we want a drink! I was like, nah, you ain’t drinkin’ wid me, nah, nah, no. I got crazy drunk.*

*The mother uh, the daughter of the, the lady from next door wound up leavin’. And she [the friend] throws her hand over me, and I’m like yo, give me a massage? Boom, she starts givin’ me a massage. I just start takin’ shit off. All the sudden, she started givin’ me head. And then, she got on top a me and started ridin’ me man. You know, I, I’m ashamed, yes. But at the time, I was intoxicated, I didn’t give a fuck about anything, you understand me? But however, it’s not like I was uh, um. Not like um, I’m a fiend for that. It’s not like um, um, that’s my fetish. It’s not like I go out my way to look for shit like dat, know what I mean? And I never let that shit happen again, I don’t give a fuck. I put it on front street. Like, yup, yup, this is what happened. Yup, it was underage. Yup, I got the, got the paperwork and everything. Yup, you know I mean?*

Tat admitted his indiscretion but highlighted some important caveats that created boundaries from other sex offenders whose offenses involved those under 18. He made it clear that the victim was in no way related to him, so his crime was not one of incest. Tat also claimed that he was under the influence of alcohol, a move that underscored that the behavior was out of character. He elaborated on this when he claimed that underage girls were not a fetish of his. Tat created a distinct boundary because while he disclosed his
sex offender status, he made an effort to portray his crime as an outlying poor decision that occurred when he was drunk, thereby resisting the predatory stigma attached to most sexual offenders. He said as much when he told me:

My thing is, if you do it more than once, then there’s a problem. Then, there’s a problem. If you do it once, and you don’t do it again, then you know you can actually show by action that you learned from your mistake. But if you do it once, and you do it again, and you do it again, know what I mean, it’s a problem.

I witnessed Tat “keeping it one hundred” hours later when we met Patch, who was also on parole. The three of us stood outside Patch’s room talking about parole officers and Patch asked Tat, “You violent? You a violent felon?” Tat responded:

Alright, check this out, I’m a keep it a hundred, I gotta keep it a hundred with everybody. When I was 25, back in 2005, I wound up havin’ sex with an underage chick, know what I mean? I was drunk, yeah, you know I mean, that’s beside the point, you know I mean. It happened. She got pregnant, her pops didn’t like that I was black, he pressed charges.

This confession was interesting because Tat added details that he did not share with me. The pregnancy and the impact of Tat’s race seemed to implicate the father’s decision to press charges as the reason for the conviction, and not the fact that Tat had done something considered by many as deviant and stigmatic.

I asked Tat to elaborate on how his sex offender status affected him and he said:

Well, it’s kinda hard but I learned to live with it. In, in a way, all I gotta do, is register where I live. And anybody that I move around, I tell ’em the truth. Look listen, this is what it is. Oh, you motherfucker! Okay, cool, fine. I won’t talk to you again. Know what I mean? If it like dat, I just, I just keep it movin’ but.

Last year, when I came here, when I came back here, some, ‘cause it was switched over, it wasn’t all, all sex offenders. It was a little bit a regular people. Some people that I met, you know I mean, they uh, got told by Elizabeth, watch it, he’s a sex offender, he’s okay. He’s a good people but he’s a sex offender. And theys like oh okay, he’s one a those, he’s one a those. Now, this is before they got to meet the attitude, you know, the character. You know I mean? So, they all the sudden, like, when I was comin’ around, I would see them like sneak over, and
start talkin’ over here. And I’m like, whatever, you know me, I don’t care. I, I would come out, try to get uh, 20 or 30 pack, do my little chippas on their weed, even though I wasn’t smoking, uh you know I mean, and do little cookouts. And eventually they started seein’ me a lot and they started seein’ my character, and they was like, you know what? I thought you was, you was an asshole, but you’re pretty decent. I was like, yo look listen, it happens.

Tat tried to be proactive in presenting his stigma to other residents. However, his attempts to limit potential damage to his identity were not always successful. Tat met the physically imposing Spike before me, but did not disclose his sex offender status to Spike until weeks later. This information did not sit well with Spike, who was happy to see Tat get kicked out of the motel a few weeks later for playing his music too loud:

Larry says, I don’t understand why they send these fuckin’ weirdos over here. Cause ya’ll take ‘em, that’s why. You the only hotel that take the weirdos, and, I don’t really care {about} them, but I don’t wanna hurt nobody’s feelings, you know, sex offenders. Like what’s his name there? Tat? But when he, I tell you, he had balls tellin’ me to my face he was a Level 2. I’m like, you know what? We good with our conversation. You can walk away from me now. He had balls tellin’ me that! I’m like dog, you know, you tellin’ me this, and you know, if we was in jail, you woulda got it. Straight up. I told him straight up, you woulda got it dog.

But yeah he had balls, he was ballsy to tell me some shit like that. I’m like, you know what? I’m good talkin’ to you man. Don’t bother me and I won’t mess with you. Like he was proud of it. You supposed to keep that on the hush, know what I mean? You don’t want anybody to rock yo shit. I got nieces and nephews. But, I cut it short aftra that. Now what I mean? He was running around promoting it like, you wanna put that shit on a t-shirt? Everybody, I’m like, come on, you can’t be promotin’ that baby.

Spike’s reaction was noteworthy because he mentioned his own nieces and nephews, thereby viewing them as potential victims of Tat. Like Reggie, one goal of Tat’s boundary construction was to challenge the public’s perception that he was predatory and dangerous. By portraying themselves as engaging in consensual, albeit illegal sexual behavior, Tat and Reggie created narratives that were intended to allay fears that they would engage in similar future behavior.16
Darryl was also forthcoming about his conviction with other residents, but created boundaries from other convicted sexual offenders by staunchly claiming innocence. He told me the night we first met how this wrongful conviction occurred:

*In 1993, I was accused of molesting a young man, uh, by a lady who I was having an affair with for eight years. Uh, behind her husband’s back, who was one of my best friends. Well, I was gonna testify at the divorce proceeding, then they reconciled, then next thing I know I’m being charged with a crime. I disproved the day that they said that this supposedly happened. The judge extended the time frame to three days before and four days after. I couldn’t prove where I was for seven days.*

I asked Darryl how the sex offender label impacted his life and he dismissed the idea that it had any effect on his psychological well-being:

*I don’t care. You know what, I did 17 years, 18 now, I really don’t care. Say whachu wanna say about me. See, see for me it’s a little bit different because where I grew up. I grew up in the hood, I slapped people’s mouths quick. You know and like I still go to the hood and people know me and you know, say whachu wanna say, but you ain’t gonna say it to my face. I try not to be a violent person but, and so what a person has to say really doesn’t matter to me.*

Darryl’s narrative absolved him of the crime of sodomy and certainly portrayed him as having a history of deviance. What ran counter to Darryl’s criminal identity was a history of pro-social accomplishments that included running his own legitimate business and traveling on a wagon train with juvenile delinquents from Maine to Florida with the Visionquest Program. He told me, “I was a perfect chameleon. Listen, I always had a job, was in the reserves, I played politics. I was a respected member of the community, a well-known member of the community. I was on the student senate in college.”

Darryl claimed that growing older in prison had changed him and that when he looked back on his criminal past, it did not make him happy:

*I thought that I was happy. I thought that I was getting everything that I wanted. But. In a way yeah, but in all reality, when you step back and really look about at*
it, it was hollow and empty. I got nothing left from it. A few people that I still talk
to but I really have nothing left from it. It destroyed my whole life.

Because of these past actions, Darryl appeared determined to right his ways and give
back to society, which he did by volunteering with the local AIDS Council in Riverfort. I
asked him if giving back was important and he replied:

_It’s part of my growth process. I was a weapon of mass destruction. you laugh,
but think of all the people I was selling drugs to, all the people I helped commit
crimes, all the people I helped go to jail, all the people I helped destroy their
families. I did more damage in that than this crime that I got charged with and I
have more problems with this crime than any of the shit I ever did. If I sell you
crack, it just doesn’t hurt you, it hurts your parents, your wife, your kids, there’s a
whole progression of people. I did this in my own neighborhoods and we
destroyed our own neighborhoods._

This realization gave him a new outlook on life and after he fell in love with Digital,
Darryl claimed that his priorities had shifted:

_What’s happening between me and Dig right now, can’t do anything but cause me
some pain in my heart, ‘cause it’s only positive. It isn’t about drugs, it isn’t about
getting high, it isn’t about using another person, it isn’t about manipulating
another person. It’s about happiness and joy._

This narrative bears a keen resemblance to the work of criminologist Shadd
Maruna, who examined desistance narrative and argues, “frequently involves reworking a
delinquent history into a source of wisdom to be drawn from while acting as a drug
counselor, youth worker, community volunteer, or mutual-help group participant.”

Darryl claimed he was 300 hours short of being a Certified Alcohol and Substance Abuse
Counselor and told me he wanted to be a counselor in a drug or alcohol program, or sex
offender treatment program. Ultimately, he dreamt of opening his own ranch-style
treatment and counseling center. Darryl’s transformation gave him the role of what
Maruna calls a “wounded healer” and his goals were a prime example of generative
scripts that addressed a need for fulfillment, exoneration, legitimacy, and therapy.
With no way to verify them, some of Darryl’s claims seemed too good to be true, such as having a Mensa-worthy IQ or running drug rings inside of prison. Regardless of what parts of Darryl’s account were true or false, they served to create a specific public identity. Darryl portrayed himself as a man taught to be a criminal at an early age, whose pro-social accomplishments hid the fact that he was a manipulative criminal mastermind. His crimes allowed him to live a decadent life until his lack of loyalties landed him in prison for a crime he did not commit. Now that he was released, Darryl wanted to repent for his past behavior and lead a simple life. This change in mindset created boundaries between him and other residents at the motel who still engaged in criminal activity. These scripts helped Darryl resist the idea that he was “doomed to deviance.” This narrative was a combination of Maruna’s “redemption scripts” and a very well-rehearsed presentation. Darryl had clearly performed this narrative many times and as audiences continued to accept it, it became engrained into his identity and sense of self. By using this narrative to resist the stigma and public perceptions of career criminality, Darryl actively tried to alter his future trajectory and improve his chances of successful reentry.

It is important to note that the issue of “truth” and narrative must again be considered in light of the aforementioned analysis. Because of the expansion of criminal justice policy, there are a variety of behaviors that can be considered sexual offenses. While I argue that Reggie, Tat, and Darryl all employed narratives with the explicit purpose of creating boundaries from other convicted sexual offenders, they may have portrayed themselves as different because they very much were different given the varied details of their alleged actions. This difficulty in separating boundary construction from the differences in sex-offense eligible behavior is important to acknowledge, even if it
cannot be definitively resolved. However, in consideration of Reggie’s reaction formation, Tat’s concentrated effort to appear non-predatory, and Darryl’s well-rehearsed redemption script, I believe these narratives serve a more strategic purpose than simply describing the particulars of how they acquired their master status as sexual offenders.

*Resistance Against Other Stigma*

Criminal histories aside, those living at the Boardwalk still had to contend with the stigma of relying on the motel for shelter. Residents managed this stigma by creating meaning in their daily lives through the presentation of self. These presentations formed identities that resisted the stigma of living at the Boardwalk. The key to understanding these various forms of resistance is that residents used their own narratives to create boundaries and form identity. While stigma could be applied from the outside, narratives were crafted by residents themselves. Through contrasts with others, residents made their lives meaningful by taking ownership over the ways in which their lives were portrayed on a daily basis. These contrasting portrayals were based on views concerning: material comfort, the value of work, conceptions of partnership and masculinity, suggestion of failure, self-sufficiency, and goal setting. In the following section, I will explore how residents used these boundary narratives to combat the psychological threats posed by the stigma of the Boardwalk Motel.

For recovering addicts Dee and Toby, the physical environment that surrounded them was a constant reminder of the fragility they faced on a daily basis. Because of this, they established a narrative of comfort to combat the psychological stress of the motel’s living conditions. I visited their room in early December 2012 and was amazed to see that they had decorated a large Christmas tree that Dee had gotten from an ex-partner. Dee
offered me a glass of eggnog as we chatted and she claimed that there were 172 decorations on the tree. They had also put up two stockings and Dee said:

_We live in a household that does not exchange gifts. We exchange love and the fact we’ve got a roof over our heads. ‘Cause you know we live here weekly, you never know what’s gonna come next week. Are we gonna have the money? Do we have to move out, are we gonna get evicted? We’re always livin’ like that._

Toby chimed in, “We don’t choose to live here, this is where we have to live.” Dee nodded and said, “I fuckin’ hate it in here but it’s my home you know, I hate it, I love it.”

Through these statements, Dee and Toby acknowledged that they treaded a fine line between shelter and homelessness. The roof over their head was only guaranteed on a week to week basis, and any number of chaotic events in and out of their control could threaten that security. I asked if they considered themselves homeless and Toby shook his head and said:

_We pay our own, so I don’t. No, I mean, I consider what we pay for this we could have an apartment. Eight hundred dollars a month, there’s no reason why, we’re payin’ our, we pay our rent. It’s not DSS payin’, so, it’s like a studio apartment kinda. If DSS was payin’, no I wouldn’t, then I would think I was kinda still homeless. But since you’re payin’ for it yourself and you’re not, ya know, it’s not so much payin’ for you._

The fact that Dee and Toby lived in the room unsupported by public assistance, however fragile their situation, allowed them to feel in control of their living situation and have a certain measure of success. Despite the fact that Toby felt they had no choice but to live at the motel, they had the money to pay for a studio apartment, which elevated their status above those placed at the motel by DSS. This created a distinct mental boundary between them and other residents whom they viewed as less self-sufficient.

Dee then elaborated on how envisioning the room as a studio apartment protected their psychological wellbeing:
We think about this as a studio apartment. We have to, ‘cause if we continue to realize where we’re at in life, we would spiral into a massive depression. And the house cleaning that we do, would not get done. You know, and uh, the job, wouldn’t be happening and we’d just go on full DSS and uhn, we would just die. I call it home and I cry on the thought of losing it ‘cause this is all I have.?

Viewing the motel room as a studio apartment was a form of resistance that required Dee to spend most of her free time trying to make their room feel like a home. This labor of love created a fantastical narrative that kept Dee and Toby psychologically buoyant by masking the miserable conditions that plagued many rooms in the motel. One day in February, I visited Dee and she gave me a tour of their room. Figure 10 represents the most complete view of the room, while Figures 11-13 illustrate particular aspects of the room that she felt were meaningful and important.

These visuals show how Dee and Toby used material comforts to cope with the motel’s stigma. By decorating their room like a small apartment, they changed how they viewed their lives and changed the way their identities were created on a day to day basis. The appearance of their room also allowed them to distinguish themselves from other residents on a level of mainstream level of material comfort and cleanliness. Dee and Toby had a room which resembled a normal apartment, while others did not have the material goods to decorate or were unable to maintain such a pristine environment. While Dee showed me around her room she created substantial boundaries between her and other residents when she said, “Another pet peeve, is looking at your food. Like Sky’s got food all over her place, and um, it was a big thing for me not having my food going all the way across and stuck on here, you know.” Dee again compared her room to Sky’s:

Why would I wanna go in her dark, drabby house when it’s beautiful out? At least open a fuckin’ window, get the fuckin’ comforter off the window. It’s ridiculous, she wonders why she’s depressed, she has no vitamin D. She’s covering her
windows, there's no sunlight, and you don't go outside, so. Why are you depressed again? You don’t go tanning.

Dee’s boundary creation between Reggie and Sky was important because in terms of material resources as represented in the rooms, Reggie and Sky, and Dee and Toby had very similar displays. Both couples had also lived at the motel for a similar amount of time (almost two years), so in many ways, they could be viewed as equals. When Dee made explicit contrasts to Sky, she created boundaries between them in order to distinguish her and Toby’s situation from one that could be considered similar.

There did come a point when Dee’s efforts to make their room feel homey created problems between her and Toby. To maintain the illusion that the room was a studio apartment, Dee often spent what little money she and Toby had on decorations and fancy items that Toby felt were unnecessary. One day, I knocked on their door and Dee opened it and said, “We’re having a [sic] awesome fight, this is awesome.” She turned to Toby, who was sitting on the couch, and said sarcastically, “I think you’re awesome Toby.” Toby shook his head and muttered, “Fine Dee, whatever.” I apologized for intruding and Toby said, “This dumbass spends her fuckin’ whole food stamp check in one week. Then what do we got for the rest of the month? Nothing. It all goes fuckin’ bad. Every time she does it no matter what I say. Fuckin’ retard.” He and I then stepped outside so he could smoke a cigarette and he continued, “I don’t need body spray, I don’t need this shit. I’m trying to save money, and making minimum wage. I don’t need this.” While Toby appreciated certain aspects of the studio apartment narrative, he felt that Dee’s efforts to distinguish themselves in luxurious ways threatened their very survival. Because their resistance depended on material goods, it became powerless once the money ran out.
Biggie crafted a particular identity in order to counter stereotypes of motel residents as lazy individuals living off of welfare, by creating boundaries constructed around the role of work. Instead of viewing the room that he and Deirdre shared as a motel room, he constructed an elaborate narrative of self-employment that he presented without reservation to other residents. The first day that I met Biggie, he told me that he was a “businessman” and was looking to hire some employees for his operation that was “open from five in the morning to five in the afternoon.” I asked him what the business was and he said confidently, “we do everything,” telling me that they could provide anyone in the motel with whatever they wanted.

It took me several days to realize that because Biggie took apart items for scrap metal inside the room, he envisioned himself as an entrepreneur running a business and referred to the room as his “shop.” One afternoon, I watched him sitting on his bed working on a crossword puzzle as he said, “Usually when I have off, my work’s done in the workshop, I come to the office and I’ll take an hour to do one of those then I’ll go right into my paperwork.” Figure 14 shows a portion of Biggie’s “shop."

This narrative of work helped Biggie present himself in stark contrast to other residents who did not put in the effort to support themselves. One day, I asked him how life was going because I had been gone for a few days and he said, “When everybody went to work, Reg didn’t really have nobody to socialize with. I work. But I work at home.” I knocked on his door on an August morning as he was throwing some circuit boards in a large trashcan and we had the following exchange in which he sternly pointed out that he worked harder than me:

Me:  You working?
Biggie: No.
Me: I don’t want to bother you if you’re working. How’s the car?
Biggie: Very good.
Me: You guys get to the track yet?
Biggie: I go to work son.
Me: I know.
Biggie: Okay, so when do I have time to do anything but work? I get up a lot earlier than you do.

The businessman narrative helped shield Biggie’s identity from stigma by giving his daily life a sense of purpose and accomplishment. It also allowed him to craft an identity for himself as an upstanding partner for Deidre. He used his profits from scrapping to buy items for her and told me, “She gets whatever she wants.” When I met Biggie, he had just bought a gas grill that he claimed was “for her” and told me he wanted to buy her a larger grill, as well as a new coffee maker, blender, and deep fryer. He was intently focused on “taking care of my girl” and contrasted his treatment of Deirdre with Reg and Sky’s relationship. Biggie said of Reg, “You take your wife’s money, spend all her money, beat the shit out of her, yell all the time. You a Nazi, you come from a family of hate.” Biggie created a clear boundary between him and Reg by portraying Reg as a non-working, abusive partner, living off his wife’s efforts. This was the polar opposite of how Biggie conceived himself, and he even linked Reg’s behavior to ideology and upbringing, which implied that Biggie had been raised differently.

Biggie bought a car in July and when he bought it to the motel he told me, “It was worth it, ‘cause now my girl’s happy, now she had a ride. She lives like a queen.” This accomplishment was a real source of pride to Biggie and he spent a good 15 minutes ranting excitedly to me about what it meant to them:

Now that I got the car I’ll have money all the time. ‘Cause now, my girl’s all set. Now that’s one less argument I ain’t gotta worry about. Not only one less argument, but another thing ‘cause she was upset, because I had lost $30. She can look at it, oh now my man’s doing alright. Now he’s moving back where he
should be, I’m saying, you can see it ain’t all about his medicine or his herb, it’s all about me. It ain’t he won’t sacrifice for me, know what I’m sayin’? It’s been two years since we haven’t had a car. And, that, that, that’s because I love family and I love my kids. Now it’s all about me and my girl man. And my business. Now I can go to the scrapyard, yo let’s get a ride into the scrapyard.

He finished by saying, “My girl messin’ up with a straight up gangsta my boy. Gangster, father, and worker. Oh, plus the businessman, don’t let her forget that.” Getting a car was a game changer that moved Biggie and Deirdre closer to leaving the motel. Biggie again contrasted his desire to leave with Reg by saying, “My plan is get the fuck outta here. Unless you content here, if you beat your wife or take advantage of people smaller than you, then you content here, you don’t want to leave.” This statement created another clear boundary between him and Reggie based on intent and goals. In Biggie’s mind, he was achieving the middle-class markers of success by working and providing, so he could not be content at the motel. By contrast, Biggie felt Reg was comfortable at the motel because it suited his achievements.

Many residents picked up on the complexity of Biggie’s business narrative. Roy said, “He go to pick sheet metal and get twenty to forty dollars a day and that’s his business in his mind. So if to him that’s his business, that’s cool with me.” Sam laughed when he told me:

*When I first met him, he blew me away Chris, let me tell you how he blew me away. ‘Cause he said he had an office, was a businessman, he said I’m a business man, I got an office, I run my business you know. But he picks up scrap metal. I put two and two together, ‘cause he had me thinking he had a real office. And he did, like he said, in his mind his apartment is his office. So these are the little insights you gotta see, they not bad people, but they got problems man that you gotta process.*

Biggie blended the fact that he lived in a motel with his scrapping efforts to create a narrative of work and provision. The facts were that Biggie lived in a motel, was
officially unemployed, and was so conscious of money that he picked up every coin he saw on the ground. However, when compared to other residents, he saw a hard-working and successful provider for his partner. This boundary allowed him to live up to the middle class measure of masculine success and gave Biggie a sense of pride in his day to day activities that would otherwise have been overshadowed by the stigma of the motel.

Reggie’s resistance against the stigma of living in the motel was summed up when he stated, “I like it here.” When other residents complained about the living conditions and day to day existence at the motel, it solidified the stigma of living at the Boardwalk as a negative attribute. By framing his life in the motel as a preference, the stigma of living in the motel became non-existent and it no longer linked Reggie to any sign of failure. This created a clear boundary between himself and other residents. While they lived there because their lives had spiraled out of control, Reggie chose to live there and was therefore still in control of his trajectory.

The importance of this narrative became clear when Reggie took instant offense to any threats against his boundary work. One day Sky wanted to ask other residents for cigarettes and Reggie screamed at her, “Acting like we’re fucking poor asking people for shit! Get the fuck over that!” When I told him that I viewed the motel as a place for people with nowhere else to go, he quickly corrected me, “I like it here. It’d be so easy for me to get out but I choose not to.” I mentioned that it would be nice to have a real kitchen and Reggie looked at me and said, “What can’t I cook? I have everything, what can’t I cook? You’ve had stuff baked in my toaster oven.” Reggie’s boundary creation was a clear attempt to combat the stigma of failure, as he contrasted himself with other residents whom he saw as lacking the means to control their lives. If Reggie was in full
control of his destiny, then there was no reason to equate an outcome like living at the motel with failure to achieve a goal.

This identity of full situational control was also seen when Reggie made substantial efforts to portray himself as a man who was not afraid of any challenge. He told Mike one day:

*The first motherfucker that wants to question my manhood? Oh, I'm coming out, let's go. I don't care if I get my ass beat. Since you seen me here though, have you ever seen me back down from a motherfucker? Do you think I'm going to? It's not going to happen and I don't care if this motherfucker's three times my size.*

This lack of fear was also evident when Trim and Sam discussed prison and Sam warned Reggie that they would not be able to be friends in prison because of race relations. Reggie brushed this idea aside and said, “No, I’d stick up for my friends.” Sam and Trim claimed that they had the same idea but it all changed when they entered prison. Reggie refused to relent and said, “I’m not you,” staking a claim that traditional rules of powerlessness did not apply to him. There were also several instances when Reggie gave the impression that he did not hesitate to be aggressive with authority figures. When a building inspector came by one day looking to check out his room, Reg told me:

*Said buddy you got a better chance a getting Bin Laden than getting through that fuckin’ door. My wife’s naked on the other side a [sic] that wall. I said now have a good fucking day and slammed the door in his face. Even if the owner says you’re comin’ I’ll tell you to go fuck yourself. He’d a went through me and he’d a ended up on his ass.*

These narratives portrayed Reggie as a man capable of extreme violence, but always cool and dismissive about danger to himself. Sociologist Jack Katz describes being cool as “to view the immediate social situation as ontologically inferior, nontranscendent, and too mundane to compel one’s complete attentions.”22 By appearing cool and controlled when faced with any situation, particularly those involving physical
danger, Reggie elevated his social status among those at the motel and fought off stigma of weakness. This strutting also suggested that living in the motel was a threat to Reggie’s masculinity. Since he did not have a legitimate job and Sky did, his male identity as capable provider was threatened and he reclaimed this masculine status by emphasizing his physical capabilities.23

This is not to say that Reggie’s narrative lacked justification. His “king of the hill” mentality was epitomized when he referred to himself as “the bull” of the motel. This identity was aided by the fact that Reggie’s hulking size made him the biggest resident of the Boardwalk and he was by far the most public figure at the motel. According to Reggie’s definition of masculinity, this made him the alpha male and created clear boundaries between him and other males at the motel simply based on size and aggression. Furthermore, when compared to many other residents of the motel (particularly those placed by DSS) Reggie and Sky lived like royalty in terms of material possessions. Because they had “stepped down” from apartments and other more stable living situations, they had brought many possessions with them and had accumulated others during the course of their two-year tenure at the motel. Like Dee and Toby, these items allowed them to create a living space that resembled a home. Their room was decorated with a 60-inch television, a desk filled with books, two refrigerators, a toaster oven, a large electronic skillet, and several posters and trinkets that honored Sky’s love of Family Guy (Figures 15-16).

Reggie’s resistance narrative also included using copious amounts of alcohol on a regular basis. He referred to himself as an alcoholic and said things like, “I got so fucked up last night, Jake and I killed two six packs and the leftover cider we had.” However,
Reggie did not view himself as a “drunk” and admitted that he had a problem, but knew when to stop. He also regularly used marijuana and occasionally abused other drugs and pills. This drug use was part of a narrative that celebrated deviance, but more importantly served as a coping mechanism for motel life. Psychologist Jeffery Schaler argues that drug addiction is used to cope with, or avoid coping with reality. In Reggie’s case, his reality was that he lived in a motel rife with stigma and devoid of many markers of middle class success. Because drug use was accepted and promoted at the motel, drug use changed his reality and created an identity of status because he could use many substances and remain none the worse for wear.

There were times when Reggie’s cool and controlled narrative broke down. As Thanksgiving approached he said to me, “Every time I think I like it here I think I wanna move. A yard would be nice, a backyard, a porch, a kitchen where you can actually cook a turkey.” While this came mere days after he claimed that he could cook anything he wanted, Reggie should not be viewed as dishonest. In many ways, Reggie enjoyed the motel because it gave him respect and a large degree of freedom that he might not have found in other locations. Reggie reveled in his role of what Jack Katz describes as a “badass” and celebrated behavior that was symbolic of deviance. This created boundaries between himself and other motel residents that gave him power and status. However, because his public identity was a form of resistance that limited the damage to his ego that came from living at the motel, it was impossible for him to forget where he once was. Therefore, while Reggie distanced himself from other residents in ways that increased his social status, he was still reminded that there were those who possessed a higher social status at his own expense.
In stark contrast to Reggie, some residents condemned the thought of getting too comfortable at the motel. To them, living in the motel was a necessity and if they were not careful, they could become stuck there. This created clear boundaries between residents who felt they had more to achieve in life, and the residents who they viewed as having given up. In her study of extended stay hotels, social worker Terri Lewinson finds that many residents avoided decorating their rooms in order to reflect their goals of moving on, amid concerns of becoming too comfortable and not moving out.  

The always friendly Roy voiced this concern at the Boardwalk when he said, “These people here, they forty, fifty, they old, they are satisfied, they content in this environment, it's not about getting ahead.” Because Roy was 43 and one could assume that he was similarly content, he made it clear that he was quite different from other residents and was only at the motel due to unfortunate circumstances:

Most of the women here are on what? Drugs. Drugs, and most of the men are pedophiles. Why would a person in their right mind want to live here? You a druggie or you a pedophile. I went to business college and what fucked it up was I had a kid! I’m determined to make something happen. Once I get a job, I’m outta this place. I’m just a guy who just be trying to be, just trying to make it man.

To Roy, others his age had given up “trying to make it” and it was important that people understood that unlike others, he was working to step up from the motel.

Similar to Roy and Biggie, Sam held the view that residents sought to stay at the motel because their failure to achieve success made the motel appealing. He created boundaries between himself and residents whom he felt had gotten too “comfortable” and “complacent.” He often used these words when talking about Reggie, Jake, Marc, and Ramòn, and went on a long rant while we sat outside his room on a hot summer day:

I’m too old for some of these cats. They all alcoholics and they all think they still slick with dey mouth. They busted and done, all of them. They done, you can bake
them mothafuckas off and set ‘em on the side. They all done. But they still think they got it. They sit there and drink all day long. If you listen to ‘em talk they swear they philosophers, scientists, engineers, like the greatest people in the world. All they do is sit there and one cheap ass beer after another.

That’s the life they wanna live, they all complacent. This is the end of the road for dem. It is the end of the road, they ain’t tryin’ to go nowhere, ain’t tryin’ to get nowhere. I guess sometimes you give up on life that’s what happens when you give up. Guess they had a plan, didn’t have a plan B and plan A collapsed. I ain’t got no plan B, so I just sit here and drink.

It’s that word complacent, come on Chris. Once you get to that point, there is nothing else. You don’t have nothing else to motivate you. Only way they get outta there the motherfucker burn down and Red Cross come and move their ass somewhere. That’s the only way that’ll happen. Other than that they ain’t goin’ nowhere.

Sam’s age contributed to his outlook, as he was 54 and Reggie, Jake, Marc, and Ramòn were in their 30s. In Sam’s eyes, those young residents used drugs because they had given up on the prospect of moving forward. When Sam moved out, Reggie asked to see Sam’s new apartment and Sam rebuffed him, citing Reggie’s behavior:

Reg wanted to come by one day, you know I had talked to him I guess, right before Thanksgiving and you know, everywhere you go you bring misery man. You a drug addict and you don’t see that you have a problem, see and you get $900 of money from the government, part of that is my tax payment, I dunno what percentage I give you, prolly three dollas, ‘cause I only make 7.50 an hour. But still that disability money is tax payer’s money, that’s how you get paid, sitting around drinkin’ and druggin’. You know that bothers me too, ‘cause you a young man, you can work, you can sling beer cans up and down your gut all day long and sniff dope up your nose and smoke crack, but you can’t work. That’s some bullshit too, but to each his own. I’m not mad at him, but like I told him, I don’t think I’ll ever have you to my house either.

This distance that Sam created reflected his concern that Reggie was not living the fulfilling life that he could be. Sam claimed that he tried to set a good example for Reggie and others who had given up:

I wanna work ‘cause I wanna start livin’ again. This ain’t livin’ Chris, this is not livin’. This is not livin’. I don’t knock Reg and them, but they too young to not be livin’ life. And I talks to him too, you know, but this is not living. I always said this was a stepping stone, this was a stepping stone on to something else. You know we
all run into hardships, we all get problems. But you know, there’s gotta be something way, way greater than this Chris.

They just get so complacent. They think this is the end of the road and they can’t do no better, so they just stay at the end of the road. I say brother, the road winds, and twists and turns, and curves and you just gotta get on it and follow it to the end and I guarantee you you’ll find life more adventurous. But if you stay at the dead end street, well you know one of them days you gotta walk off the dead end ‘cause that’s as far as you go is the dead end. You got to take the road and see where it winds and curves and goes and ‘fore you know it, you’ll be glad you did ‘cause it’s a whole big world out there man. They don’t wanna get out there and live man.

Sam also resisted filing for unemployment because he believed “checks make people complacent.” When Justine pressed him to go to DSS he said:

I said no no no, that’s for motherfuckers that can’t do no better. I kept tellin’ her that. That’s for people, that really gave up. Now I can see if you got a mortgage that’s due and, you know you ain’t found a job right away, sometime you forced to go do it Chris. But I said baby, you workin’, we can, we can make it, it’s gonna be a little hard but we can make it. I said but if I go down there and start getting checks, man you start getting them checks, Chris eventually you will not go to work, that’s a fact.27

Sam felt that government benefits threatened his identity as a hard working individual persevering in the face of adversity. Because his presentation of self involved resistance in the form of work, it was easy to see how Sam was aggravated by those whom he felt did not possess similar drive. Sam had internalized popular discourse about the poor in his disapproval and criticism of Reggie and others. This boundaries between him and their “comfortable” lives, and gave meaning to his efforts.

The boundaries that Sam constructed between himself and those on welfare were echoed by other residents. Reggie and Mike had the following exchange one afternoon as they sat in the garden near the rear of the motel:

Reggie: Hey yo, I live off the system too but I make my money on the side.

Mike: No no no no. You get a check. You don’t get welfare.
You don't get welfare. They get welfare.
Reggie:
I hate that shit, motherfuckers looking for a free ride. Then they try and live off of you while they're here.
Mike:
No matter how much I drink, I still go to work.
Reggie:
I don't work but I have my hustles. My cigarettes, I sell what I can get. I do what I do man but I make a living. I have my extra money, my check is not my life. I could live without that check and still be happy.

Similarly, Biggie and Deirdre were adamant that they did not live off of DSS, as Biggie continually told me, “We pay our own rent.” The creation of boundaries between welfare recipients and others demonstrated the importance of the ability to “make a living.” This identity of achievement was an active form of resistance against the welfare stigma attached to the Boardwalk.

In many ways, Larry’s outlook was similar to Sam’s. When Larry moved into the Boardwalk from his car in October, I asked him early on what he thought about the motel’s reputation of housing sex offenders and he said:

As long as like I said, they don’t bother me, I don’t bother them. Like I said a lot of times you don’t know the whole story anyway. You know you hear it from one said, you know that guy’s a fuckin’ asshole, blah blah blah. Just like any situation, there’s always two sides to a story. You can’t judge somebody on one person’s uh…one person’s accusations. I was brought up the right way. I’m courteous to people. I’m respectable and I respect people, that’s just the way I am. I guess I’m kinda soft in a way at some times, that’s just me.

I was struck by this tolerance of sex offenders because it was often lacking at the motel. On several occasions, Larry’s efforts to assist residents who he viewed as vulnerable proved that his point of view was not just lip service. However, as Larry became more involved with the motel’s residents, his tolerance began to wither.

Within a few weeks of moving in, Larry was doing maintenance jobs around the motel such as cleaning the office windows and sweeping around the parking lot. By the end of October, Larry had assumed a daytime manager position and rented out rooms in
addition to doing maintenance. He received $10 a day for this work and admitted that it hurt his pride to make so little, but he could not turn down the opportunity to make money. With this new job came a new and free residence when Larry moved into the house next to the Park Place that was inhabited by Elizabeth and Natalie. Sam told me:

He moved over there, ‘cause once you take the little job here they move you to the blue house. Then from the blue house, they move you out to the street again. Most people don’t stay in that blue house long. I told him that, it’s like a curse on that blue house. None of the maintenance people, in all the years I been comin’ up here, they don’t stay long.

Fortunately for Larry, he bucked this trend and still lived in the house when I concluded my fieldwork. This move from resident to employee did not sit well with others and Reggie complained, “Larry, he’s been acting like a fuckin’ douche, since he’s become fuckin’, whatever he is here.” Reggie’s observation was fairly astute because as Larry’s involvement in the managerial aspect of the motel increased, so did his social distance from other residents. The physical distance created by Larry’s move to the “blue house” amplified the boundaries between him and the residents of the Boardwalk.

Despite the fact that he used to reside at the Boardwalk Motel, after starting his job as day manager Larry consistently created boundaries between himself and motel residents based on what he perceived were differences in intelligence and behavior. A month after moving out of the motel, Larry told me:

It’s easy to get along with you because you have smarts. It’s hard around here because there’s people with such different personalities and some people don’t have a lot goin’ on upstairs. You’re the only one that has common sense, the rest of these guys here. I mean, don’t get me wrong, I don’t dislike ‘em, I just like talkin’ intelligent to people, these guys, they’re just not too bright.

My presence and friendship allowed Larry to share in my status prestige and he took full advantage of it when discussing other residents. This statement was less of a compliment
of me and more of an attempt by Larry to use my presence to create boundaries from residents whom he felt lacked the capacity to carry on a conversation with someone who was atypical of the motel. One day Reggie declined a ride that Larry offered and Larry complained to me:

_I don’t even why I offer people sumpin’, ‘cause there, they got nothin’, nothing upstairs you know what I’m sayin’? I mean I’m not sayin’ they’re bad people but, they’re headed down the wrong road, he’s only 37 years old, I went through that shit. It’s a lot of fun when you’re young but when you get older it’s a job, it’s no fun after a while. I don’t think you ever been through it, which is a good thing Chris. I don’t think you ever will, you don’t seem that type of person._

By asserting that I was not the type of person to use drugs like Reg, Larry made a claim about Reg and placed Reg’s social status below mine. Larry also made a statement to distance himself from Reg. Because he used to behave in a similar manner to Reg but had changed his ways, Larry was smarter than Reg and held a higher social position.

Another way that Larry created boundaries was by linking behavior to how people were raised. When we first met he spoke about his past drug use and told me:

_Even if you do drugs, you’ll start thinking, you know I wasn’t brought up like this. When you’re brought up properly it’s instilled in your mind. I got a good family and I was brought up properly, it’s just, things went sour only because of my doing you know, I’m not blaming anyone else but myself._

In Larry’s mind, behavior was determined by upbringing. Larry presented himself as a man who overcame drug abuse because his family environment had given him that power. More to the point, the argument “I wasn’t brought up that way” created boundaries and identity because it placed Larry in a completely different social class than those at the motel. It implied that motel residents came from families where that sort of behavior was tolerated or encouraged.

When I asked Larry one day in December how things were going, he responded:
Well, I really wanna get outta here, it's just too much. Too much bullshit you know? Too many people are just crazy. I wasn’t brought up like that. I mean believe me, I lived on the street too, but. Everybody’s either drinking or they’re doing drugs. I have some beers too, you know. I’m not really worried about getting caught up with it. It’s just that the people are so phony, you know what I mean? You know it’s always lies and gossip. I, I just don’t like that shit. But, that’s just the way life is I guess. In places like this, know what I mean.

By attributing motel culture to how people were raised, Larry crafted an identity for himself that made him qualitatively different from other residents. It was not just that he acted different, but because of his family background, he had been and would always be different. His comment about “places like this” made it clear that Larry linked the location with the behavior that he condemned. In Larry’s presentation of self, his destiny and social standing were predetermined by his upbringing, as if he was programmed from an early age to behave better. His boundaries established that he was not cut from the same cloth as the residents of the Boardwalk and therefore, could never be comfortable in that environment, or viewed as the same.

Despite the fact that Larry felt he had created an upstanding identity for himself, others did not always see it that way. After Sam moved out, he and Larry kept in touch by phone and like Reggie, Larry asked if he could come over to Sam’s new place. When they both lived at the motel, Sam felt that he and Larry were kindred spirits because of their age. Sam reversed course after he left and told Larry that coming over to his apartment was not a good idea:

I dunno if he got offended by it or what, but you know uh, I mean what it is, is what it is. I said Larry, you know, I know you, but we ain’t, we ain’t friendly like that you know, ‘cause you drink and all that. I mean I don’t or nothin’, I don’t want none of that shit around me Chris.

Don’t get me wrong I like Larry, he’s a nice guy. Like Justine say, you know he let me use the car a couple times, you know, and and, but you know, at the same token, we talkin’ ‘bout my home, you know. And some things we have to separate.
You know everybody you meet and you smile at they face, ain’t a friend. You just can’t be draggin’ everybody to your house, you know that just something you just don’t do. These guys you know, I told Larry, you a drifer Larry, you know, I know what you do, you a drifer. I don’t know how long you’ll be at the Boardwalk, once you get in your car and pack up and leave one day, we might not never see you again, you know. I mean you came here like a warm breeze, you fuckin’ leave out the same way.

Me and you, we sat down, we talked when you was always drunk after about four beers you wanna sit down and talk with me, so I sat down and talked with you and you know that was basically it you know. And you know, you out buyin’ prostitutes and shit, I mean, I, I, I ain’t livin’ like that Larry. I mean, I understand, you a single man, that’s your cup a tea, not mine. And I told you guys when I moved out, that, you know, I’ll see you guys when I see you but, it wasn’t gonna be that kinda party, you know.

Once Sam left the motel, he used physical distance to lay down more concrete boundaries from individuals still at the motel. His willingness to interact with Larry and Reg at the Boardwalk, but then limit interaction when gone, put him in the category of what Reg called a “motel friend” versus a “real friend.” “Motel friends” are a prime example of what sociologist Matthew Desmond calls “disposable ties.” Because the Boardwalk was so transient, Reggie realized that most social interaction was simply based on proximity and that these interactions were those of “motel friends.” Once a person moved out, there was often little incentive to keep in contact. Those who established an emotional connection that lasted beyond life at the motel were considered “real friends.”

The social psychological strategy of creating boundaries and warding off stigma was an important part of everyday life at the Boardwalk Motel. However, in order to avoid any sort of academic stigmatization of marginalized people, it must be noted that creating distinctions and boundaries is to some degree, a feature of many social groups. The process of “othering” has been well-documented among what may be considered
fairly mainstream social groups such as: nurses, radiologists, college athletes, religious
groups, rural whites, sororities, and sports fans.\textsuperscript{31}

This chapter explored the ways in which residents resisted the stigma of motel life
by creating and managing identities. A key part of these identities involved presentations
of self that established boundaries between other residents. These boundaries served to
inoculate residents against the psychological harm that occurred when residents
considered their living situations in the context of middle class success. Identity
management met the very basic psychological need to cope with the courtesy stigma of
the motel environment. However, the shared identity of the Boardwalk was not entirely
destructive. Because they shared the same environment, motel residents encountered
what Goffman refers to as “sympathetic others” in the form of other residents.\textsuperscript{32} In many
ways, encountering “sympathetic others” gave residents a common identity. One day,
Cinque complained that Elizabeth did not understand what he was going through and
Sam called out to him, “Cinque, everybody is! Shit, everybody goin’ through sumpin.
Nigga we all strugglin’ out here. You think we all happy? We all struggling, alla us!” In
the next chapter, I will examine how residents worked together in their daily struggles to
create a culture of community at the Boardwalk Motel.
Chapter 5: Community, Conflict, and Fragility

In the previous chapter, I described the ways in which residents attempted to resist stigma from the outside world. One of the tools they used was narrative, or a story of the self. Narratives are important because they create a version of the truth. Dutchland residents also used narratives to create their own truths about the Boardwalk Motel. One online commenter wrote in response to discussions about motels and the local economy, “The only economy it’s helping is the slum lords [sic] pockets. Oh and maybe Giant Foods across the street where the tenants buy the beer for their cookouts during the day when the other Dutchland residents are working.” This narrative portrayed motel life as comfortable, as if motel residents basked in daily luxuries that hard working residents of Dutchland could only dream of. As this chapter will show, residents of the Boardwalk lived lives of deprivation and insecurity, and living at the motel only served to exacerbate their vulnerabilities.

Residents of the Boardwalk Motel faced both material and social deprivations. These deprivations left residents with wants and needs that required attention, often on a daily basis. While some residents of the Boardwalk Motel chose to address these needs in relative solitude, daily life at the motel was highly organized around calculated social interaction. Social interaction among these residents can be classified into two types of behavior: community and conflict. When motel residents attempted to alleviate their deprivations via one another, they engaged in community - the consensual transfer of resources between residents satisfying wants and needs. While these transfers proved mutually beneficial, they often led to conflict - perceived acts of disrespect created through social interaction. On many occasions, the process of resolving conflict through
violence, threats or violence, or blacklisting, increased fragility among residents. As I explained earlier, fragility is the shortage of material goods and social capital that leaves one vulnerable to unexpected or self-inflicted disruptions to short and long-term goals.

Community, conflict, and fragility are best viewed as a cycle. Residents of the Boardwalk Motel arrived in states of fragility and attempted to address their shortages of material goods and social capital by engaging in community. These community interactions often led to conflict when residents perceived that they had been disrespected. Conflict resolution then increased fragility, leading residents engage in more community to address any deprivations that had increased as a result of conflict (Figure 17). In this chapter, I will examine these cyclical themes of community, conflict, and fragility by showing how they emerged through social interaction and describing how they affected the lives of motel residents for better, and often for the worse.

**Community**

*The Underground Economy*

The most observable transfers of resources revolved around material goods in what I call the motel’s underground economy. Residents were acutely aware that although they all endured lives of relative deprivation, this did not translate into a complete lack of resources. Rather, each resident possessed varying amounts of material goods and social capital that were determined by the paths of migration that brought them to the motel. In some ways, the social landscape of residents can be viewed as a realm of rulers who presided over a particular set of natural resources. Only though social interaction were residents able to “discover” the resources that others possessed and if these resources were available for transfer, borrowing, or exchange.
Residents often discovered available resources through inquiry in the form of knocking on doors and asking those living inside for particular items. Sam told me about people knocking on his door asking, “You got a pack a hotdogs, you got a jar a peanut butter? It happens every day.” When Tat returned to the motel from prison, he knocked on several doors looking for a pan, silverware, DVDs, and a hammer.

Inquiries about resources also occurred in the public spaces outside rooms. Jake and I were walking through the parking lot one winter afternoon when a new resident asked if we had any empty cans. We said no and Jake informed the man that everyone at the motel was on the lookout for empty cans. Because Jake and Reggie were avid can collectors, this man represented a threat. By insinuating that there were no cans to be had, Jake protected his territory. Late one April evening Tat and I were talking in the parking lot when Patch called out to us from his room several doors down, “Yo bro! You got a phone?” and later, “Yo bro, you got rollin’ papers?” Most residents at the motel had phones which were loaded with pre-paid minutes. When these minutes ran out, often at the end of the month, the need for minutes became pressing.

Inquiries that occurred outside were aided by nice weather because many residents spent warm and sunny days in the parking lot soaking up the sun and fresh air. On these desirable days it was easy to see what resources residents possessed because passing the time in this manner usually involved the consumption of beer, food, cigarettes, and marijuana. Those who chose to drink, smoke, and eat in full view opened themselves up to constant inquiries about these goods. Jake and I took advantage of an April day to drink cans of Coors Light in the parking lot and a new resident sauntered up
to ask, “Can I grab one of those cold ones offa you?” Jake asked if he had any money and the man replied, “I got no food, no money.”

Vehicles were visible regardless of the weather, which made them unique possessions. It was rare that a resident owned a vehicle and therefore, residents with cars (such as Biggie, Larry, and myself) became instant celebrities. Anytime a resident arrived in a car or went out to their car, they opened themselves up to the question, “Is that your car?” which was inevitably followed by a request. Residents requested the use of vehicles for a variety of reasons, such as when Sam paid Biggie $10 for a ride to downtown Riverfort. Some residents did not want to walk to locations in the sustainable habitat, like Cinque, who would ask for rides to fast food establishments. When Larry started working as the day manager he was unable to leave the premises; he asked me on a daily basis to drive to CVS for cans of Natural Ice, which he referred to as his “cornflakes” because he used them to start his morning. Other times, residents going on shopping trips did not want to carry purchases back to the motel or push them back in a cart. I was enlisted for rides when Reggie and Jake accumulated huge bags of cans and bottles to be returned at Giant Foods to reclaim the deposit. Then there were more demanding requests that involved a bigger investment of resources, such as when Dale asked if Biggie could drive him to his father’s house an hour away to pick up some belongings.

Enterprising residents made an effort to advertise that their resources that were available for exchange. Reggie taped an 8x11 piece of white paper in his window, upon which he had written in red marker, “Cigarettes for sale. 50 cents a piece. No credit. 8am to 8pm.” Similarly, when Cinque began selling marijuana, he actively encouraged his customers to spread the word that marijuana was available.
One of the more interesting resources that residents advertised was the skill of giving tattoos. The Boardwalk was home to a few aspiring tattoo artists, which was not surprising given that many residents had spent time in prison. Tat, as his name suggests, envisioned tattooing as a way to earn money and legitimacy. One day he brought me into his room to show me his drawings. Together we moved a large black refrigerator from one part of his dresser to another, revealing a half dozen pieces of white notebook paper. These drawings were hidden because they were sexual in nature, featuring Japanese anime-style depictions of woman in various stages of undress, and as a sex offender on parole, Tat was prohibited from having any sort of pornographic materials. Tat’s relatives bought him a tattoo kit online for $300 and they dropped it off at the motel one day in April. Later that afternoon, Tat showed me the kit saying, “This is a career for me, I draw very good as you can see. And um, I’m thinking about maybe um, filling out applications as a tattoo shop.” He then looked at me and asked, “Ya’ll like tattoos right?” offering to give me one for very cheap. I declined the offer, but told Tat that others at the motel might be interested and he offered tattoos to Jake and Spike.6

Residents advertised resources in other ways. For example, Ned loitered in the parking lot one day asking if anyone needed their bills paid by phone. Ned was unable to articulate how this would occur but Sam and I told him we would spread the word for him. On a cold winter day, Eric, the shorter Park Place resident with tattoos under his eyes, walked into the Boardwalk office with a black North Face jacket several sizes too big which he tried to sell to me for fifty dollars. I suspected it was stolen so I declined and he then tried to sell it to Elizabeth, asking, “You got kids? How ‘bout a husband?”
She replied, “Oh he’s dead, I don’t think he needs it.” Eric then turned to me and said, “I’ll take forty dollars, I just need the money.”

This illustrates that unlike a commercial establishment with predefined prices for goods and services, the motel’s underground economy thrived on negotiation. Those who needed to offload items for cash were often at the mercy of those doing the purchasing. As Reggie put it, “People need the money, they come here on their last dime.” This made the Boardwalk a seller’s market, as those who were approached for their goods and services had the upper hand and could refuse exchange if they did not feel the price was right. Reggie explained this to Curtis one day:

Curtis: Can I have a cigarette?
Reggie: I sell them, I do not give them out.
Curtis: Give you ten bucks later.
Reggie: Yeah later I don’t do. I don’t mean that rudely but I can’t lose out.
Curtis: For a quarter?
Reggie: I’ll smoke it myself for that price. If you had forty or forty-five I might say okay, but not a quarter. I’m not that desperate.

Amidst this chaos, the market did establish some going rates for goods and services. A cigarette ran between fifty cents and a dollar, and cans or bottles of beer/soda/water were usually a dollar each. The ability to run errands on foot was also valuable. Residents were often interested in obtaining food, beer, or other items from the sustainable habitat, but not interested in exerting the effort to procure them. In these instances, those who obtained goods for others were either paid with some of the materials (such as a can of beer) or a negotiated sum of money.

Because cash was so scarce, it was not expected to be the primary method of payment for goods and services. Often, the exchanges of goods and services occurred chaotically and haphazardly. A prime example occurred on an uncharacteristically warm
November day. Shawn was a male nurse in his late 30s, with a moustache and shaggy brown hair who rode a green mountain bike. He traded his bike to Reggie for a nickel bag of marijuana and told me that he parted with the bike because he got hit riding it and “it did enough to me.” Later that evening, the new resident Gene arrived on a grey bike and took a room on the second floor. A shorter man on DSS with a round, bald head, Gene asked everyone he encountered if they had a microwave he could use to cook some meat that he had just stolen from a local restaurant. He and Shawn entered into an agreement which Gene described as, “I traded my bike to the dude, I said take my bike, I don’t fuckin’ need it, here. I got a microwave now. He wanted ten bucks for it, I said you want a bicycle? He fuckin’ rode it, said no problem.”

The exchange between Shawn and Reggie shows that a large part of the underground economy was devoted to drugs. A variety of residents with mental health issues sold their prescriptions to others. Ed was a prime example who often sold his Xanax to Natalie and other residents. However, the most popular drug at the Boardwalk was marijuana and its market was prone to interruptions, as one day residents would have access to drugs and the next day, the dealer could be gone and new arrangements had to be made. When I first arrived Roy was the only active drug seller. He sold marijuana and other drugs to residents of the Boardwalk, trailer park, and Park Place, and several residents referred to him as “the weed man.” Roy’s connections to the drug world allowed him to control the market and he charged upwards of fifty dollars for late night runs into Riverfort. When Roy got evicted the motel went without a source of marijuana for a week. Then Anthony, a tall and skinny Puerto Rican with dreadlocks, moved in next door to me at the end of June. He introduced himself by asking if I needed marijuana and
told me, “Everybody smokes weed, like 80 percent of people.” Anthony became the local dealer for residents in the area until he left without warning in the middle of July.

Cinque, who was also a registered sex offender, arrived in mid-August after being paroled on his weapons charge. He and Reggie entered into an agreement to sell marijuana using Cinque’s connections, despite the fact that Reggie told me earlier, “It’s not worth the hassle, it’s not worth the money, it’s not worth anything, it’s really not.” This attitude of wanting to deal drugs for the money, but not wanting to deal with the potential risks was common among residents. Other residents such as Natalie, Sam, Tat, and Darryl all told me that they thought of using their connections to sell drugs at the motel, but could not risk getting in trouble because they all had criminal histories. Furthermore, Tat and Darryl were on parole and focused on going straight.

When Cinque was arrested on Halloween for failing a drug test, Reggie continued using Cinque’s supplier to sell marijuana at the motel. He told me, “I did not want to do it but I am. Entrepreneurial skills brotha.” Reggie then urged me to see if I knew “any college kids who need a nic’ [nickel bag].” Despite the potential problems that drug dealing posed, these drug connections helped Reggie satisfy his wants and needs as he often exchanged marijuana for goods and services. When Reg and Sky decided to move out of the motel, Reg used his profits to save for an apartment and provided marijuana as payment when he needed physical help moving.

Sharing Resources

The sharing of resources occurred when one resident transferred resources to another without any explicit expectation of immediate compensation. Prime examples were instances when residents were given finite resources for one time use such as Sam
giving Cinque a microwaveable burger or Biggie giving the vulnerable Steve a cigarette. In other instances, residents would borrow items for specific purposes and then return them. Ed borrowed a can opener from Toby to make a tuna sandwich, and Tat gave me a hooded sweatshirt to wear as the temperature started to drop one evening.

Residents shared not only their material resources, but their social capital as well. Jake and Sky were fairly unique in that they held jobs in the local community. At one point, they worked together at KFC until Jake quit. Jake then got a job at McDonald’s, which he held for a few months before quitting again and getting hired at the Indian restaurant next door to the motel. New residents of the Boardwalk who were on unemployment and parole were required to look for jobs and often lamented this fact to those that they met. Jake and Sky were quick to tell them to stop by their places of work to fill out applications and use them as references. Sam did something similar when he encouraged Natalie to apply to the girl’s detention facility where his wife worked. To my knowledge, no residents took jobs through these options, although as I will explain later, Darryl did get a job offer with Sky’s help, which led to conflict.

When Jake and Sky were employed at fast food locations, they used their managerial positions to provide food for friends. One afternoon in June, Jake walked into the parking lot and announced that he was heading to KFC and asked the seven of us who were sitting there, “What do people want?” Several of us offered him money and he refused to take it. In October, Reggie, Jake, Cinque, Marc, and I grew hungry after an afternoon of drinking so Reggie invited us to go visit Sky at work at KFC for free dinner. We waltzed into KFC and Sky greeted us with, “The drunken parade’s here!” In addition to giving us whatever we wanted off the menu, Sky gave us ice cream and soda.
In some instances, an extra set of hands or eyes proved just as beneficial as any material resource. Physical resources were useful when residents had to move items in and out of rooms or around other locations. While walking down Main Street in November, Toby noticed a wooden entertainment center by the side of the road and Reg helped him drag it back to his room. Biggie asked me one afternoon if I could give him a haircut, but I told him that I had never done it before. Other times, residents asked each other to pass on messages, like when Trim approached me and said, “Chris, if you see Natalie comin’ up here, tell her I’ll be right back, I had to run into Riverfort.”

Sharing also occurred when residents pooled their resources for mutual benefit. Steve lived on the first floor in room 7, which was easily recognizable because of a white piece of paper taped to the window with the word “*Alarmed*” written in black marker. This sign was put up by his roommate who worked the night shift at the 24-hour Giant Foods, but Steve denied that the room had a security system. Steve met this roommate at the motel and the two moved in together to save money. When I met Steve he had been living with his roommate for two months. Steve also benefitted from this situation because his roommate got free food from work and brought it home around four or five in the morning. The two of them would eat together before Steve’s roommate went to bed.

Pooling resources for mutual benefit occurred on an almost daily basis in many different magnitudes. Jake and Reggie often woke up hungover and their first acts of the day were to combine whatever money they had in order to buy more beer. Cinque and Marc shared a love of pizza and they pooled their money to order pizza and chicken wing dinners after long days of work. When Tat and Patch got to know each other, they spent the evening smoking loose cigarettes that they made by combining their change to buy
rolling papers and tobacco. In these instances of pooling, residents realized that the only way they could satisfy their wants and needs was by working with each other.

Creating Care

The communal actions of sharing between some residents were not the business-like transactions that occurred in the underground economy. When residents established close relationships, sharing involved material resources as well as emotional resources and such actions can be viewed as acts of care. These emotional and material dimensions of community revolved around acts through which residents cared for, tended for, and cared about each other.\(^{10}\) Care work theory is rooted in the examination of the hands-on work (predominantly by women) carried out by individuals in order to maintain and repair the world so it can be lived in as well as possible.\(^{11}\) According to care theorists Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, caregiving requires knowledge that is rooted in everyday understanding of those receiving the care.\(^{12}\) At the motel, the intimacy of the living environment fostered the types of social interactions that led to everyday interactions and understanding between residents with varying vulnerabilities.

Care was used to monitor residents who others viewed as vulnerable and to create and maintain friendships. Sam shared his insight into care at the motel when he told me:

*But then overall, the picture up at the Boardwalk ain’t a bad picture. People helpin’ each other, they sharing stuff. Even though we all have our little moments, but I think we all, we basically like one big family. If I see Ed walkin’ down the street and I see him trip and fall, I’m’a help him up, just cause I know he lives at the Boardwalk, he live the same place I live. If I see somebody messin’ with him by the CVS, I’ll tell everybody, leave him alone that’s my neighbor!*  

Residents often took steps to care for residents whom they viewed as more vulnerable or deprived than they were. DSS used the motel to house individuals with disabilities and mental health issues. Other residents were placed at the motel by family
members who did not want them living at home, or in a shelter or institution. What these residents had in common was that they suffered from a combination of poverty, disability, and mental illness that made self-sufficiency almost impossible.

Those vulnerabilities did not go unnoticed by more functional residents. Reggie commented to me, “There are a lot of mental patients here. They do not belong here.” The belief among residents and even Elizabeth was that case workers simply placed their clients at the motel and forgot about them:

Elizabeth: The case workers don’t watch ‘em.
Sam: Yeah, they don’t never come check on ‘em. I dunno why they got case managers for, they don’t do nothin’. They just dump ‘em up here. It’s just a dumping ground for the mentally ill. I don’t know your job description but I’m pretty sure it involves more than just leaving the motherfuckers here.

Recall that when Larry arrived at the motel, he told me that he was open to viewing each resident as a human being. Because of this, he was particularly haunted by the experiences of Curtis, whose alleged drug and accident induced mental health issues made him quite vulnerable. One day I walked into the office and encountered both of them inside. Curtis mumbled something through his yellow rotting teeth and brown shaggy beard about, “I’m in neverspace. My hands are not. My nose smells turkey. Do me a favor, reflect for me,” and then walked out the door, holding his hands together like he was scheming or playing an invisible accordion. Larry sighed and said:

*This isn’t helpin’ him. You got people you know, talkin’ down to him. Makin’ his self-esteem so fuckin’ low, excuse my language, that he might not even wanna live, know what I mean? He’s a good human being, he’s got a good heart, but he needs attention, he’s always lookin’ for attention. He needs more than charity, he needs attention and people to talk to him and get him outta that state of mind that he’s in. And I think it could work. I mean the little bit of time that I know him, he’s listening to me. I mean, I give him attention you know what I mean? I don’t say, Curtis get the fuck out. ‘Cause I’m soft too, I don’t like to be mean to people.*
Larry finished by shaking his head, planting his hands on the desk and saying, “I’m getting more worked up over it than his family probably does.” Unable to disconnect emotionally, Larry became actively involved with caring for Curtis. I saw Larry try and socialize Curtis on many occasions by teaching him how to tie his shoes and instructing him to be respectful and not interrupt people when they were talking. Larry also gave Curtis a pair of sweatpants, several pairs of socks, and t-shirts, because Curtis walked around the parking lot barefoot in the same navy blue t-shirt and grey pants. He paid Curtis two cigarettes to shower and made sure he washed the bottoms of his feet. I also observed Larry knocking on Curtis’ door on a regular basis and Larry explained to me that he was “checking to make sure he’s still alive.” Jake who was sitting nearby croaked, “Yeah, not like anyone else is going to.”13 Other residents took note of Larry’s efforts and one day Sam joked to Curtis, “You have two dads, ‘cause he stay on you just like a son. Clean your room, change your sheets, vacuum it up!”

Curtis’ father was a World War II veteran who lived in the Save More Inn and came to the Boardwalk via DSS to visit with Curtis every week or so. Before each visit, Dee and Natalie took Curtis into an empty room and showered him so he did not smell. When Curtis’ father visited he gave Larry $20 to hold for Curtis and ration out to him. Sam took it upon himself to tell Curtis’ father that Curtis was not eating and was not able to take care of himself. Sam was not sure if this resonated, so he gave Curtis some frozen hamburgers to eat and later made him macaroni and cheese and chicken tenders.

Other residents established similar caring relationships with vulnerable residents. Interactions with Steve were prime examples because Steve was obviously in need of care. For the week that I saw Steve, he always wore the same outfit: a tan button-up shirt
covered in stains, black sweatpants, and shoes and socks so worn that his bare heels and
gnarled toenails poked through. During one of our early conversations he simply leaned
over in his chair and vomited into the parking lot, then continued talking. Biggie called
down from his room, “You alright Steve?” and Steve replied, “Yeah, I’m okay B.”

Early on in my fieldwork, I saw Biggie grilling pork ribs outside of his room. He
gave several to Steve and told me, “I always cook outside, I give my leftovers to people
who don’t have.” Another day, Steve had an encounter with Nolan, the perpetually drunk
resident who carried a small pocketknife. Steve had returned from the store and sat down
in a chair outside of his room to enjoy the day. Nolan stumbled over and yelled, “Get
outta my chair!” and brandished his knife. Steve got up and walked over to where I was
standing just as Biggie came out of his room and took notice. Biggie shielded Steve with
his body and yelled at Nolan, “You better watch who the fuck you’re talkin’ to!” He then
grabbed Steve’s arm and brought him down to his room saying, “Steve, stand over here
man,” while shooting a deep scowl at Nolan.

Reggie cared for Steve as well. Similar to how Larry behaved with Curtis, Reggie
paid Steve in cigarettes to get him to shower. After returning from the food pantry one
day, Reggie dropped an unopened box of crackers at Steve’s feet before heading into his
room. Biggie observed this and called to Steve, “You say thank you?” Reggie returned
from his room with a pair of large, black boots and handed them to Steve saying, “These
are brand new fucking boots, here.” He then looked at me and called out, “I couldn’t
stand seeing him in those shoes, you see them? They didn’t have any soles!” A week
later, Reggie called DSS and told them that Steve was unable to take care of himself, so
Steve was moved to an assisted living facility. Reggie said the last straw came when
Steve lit his mattress on fire “during the day he was sleeping next to it and we saw the flames and were like, get out! And we got water and we put it out.”

Besides caring for the explicitly vulnerable, residents created friendships as they grew to know each other. The sharing of resources over time or in response to a particular situation was an act of care when one resident used their own resources for emotional, as well as material benefit. Friendships emerged because residents valued relationships that helped them satisfy their human needs for social interaction. Sociologist Nels Anderson observes that homeless men look to break the monotony of life by interacting with companions.\textsuperscript{14} Sam shed light on this when he told me, “Get lonely sittin’ in that room by yourself all the time. That’s a lonely ass feeling sometimes man, man can only take so mucha that. Gotta interact with somebody, gotta talk with somebody you know.”

These friendships were surprising not only to me as a researcher, but to residents as well, because the stereotypes and stigma surrounding the motel painted a picture of a location devoid of any sort of community. When Avery and Elisha moved out of the motel into a trailer down the street, he invited Biggie, Deirdre, and me to visit, saying, “I didn’t expect to meet anyone here, I figured we’d just come here and split.”

Some of the most observable acts of care between friends emerged around food and cookouts. Biggie distinguished himself when he purchased a gas grill shortly after I moved into the motel.\textsuperscript{15} When the weather was nice, he grilled burgers, ribs, and sausages, and often invited me, Reggie, and Sam to eat with him. Reggie and Sam always refused and I accepted selectively because Biggie’s sanitary practices often left a lot to be desired.\textsuperscript{16} Despite our misgivings about Biggie’s methods of food preparation, his actions were genuine acts of care in which he wanted to share his material resources with us.
Reggie and Sky used their relatively abundant resources to care for their friends by cooking for and feeding them. Although he lacked the luxury of a gas grill, Reggie purchased a small charcoal grill from the local CVS for four dollars and used it whenever he could. His cooking ranged in size and purpose. On some days he would make a large amount of food for himself, such as spaghetti, and then offer portions to his friends such as Sam, me, Dee, and Toby. Other times he invited scores of residents to elaborate cookouts involving beer, wine coolers, chips, potatoes, steak, macaroni salad, and corn on the cob (Figures 18-19). On Thanksgiving, he prepared a cheese plate with crackers, cheese, pepperoni, and a homemade cheese log (Figure 20). He also cooked baked beans, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, squash, and rolls. Instead of a turkey, Reggie prepared a chicken in his toaster oven, washing it beforehand in his bathroom sink because he lacked a full kitchen (Figure 21). He offered plates of food to me, Shawn, Biggie, Deirdre, Toby, Dee, and Elizabeth. Like Dee and Toby’s apartment narrative from the previous chapter, Reggie’s elaborate cookouts and meals created a sense of material abundance that resembled mainstream notions of provision.

Cooking and care were also used to maintain friendships on special occasions. Sam was particularly excited one summer afternoon when he told me and Reg that he was close to getting a job at a local barbecue restaurant that had just opened up:

Sam: Hopefully I’ll come back with some good, good, great news, I got a schedule hopefully.
Reg: Well when you do man, I’ll have to grill out, we’ll have a little bbq for your congratulations.
Sam: It ain’t written in stone yet ‘til they tell me fill out that time card.
Reg: Once it’s written in stone we’re gonna have pork chops, asparagus, baked potato, we’ll do the full on, we’ll do a nice little bbq for you man. That’s worth it.
Reggie’s proclamation that celebrating was “worth it” summed up the friendships between residents who cared for each other. Acts of care, especially cooking, used valuable material resources. When Reg cooked out he used his charcoal, food stamps, money, and food to create acts of care. In his mind that expenditure was “worth it” because it created and maintained the emotional connection between him and his friends. Therefore, Boardwalk residents created friendships by demonstrating that they viewed the sharing of valuable resources as “worth it.” This was echoed when Ramòn told me about the proper way to make friends at the motel, “You just gotta walk by, nod, and say hi. Then maybe a few days later walk by again, then another few days you bring some beers, you know that’s always good you know.” Ramòn’s words show that friendships were built upon social interaction and the willingness to share personal resources to facilitate and maintain that interaction. Because residents were well aware that they lived in deprivation, sharing resources carried a strong emotional component that was interpreted as friendship and care. The emergence of care was so surprising because it was the polar opposite of the behavior that much of the public associated with the Boardwalk: that of conflict.

Conflict

Today’s Community to Tomorrow’s Conflict

Conflict occurred when perceived acts of disrespect arose through social interaction. At the Boardwalk, conflict erupted early and often at all stages of resource exchange. Sometimes conflict occurred during the simple act of approaching residents about resources. One day, Sam, Jake, Reggie, and I sat outside smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. Ned, who earlier had offered to pay bills by phone, cautiously approached
and asked if anyone had a cigarette. Sam chastised him, “You could try to say hi to some of your brothas.” Ned tried to defend himself, “I did say hi.” Sam shook his head, “I ain’t see you say shit.” Sam viewed this as disrespectful because Ned failed to acknowledge him as a potential friend by focusing only on his resources and disregarding the caring relationship that he could have established.\(^{17}\)

Inquiries about resources also created conflict when the residents who were asked were not interested in participating. Sam had family connections to the drug market and some residents assumed that he would be willing to get them drugs. However, because Sam was a member of Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous and had been clean for several years, he found these requests disrespectful. One day Dee asked him to try and get her heroin and he replied, “I don’t do drugs. Don’t ask me for that, don’t ask me that again.” When Nolan asked Sam to buy beer for him, Sam got similarly aggravated and yelled, “I’m not a hopper, I’m not going to the store for you ‘cause I don’t drink alcohol so I’m not gonna buy you something I don’t drink.”

Once resources were exchanged in acts of community, conflict emerged if the exchange increased the fragility of a resident. Conflict also occurred among residents who were engaged in caring relationships. In these instances, disrespect was perceived when acts ignored or threatened the efforts to create friendships that revolved around acts of care. The following stories show how these evolutions from community to conflict occurred frequently at the motel.

The “Can Wars,” as Sam called them, erupted in early June, about a week into my fieldwork. Like many conflicts, it began as an act of community. Reg supplemented his disability income by gathering empty bottles and cans from locations such as the trailer
park, and returning them to Giant Foods for five cents each. Biggie also collected cans and Reg showed him the places that he frequented with the understanding that Biggie could collect from them until Reg needed them back. When Reg told Biggie he needed the locations back, Biggie ignored him. As Reggie complained to me and Sam:

Reggie: Dude, I’m the one that turned him onto the business because I didn’t need the money. Then when I told him I needed to do it again, I needed my shit. All the sudden he wants to get up before me at like 3am in the morning to rob my ass? Knowing that I told him I needed my shit back, I’m broke! I let him take over ‘cause he needed the money real bad you know? Don’t do me grimy when you didn’t have shit and I gave it to you. I need it back for a few weeks, then you wanna play me?

Sam: That’s why I really like you Reg because you helped mostly everybody here, you ain’t never turned nobody down. Somebody knock on your door say he hungry, I know you’re gonna give him something to eat. They said they need a dollar, I know you a give it to him.

This all came to a head around 10am on a sunny morning. I was jolted from my television by yelling in the parking lot and I walked outside to hear Reggie yell, “I will kick your fucking ass, run your fucking mouth! Wannabe gangster! I’m no pussy!” He tramped across the pavement in a black t-shirt and red shorts to where Biggie was standing outside of his room five doors down. Biggie yelled back something about being a “gangster” and Reggie shoved Biggie to the ground. Biggie got up screaming as Reggie stomped back to his room, calling over his shoulder, “I am going to kick your ass! Run your fucking mouth, monkey!”

About ten minutes later, two police cars arrived and officers went to both rooms to get statements. Biggie got very loud when he explained what happened and at one point the police told him to calm down. Jake stepped in and told them, “That’s just how he talks,” not wanting the police to get the impression that Biggie was being aggressive.
The police spoke to Reggie and then left without taking any further action, telling Biggie, “Stay away from him, don’t talk to him. It’s over and done with when we drive away.” When the police left, Reg called down to Biggie, “You fucking snitch, bitch! Go tell your buddies from the city how you called the cops on someone! Fucking snitch!” Reg spread the word about Biggie whenever his name came up. We were at the Park Place one day and when one resident mentioned Biggie, Reg replied, “Fuck that bitch cop caller man. Fuck that cop-calling faggot. Lucky I don’t break his jaw, callin’ the cops.”

While this incident can be traced to the location of cans, Reg shared other resources with Biggie, such as a wooden table and New York Giants locker that Biggie kept in his room. Biggie’s actions were disrespectful because they increased Reg’s fragility. Unable to collect cans to supplement his income, Reg lost access to income that could meet his needs. Biggie also disrespected Reg’s attempts to create friendship. Giving Biggie furniture and access to can locations were acts that Reg considered “worth it.” However, in Reggie’s eyes, Biggie did not hold up his end of the emotional bargain and his disregard for Reggie’s acts of care created conflict between them. As Reg said during one of his rants, “This is grimy, two-faced, backstabbing shit, then you talk to me like a friend.” Biggie’s reliance on outside authority to resolve conflict was viewed as a particular transgression because he violated an unspoken code among residents that conflict would be settled interpersonally between the parties involved.

Another instance of conflict occurred over social capital and employment. On Thanksgiving Day, I talked with Darryl in the parking lot as he headed to the bus to go to his mother’s house. As he walked out of the parking lot, Reggie and Sky were returning
from the grocery store, clad in winter hats and hooded sweatshirts. Darryl extended them a simple “Hi” as they passed. Instead of returning the salutation, Reggie snarled:

> You made my wife look bad. You put her name on that application, and she was giving you a job, you wouldn’t leave it alone that you need 40 hours. You made my wife look like a complete asshole, dude. That wasn’t right, man, whatsoever.

I was shocked by this exchange and I watched Darryl continue silently on. Reggie and Sky trudged back to their room and Reggie explained to me:

> Douchebag. Guy says he needs a fucking job, my wife gets him in down there. And then the cocksucker fucking got hired, but he wouldn’t leave fucking, well enough alone. Oh well I need forty hours, I need forty hours. Well then I guess we don’t need you, have a nice day. Make my wife look bad dude. What the fuck’s wrong with him?

Because Sky had put her name on Darryl’s application, her reputation was at stake. When I spoke to Darryl a few days later, he understood as much:

> 20 hours at $8.25 an hour. I couldn’t take it, I can’t live on that. But it’s enough for me to lose my DSS. Even parole told me don’t take a job like that. So Reg was mad at me ‘cause he felt that I disrespected his wife for not taking the job ‘cause she went out on a limb for me.

When Darryl refused the job, it had the potential to harm Sky’s reputation so Reg and Sky worried that she could lose her job, which would increase their fragility because they would lose her income.¹⁹ A similar situation occurred when Jake tried to get one of Sky’s friends a job at McDonald’s where he worked. He set up two interviews for her and she failed to show for either. Jake told Sky afterwards:

> Fuckin’ you’re done, fucking I’m fucking new there, and you’re getting me to fucking vouch for you and you’re gonna fucking screw me like that, fuck you, that’s not okay. I’m done fucking going out for people, fuck that shit, ‘cause then I look like an asshole.

Jobs were precious to residents and any acts that threatened their employment were seen as disrespectful. When assisting someone in getting a job suddenly became “not worth it”
because it threatened a resident’s own employment, community broke down into conflict. This reflects the reality that many residents could not completely disengage from community for fear of creating disrespect, but engaging in community inevitably resulted in them getting burned and resolving not to be taken again.

It was not surprising to see community lead to conflict when it involved residents with mental health issues. The motel brought together people with a variety of vulnerabilities and this intermingling is something they would not have experienced in more stable settings. Therefore, the conflict that arose between vulnerable residents was unique to living at the motel. As one example, Curtis suffered from what he described as LSD-induced mental health problems and what others thought was schizophrenia. As I described earlier, many residents cared for Curtis and involved him in community activities because they recognized his vulnerabilities. However, Curtis’ mental health issues often caused conflict to emerge from community interactions.

Curtis was a chain smoker and he inquired often about tobacco. He bought cigarettes from Reg and purchased loose tobacco from Dee and Toby, which he then rolled into cigarettes using newspaper and pages torn from a phonebook. Problems arose when Curtis would pace outside of their rooms and stare into their windows, looking to buy more smokes. He also knocked on their doors in the early morning hours when they were asleep. When Sam instructed Curtis to stop his behavior, Curtis did not understand why and asked, “They don’t have money?” Sam replied, “No Curtis, people sleep that time of night.” Curtis was also unable to register that his constant requests for free cigarettes were taxing on residents who had very little. An exasperated Sam vented to me one day, “And the irony of it all is, after I done gave him two, he bug me, I gave him
another one, then he just come back again, like what the fuck?’” Toby relayed a similar story, “I was rolling him some cigarettes after he asked and then he knocked on my door as I was rolling them and asked for even more.”

Curtis found himself in the hottest water when he left lit cigarettes smoldering on the carpet of his room or the carpet on the second floor landing. Reg was the first to chastise him for this, “Dude you’re gonna catch the place on fire, do not put cigarettes out like that or on your floor! You can’t do that, dude! I live here!” Dee feared that Curtis’ newspaper cigarettes posed an even greater threat of fire and she took them away and yelled, “Put the newspaper down or we’re done rollin’ you cigarettes. If I catch you smoking fuckin’ newspaper again, we’re done.”

Many residents tried to tolerate Curtis’ behavior but at times they hit their breaking points and resorted to aggression. Cinque caught Curtis loitering outside his door and threatened to throw him over the railing, shoving him until Jake intervened and told Cinque to stop being a bully. When Curtis would not stop asking Reg for cigarettes after Reg repeatedly told him to leave, Reg reportedly pushed Curtis into a mud puddle in the parking lot. Biggie was one of the few residents who loaned Curtis money and when Curtis failed to repay him $50, Biggie called Curtis down to his room for a talk:

Biggie: I’m gonna give you this last chance. This time, when you get the money, you wait for me.
Curtis: I what?
Biggie: You wait for me. Don’t spend it and don’t tell nobody you got it.
Curtis: Yup.
Biggie: Aight young man. You heard? Do you hear me? You get that fifty dollars you save it ‘til I get back. You hear me?
Curtis: Yup.
Biggie: When you get that cash tomorrow, don’t get all ah, bah, bah, bah. I’m talkin’ to you!
Curtis: Yeah, I already said yes, I said yes.
Biggie: I’m letting you know that now. You fuck up, I’ll put you in the
hospital. You hear what I’m sayin’?

Curtis: Yeah.

Biggie: So you know the deal right?

Curtis: Yeah.

Biggie: So you think about that when you get your fifty bucks! You think about that ass whoppin’! You heard?

Curtis: Why you hollerin’ at me?

Biggie: ‘Cause I know you. You get that fifty bucks, you spend it cause you got it. Don’t do that tomorrow!

Rob was another resident with mental health issues who got involved in conflict.

He liked to sniff the aerosol from cans of whipped cream and it was rare to see him sober. When he got high, he would lock himself out of his room which annoyed Larry to no end.

On a nice day in May, Jake and I were drinking out in the parking lot when Jake ran out of beer. Rob lumbered downstairs looking for beer, so Jake gave him $8 to buy some with the promise that he would give him one upon his return. As Rob walked away Jake said, “I said if he robs me, I’ll kill him.” Thirty minutes passed and Jake grew impatient:

You wanna see what I do to someone who robs me? He lives here, so he’s gonna be coming back. Obviously I can’t kill him but I’ll beat the livin’, fucking, I’ll put him in an intensive care unit. I mean, what the fuck? What am I gonna do? Go to jail? It’d be no worse than livin’ here.

After forty-five minutes, Jake hopped onto his mountain bike and rode down to the store in search of Rob. Jake rode back in after five minutes with a six pack of beer and said matter of fact, “Stick around Chris. You get to see me kill a guy. It’s gonna happen. I tracked him down, he was there, bought a pack a something. I’m gonna kill him.” It did not take long for Jake to finish off five of the beers and we sat in the parking lot listening to the radio and waiting for Rob to return.

Rob slinked back into the parking lot with the Foo Fighters blasting on the radio from Jake’s room. Upon seeing Rob, Jake jumped up and ran over to him yelling, “Where’s my fuckin’ money? I went to the goddamn store down there! Who the fuck do
you think you’re fucking with?” In an attempt to avoid confrontation, Rob took off running down the sidewalk with Jake in pursuit. Jake caught up to him at the Park Place and tackled him into the grass, where they exchanged punches while Randy and other Park Place residents looked on. Rob disentangled himself and darted across four lanes of traffic to the parking lot of the Paulson Motel across the street. As Jake followed him across the street, Rob picked up a textbook sized rock and used it to keep Jake at a distance. With Jake at bay, Rob dropped the rock and ran back across the street to the Boardwalk. At this point, Reg and Sky bounded out of their room and stopped Jake in the parking lot as Rob ran up to his room. Jake struggled to get by Reggie, who yelled, “Stop! Jake! Stop your fuckin’ ass! Jake! Before the cops come!” Sky chimed in, “Elizabeth’s gonna call the cops you stupid fuck!” The fact that Jake was deterred from further aggression by the threat of police showed that residents feared police authority. Police could involve official sanctions, whereas residents could only employ physical violence as their most powerful tool. Therefore, police were the ultimate trump card and because of this, threats by Elizabeth to call them were heeded, and when residents called the police to resolve their own conflict, it was viewed as weakness.

Jake and Rob avoided each other for several days, until Rob approached Jake in the parking lot and told him he would give him his money back. Jake instructed him to simply apologize and return the money when Rob got the chance, not wanting any further problems. In fact, a few days later Slash and Vito confronted Rob as he walked by, yelling that Rob had robbed Jake and they were going to beat him up for it. Jake told them to stay out of his business and leave Rob alone because it was not worth the hassle.
This shows that conflict was often impermanent and residents of the Boardwalk were not always on the lookout to pick fights and hold grudges.\textsuperscript{20}

Reggie frequently cooked out when the weather was nice, using food to create care. However, his efforts did not always work out as intended. In July he prepared an elaborate barbecue and invited several residents from the Boardwalk and Park Place, as well as Sky’s friends from work. Despite the fact that Reg spread the word, Sam, Trim and I were the only ones from the Boardwalk to attend and Neal was the only Park Place resident who showed up. This aggravated Reg who ranted:

\textit{And those guys were just told down at the Park Place that I was doin’ it. That’s kinda fuckin’ rude if they didn’t want to come they shoulda just fuckin’ said so. I got a bunch of people to talk to over the next few days. Tell ‘em exactly how the fuck I feel about ‘em. They don’t need to be coming back around anymore for a free fuckin’ beer if they can’t make it here.}

He and Sky also cooked out for Spike and Mary Anne. The two couples became friendly because Sky and Mary Anne got along well and Spike had connections to marijuana. However, problems arose when Spike and Mary Anne failed to bring food for Reg to cook out with, despite their verbal promises to do so. Reg lamented to me:

\textit{Ever since they were supposed to do something with their stamps on the 1\textsuperscript{st} with us they just fricken haven’t even come down once. Fuck ‘em. I can write people off like that real quick. If you say you’re gonna do something then fuckin’ do it. They were supposed to fricken buy food to come out and cook out with us. All the times I done it for them you know? They were friggen, sayin’ they were gonna do it. Like, cool, shit whatever. Hamburgers and hotdogs, cool. Just something. Then no, and excuses, this and that. It’s like whatever. I don’t wanna hear it.}

Conflict was created because Reggie had used his valuable resources to create acts of care for other residents, who then spurned his efforts. Reggie was then left in a worse position than when he started, because he had used his resources in an attempt to create friendships and social networks that never materialized. On these occasions, his actions were not “worth it” and hope of creating a friendship and care was lost.
These situations reveal another important aspect of social interaction at the Boardwalk, that of reciprocity. When one resident asked for resources they had to make it very clear as to what they were offering in return. If they did not offer resources in return they could be viewed as a “moocher” or one who constantly took what others often paid for. By the same token, if one resident gave resources to another the onus was on them to make clear what they expected in return. The potential for misunderstanding is illustrated by an exchange between Tat and Slash. Tat had just met Patch, who was looking for a cigarette. Tat spied Slash returning to his room from the soda machine with several cans of Pepsi. Tat introduced himself and asked, “You got a cigarette?” Slash nodded, one out of his pocket and gave it to Tat. Tat thanked him and then walked away, calling out to Patch, “I finally got one bro. I finally got one.” Slash saw me a few days later and said:

_Yo that guy that asked me for that cigarette last night, I thought he was gonna pay me for it. That’s why I gave it to him. He was like, yo, can I bother you for one of them cigarettes? I’m like, yeah sure, no problem. I thought he was gonna hand me like 50 cents._

No confrontation came out of the situation, but it easily could have.

Although many residents engaged in acts of care, residents often assumed some sort of implied reciprocity, as in there would be some sort of material or social payment later in exchange for resources now. French sociologist Marcel Mauss asserts that gifts are given to those who need or desire with the illusion that it is voluntary, when in fact it creates an obligation. Cultural anthropologist Carol Stack expands on this finding:

_An object given or traded represents a possession, a pledge, a loan, a trust, a bank account-given on the condition that something will be returned, that the giver can draw on the account, and that the initiator of the trade gains perogatives in taking what he or she needs from the receiver._

Reg commented on people not being welcome to come around for free beer and
the fact that he had cooked out several times for Spike and Mary Anne. This indicated that he was offended by their failure to acknowledge gifts of care in a meaningful way and that he viewed meaningful acknowledgement as attending his elaborately orchestrated social gathering, or reciprocating the creation of family through food. Sam commented on Reg’s efforts when he and I observed that Reg was wearing a pair of Jean shorts that Sam had given him:

That was when I first met him, he was shocked that someone gave him something. Reg put ’em on and said, oh shit I like these, oh yeah. ‘Cause he give so much nobody ever give him nothing. That’s why I like him, even though his life is in a bottle, but he’s still got a good heart. He still has a real, real good heart. He gives, he gives, he gives, and nobody ever gives him nothing. Nobody ever comes over and says, hey Reg, here cook these steaks, let’s have a bbq, I’m buying the beers today.

Reggie used cooking as a way to expand his social network and access to resources as he admitted to me, “It’s a way to meet people.” These food illustrations show that Reggie did not just value the material resources that other residents could provide, but the emotional components as well. Like many of the residents at the Boardwalk, Reggie wanted meaningful emotional relationships with people and when they acted in ways that made him feel like he was not “worth it” it insulted his identity.

Transgressions over reciprocity also occurred with those who were more deprived than others and who received charitable donations from others. Cinque is a prime example because he came to the motel on parole and had very little money until he started a job with a waste management company. He quickly alienated himself by asking constantly for resources without offering anything in return and failed to provide future resources for other residents when he got paid. Exacerbating the situation was the fact
that other residents viewed Cinque’s job as a high status position and he failed to appreciate his good fortune. Sam complained one day:

*He know he grimy, that’s how he is. Just cut him off anyway ‘cause Cinque is like that. That’s how he do me. Oh Sam, you got no cheeseburgers? I said I done gave you two of my cheeseburgers, when you gonna bring some food up here, suppose I’m hungry one day, how am I gonna eat? And you workin’! And you got a job! And every Friday, I don’t see you ‘til Monday, and every Monday you always cryin’ you broke.*

Conflict arose when residents felt that they were being taken advantage of. Sam said:

*He’ll suggest, let’s go to McDonald’s I’m hungry. And you jump in the car thinking he got money, you go to McDonald’s and he don’t got a dime. He one a them type a guys. He asked me for a cheeseburger. Let me tell ya something man, I’m not working. Wasn’t for my girl, I probably be starving, to, death! And how am I gonna take what she buys for me to give to you? But I hate to turn a person down when they say they hungry so don’t try to play me.*

Charitable acts of community often led to conflict because residents had to manage two instincts whose outcomes were often at odds with each other. Acts of care showed that residents did not enjoy seeing people suffering and living in deprivation.

Residents were more than willing to transfer resources to others simply to make the recipients better off. Many residents commented that they felt bad about the conditions some residents were in and their actions supported these claims. However, all residents of the Boardwalk lived in relative deprivation when compared to the middle class measuring stick. Therefore, acts of care often created fragility in the residents who were providing the resources. I asked Sam if felt obligated to help Curtis and he replied:

*Not obligated, my heart didn’t want to give it to him, but it’s the right thing to do so I gave him a burger. I don’t want to see him hungry. I’m glad I was here to help out, but I cannot take on the sins of this world, I ain’t no world saver.*

This instinct to care competed directly with another instinct, “you gotta do you.” “You gotta do you” is the equivalent of looking out for number one. It is an individual
way of thinking in which a resident puts their priorities ahead of any others. Residents were aware that even if they wanted to help others, their ability was limited and at some point the need to “do you” would win out over caring for others. Conflict arose when residents on the receiving or asking end failed to appreciate that continued provision of resources challenged the giver’s ability to look out for their own interests. By the same token, those asking for or receiving resources did so because they were looking out for themselves. Thus, conflict emerged when residents with individual priorities collided in the community. This helps explain why some residents were caring one day and focused on their own needs the next. Because caring had its limitations, residents constantly had to weigh the costs and benefits of their communal actions. The motel brought together so many residents with different vulnerabilities that community transgressing into conflict was unavoidable. It was distressing that the failures of the mental health and social service systems meant that those taking up caring activities had so little to work with themselves. However, it was also very inspiring to see the residents of the Boardwalk caring for each other despite their own hardships.

*Environmental Conflict*

Environmental conflict involved behavior that threatened the privacy, reputation, and/or autonomy of residents. Despite its connection to resources, environmental conflict arose out of social interactions outside of the underground economy and acts of care. Environmental conflict was an artifact of the motel’s population of social refugees living in close proximity with one another. Steve got into trouble with Ramòn because Steve loitered outside Ramòn’s door while his girlfriend was inside, making her uncomfortable.
Sam and I listened to Ramòn explain how this situation led to violence when Ramòn finally confronted Steve in his doorway:

*I’m like this, you can’t keep this and that right here. My wife is very uncomfortable, you gotta go about your business. I was right here, my little cousin came over, [makes a punching motion] paaap! All the sudden he [Steve] was like, he was on the stairs. He was like, ohhhh. Like he did this shit like a dog would yell, so I, I, got mad emotional. I almost felt like, whoa, are you alright? Cause he was ohhhrrr, roaarrrh. I was like [to my cousin], dude get in the fuckin’ house you idiot and I had to have the girls hold him down. And I went over to him [Steve] on the stairs and I was like, are you alright?*

Sam defended Ramòn’s actions because they both believed that residents at the Boardwalk had a right to defend their property from each other.

Environmental conflict occurred on other occasions. Burt was the tall, bald resident who worked in his room via phone, so one day Reg was playing loud music outside and Burt complained to Elizabeth, who asked Reggie to turn down his music. Reggie muttered that “Mr. Clean” was annoying him and he later called up towards Burt’s room, “Yo Kojack!” One evening, Darryl and I were talking outside of Darryl’s room and Burt came out of his room next door and said, “Excuse me, I’m sorry to say anything to you guys, I know it’s a public place. I have to get up at 4 o’clock to go to work so, any help you can give me I sure appreciate it. Thanks a lot.” In contrast to Reggie’s behavior, Darryl and I quieted our conversation.

Noonan relayed a story to me about environmental conflict that erupted between him and Eric at the Park Place:

*So I’m cookin’ food in the microwave, you can make a lotta food in the microwave, it’s amazing what you can do with a microwave. So he’s smellin’ it and he’s drunk, he’s pissy pissy drunk. So, he’s like, you gonna feed me? I said, no, you got your own money, you got your own food, you go to your room and cook your own food. And he says, okay I’m gonna go in my own room and since you’re using your microwave, I’m gonna use my microwave and it’ll shut off the*
power. I said, don’t do that, let my stuff finish first. He says fuck you and he leaves.

Sure enough, five minutes later, boof! The power goes out. I come out, I go to turn it on, he won’t let me by. So now he doesn’t wanna let me by, I try and push my way by him and he swings at me. I get him on the ground, I’m on top of him, I get up, I go to the basement to turn the power on. So now Elizabeth pulls over [after driving over from the Boardwalk where she was working for the night], ’cause earlier, prior to that, I went over here, I said Elizabeth, you gotta do something about him, he’s really goin’ crazy. She comes over, pulls to the parking lot and he says, what the fuck you want cunt? You bitch! And dives right in the window! I swear to God he dove right in the window and started swingin’ at her. She’s like, ah get him off me, get him off me! I went over, pulled him out of the window, next thing you know, cops come.

I spoke to Burt a few days later and he spoke about the environmental conflict at the Boardwalk that arose among residents when they went against the norms of the environment, a behavior that he called the “community action program”:

*Long term residents, they essentially run the community action program and if you’re an asshole they’ll let you know. If you behave yourself and are proper and respective, you usually do okay. And if you’re an asshole they’ll sniff you out in 30 seconds and then you’re gonna have trouble the whole time you’re here. But it is their community if they lived there a while, and, and they get very, uh, they, people have a tendency to habituate to a place, they get territorial. And you are, even if you’re paying, you’re still in their neighborhood and you gotta treat it that way. You can’t go in there and say hey asshole do this, do that, because you’re gonna have trouble the whole time you’re there. It’s like any other community, it’s people just trying to get along.*

Burt’s comment that “it’s just people trying to get along” was an astute description of life at the Boardwalk that worked on two levels. Residents attempted to “get along” in respect to surviving day to day and procuring rent money, food, and other resources. As the examples of community and conflict demonstrate, residents also worked to “get along” with each other as they interacted at the motel. In a way, trying to “get along” epitomized the struggle that social refugees confronted between engaging in community and following the mantra of “you gotta do you.”
The lives of social refugees at the Boardwalk Motel, much like the lives of prisoners, were based on a differential valuation of material resources compared to the middle class. Shampoo might seem trivial to those in the middle class, but one day I saw Natalie post on a door a note which read, “Could you please give the office my shampoo or replace it. Thank you.” Similarly, a member of the middle class might not think twice about picking up a nickel lying on the ground, but residents of the Boardwalk actively searched the ground for any loose change or salvageable cigarette butts. Remember that Jake yelled at Slash for throwing away a few empty Pepsi cans, not because Jake was an environmentalist, but he recognized that Slash was throwing away five cents.

Residents also faced a deprivation of social resources. Many of them lacked the social status indicators that are valued in middle class life. High school and college diplomas were scarce, as were cars and other modes of transportation. The fact that residents were living at the Boardwalk symbolized that they were unable to find a stable home. Even though some residents had jobs, they were often temporary and paid so little that they lacked the prestige needed to improve their social status. Therefore, residents were often left with nothing but their reputations to speak to their worth.

The importance that motel residents placed on respect is not limited to the Boardwalk Motel and other social refugee populations. As sociologist Elijah Anderson writes, “In the inner-city environment respect on the street may be viewed as a form of social capital that is very, valuable, especially when various other forms of capital have been denied or are unavailable.”24 Thus, respect is a key part of life in street worlds, and moreover, the premium placed on respect is indicative of the living conditions found in these environments. When individuals face “the lack of jobs that pay a living wage,
limited basic public services, the stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and absence of hope for the future,” status on the spot matters most because there is so little else to draw on.25

This similarity to the street sheds light on another aspect of the unspoken norms surrounding exchange at the Boardwalk. Unspoken norms (such as acknowledging someone before requesting resources, and showing up to community events when invited) when followed, created a sense of community. This community allowed residents to transcend the motel and in those moments, experience a normalcy of life that was so often fleetingly found in street worlds. When residents broke these norms through acts of disrespect, it exposed the grim reality of their living situations and the act of shattering the illusion of stability was damaging for resident’s conceptions of self. Therefore, resolving conflict that arose through disrespect in a key part of life in the streets, and at the Boardwalk Motel.

Conflict Resolution

Because motel residents lived with very meager material, social, and emotional resources, conflict emerged when those resources were threatened. Residents defended their resources and defensive actions took the form of threats of violence or actual violence. The examples of conflict in this chapter illustrated the threats of violence and acts of physical aggression that were used to resolve conflict and defend resources. There are several reasons why residents relied upon violence and aggression to resolve conflict.

Although Elizabeth was the manager, her powers were somewhat limited to managing the books. Residents respected her because she could supply them with resources such as clean towels and toilet paper and ultimately, she could call the police or
throw residents out of the motel. However, as she was pushing 70 years of age and stood just over five feet in height, Elizabeth’s ability to resolve interpersonal conflict between residents was limited by her age and physical stature. Another factor was that Elizabeth had worked at the Boardwalk and Park Place for over 20 years. Being exposed to motel life for so long caused Elizabeth to adopt a quite cynical and laissez faire attitude towards the residents, as evidenced when she talked about a stabbing that occurred at the Park Place Motel and muttered, “If you’re gonna’ kill someone, kill ‘em, it’s one less person to deal with.”

Elizabeth knew about most of the illegal activities and conflict that occurred at the motel, but she ignored these situations until they got “annoying.” Residents appreciated her turning a blind eye and as one resident put it, “her job is to take my money and keep her mouth shut.” However, this left a void of authority that Reggie summed up by saying, “This ain’t high school, you can’t go to the principal, gotta take care a shit yourself.” Without any sort of formal authority figure to step in when conflict arose, residents were left to their own devices.

Darryl and I spoke one day about Elizabeth’s role and he said, “I mean if you really have a problem you just dial 911.” While some residents called the police when conflict arose, it was seen as a last resort. Residents (especially those with criminal records) had extremely negative views of local police and referred to them as lazy and overweight “pricks” or “assholes.” Because the Boardwalk was home to parolees, probationers, and many individuals with criminal histories, having police at the Boardwalk was asking for trouble. Residents avoided using the police to settle disputes because they worried about getting involved with the criminal justice system. The roots
of conflict also determined whether or not the police were called. Several instances of conflict arose over the illegal drug trade and residents could not even call the police to report that someone had yet to pay a drug debt or that they were being harassed at two in the morning to go make a drug run.

What deterred most residents from calling the police was the classic prison and street culture label of being a “snitch.” Calling the police indicated that a resident was unable to take care of themselves and like in the inner-city, snitches were viewed as those who went “to the cops to do their own retaliatory dirty work.”

One day Reggie passed the word to Mike that Park Place residents were calling Mike a “cop caller.” Mike immediately defended himself, puffing out his chest and asking, “Why, ‘cause I called the cops on them guys down there to get them off the property?” Not wanting to be accused of anything, Reg put his hands up and said, “Dude, I’m telling you what the fuck I’m hearing. Nothing to do with me man.” At a barbecue, Reggie and Neal talked about Biggie calling the police and Neal said, “I don’t play that game.” Reggie nodded, “Take care of your own business, that’s it. I might get mine, you might get yours, either way.”

Residents also resorted to violence and aggressive posturing because they did not want to appear vulnerable or easily victimized. In his study of prison environments, sociologist Gresham Sykes finds that inmates are eventually tested for their resources and how they defend themselves determines their social status in prison. The same can be said of the Boardwalk Motel and at the Park Place, where Eric fought when he first moved in because, “I was new there and I didn’t want to seem like a pussy.” When residents were disrespected, especially if the slight became public knowledge, their
reputation was on the line. Sam talked about how Jake made racist comments around him:

You know, you hear it but you kinda gotta let it go, but everyone in the crowd hears it. And I don’t like that, ‘cause it makes everyone think that, oh this motherfucker talkin’ about Sam right in his face. So I said, yo Reg, get your boy before I break his neck.

Similar to prison, the motel’s environment placed a premium on masculinity and physical prowess because residents had little else that gave them status. Because of this, residents not only used violence to settle matters, but they often recounted acts of violence to each other in order to enhance their reputations. Biggie did this on several occasions when he spoke of his “original gangsta” past:

I was really close with my brother Ron. We fought together, we shot together, son we kill people together, we kills families together man. Cs all day son. Blue, blood, yellow, and gold. I do everything, any flag in this motherfuckin’ hood. Anywhere I go down to L.A. and we don’t play down there. We kill niggas for real son. There ain’t no arguments. It’s bang, bang, bang, shut the fuck up nigga then we off. And snitches get two stitches down there my nigga. And families don’t live down there my nigga. When we kill you we killin’ your family too. And whoever else you was with son.

Most residents did not believe Biggie’s stories but the fact that Biggie told them is evidence that he thought it was prudent to do so. Residents also discussed what they would do in certain situations if they were disrespected. Sam talked hypothetically about Reggie disrespecting his wife, Justine:

I would hate for you to scare her or her to come tell me you did something or said something out the way. That would make me be real smart, but you would never see another sunrise, you wouldn’t see another sunrise. I would have to do something real, real nasty to you, I wouldn’t want to. But I grew up in the ghettos of life, I would have to do something real nasty to you bro. I can envision you callin’ me a nigger and then I’d have to break your larynx so you can’t talk.

This behavior served a purpose, as it allowed residents to demonstrate that they were more than willing and able to defend their resources and reputations through violence.
Finally, because many residents suffered from mental illness or drug addiction, formal conflict resolution strategies were simply out of the question. Curtis, Steve, and Rob were often unaware as to how their actions created conflict. Elizabeth told vulnerable residents to stay to themselves and instructed Rob, “You gotta go up to your room and stay up there. Don’t come down here.” Elizabeth also warned residents not to interact with those with mental health issues and told Jake, “You don’t give people who aren’t right in the head money. You’re just askin’ for trouble.” When Biggie complained about loaning Curtis money, Reg told Biggie, “I told you not to. No matter how much you want to, you can’t do it.” However, those with mental health issues were often the most deprived of material and social resources. This meant that they often attempted to satisfy their wants and needs through interaction, something which did not go unnoticed by more functional residents. Despite the recognition that these vulnerable residents should be left alone, that adage was rarely heeded.

**Fragility**

As a result of conflict and conflict resolution, residents of the Boardwalk Motel found that their fragility had increased. This loss of social capital and material goods left residents more vulnerable and deprived than when they arrived at the motel. With dwindling resources, residents were driven back into social interactions in order to meet their needs. It was not surprising to see residents engage in community one day, butt heads the next, and then repair their relationship a week or so later to transfer resources once again. Community and conflict were impermanent because they were rooted in fragility. Fragility created the need for community, and community led to conflict.
Because conflict often increased fragility, the progression of community into conflict became a cycle, illustrated through the following case study.

Reg and Sky, and Dee and Toby, had been living at the motel for almost two years. During that time, they entered into a friendship that satisfied many of their needs. They socialized (including going into downtown Riverfort on the 4th of July to watch fireworks), and Reg and Dee procured and used drugs together. Soon after I met them, Reggie and Dee began a sexual relationship that was born out of Toby’s refusal to be intimate with Dee (which he admitted) and what Reggie claimed was Sky’s decaying interest in sex. When Sky found out, she and Reg had a verbal confrontation and Reg contemplated leaving the motel with Dee, but ended up maintaining his relationship with Sky. Conflict arose in mid-July when Dee slept with Marc for drug money, which set Reggie off because he claimed, “she did it to piss me off because she knows I hate Mexicans.” What resulted was a physical confrontation in the parking lot between Dee and Reggie that ended with the police being called to resolve the conflict, which they did without resorting to arrest.

This violence did not end the relationship between Reg and Dee, largely because the emotional and social benefits of keeping their friendship outweighed the costs of losing it in a transient setting where friendship was hard to come by. Weeks after the fight, Dee confessed to Reggie and me that she was unhappy with Toby saying, “I’ll give him his money and he can go. How you gonna afford to live here, blah blah blah. Plain and simple, I’ll suck cock for a living.” Reg looked at her and said, “Sky and I will gladly pay your rent. We clearly stated that.” Later, Reg told me, “No matter with all the shit with me and Dee man, I made a good friend outta her, no matter how you look at it.”
In early December 2012, Reggie and Sky celebrated their 30th and 29th birthdays respectively. Marc allowed them to use his room for the party and Reggie and Sky provided food and drinks, which included: a keg of beer, birthday cake, jello shots, cookies, deviled eggs, various chips, shrimp, pickles, cheese, and submarine sandwiches. Over 20 guests showed up, including several from the Park Place. As guests imbibed copious amounts of alcohol, a rumor spread that Jake and Dee were having sex in the bathroom while people sang happy birthday (which both of them denied) and this got back to Reg, who was offended because Dee was not present and because she was being intimate with his friend. When Reggie cut the cake, he yelled, “Hands of the cake! Back up!” Dee muttered, “Wow, what a dick,” and Reggie whirled around and called out, “Who wants to say what a dick?” Dee raised her hand and Reggie snarled, “Get out, you’re done, goodbye.” Dee was incredulous and Reggie conveyed his seriousness by yelling, “Fuck you cunt! Fuck you bitch, ‘cause there are about five people here, who will beat your fucking ass! Anyone here Dee’s friend? Go with your skank. Go with your skank!” and ushered Dee’s friend Guy out the door.

Moments later, Toby arrived at the door and Reggie confronted him, “Do you wanna say something? Do you?” They exchanged shoves, which turned to grappling when Toby punched Reggie in the face and Reggie yelled to the crowd, “Beat this nigger’s ass! Beat his ass! Beat this fucking punk!” Their battle carried them into the birthday cake and onto the floor. Dee and Sky intervened when Toby screamed because Reggie attempted to stick his fingers in his eyes. Dee said later, “That scream, was bloodcurdling. It was like a child screaming, that sound comes out of a grown man, you get fuckin’ scared.”
The couples were separated and guests began a mass exodus of the room. Noonan looked at me and asked, “Do I really wanna come back here? Park Place, or here?” Reggie continued to trade verbal barbs with Toby, yelling, “Get out, we’re having you arrested right now, police are coming for you right now.” Police and EMTs arrived, and Toby was placed on a stretcher, calling Reggie a “pedophile” before being loaded into the ambulance. Dee stood outside her room singing, “It’s my party, I can cry if I want to!” The police left without pressing charges, although they instructed Reggie to call the police if Dee bothered them again. Reggie took advantage of this later while several of us sat in his room, when he instructed Sky to call the police and tell them that Dee was outside the room screaming. This was fascinating because I had heard Reggie claim, “I would not call the cops on my worst enemy.” I left with several others before the police arrived and records show the police did not take any further action once they arrived.

The pangs of this conflict surfaced again on Christmas morning 2012 when Reggie consumed a substantial amount of vodka and walked down to Dee and Toby’s room, where they were spending the day with Petey. Reggie slashed the tires of Petey’s bike with a large knife and when Dee went out to confront him, he snarled, “You want some? You wanna fuckin’ die?” This was the last straw for Dee and Toby and they called the police, who arrested Reggie. When I asked Reg about this, he claimed that he slashed Petey’s tires because Petey held him back during the birthday fight, which led to him getting punched in the face.

Reggie was held in jail for six months and the psychological impact on Sky cannot be understated. She fought back tears as she told me:

*I haven’t been sleeping, I’ve been living off my couch. I haven’t slept in the bed, I let her [Fran] sleep in the bed, I’m not sleeping in the bed. ‘Cause ya sleep on the
couch, ya roll over, ya know nobody’s gonna be there. Ya sleep in the bed, roll over, you expect somebody to be there. I can’t do that. I’m depressed, horribly. I’m leavin’ my Christmas tree up, I’m leaving all my fuckin’ presents sittin’ there.

While Sky blamed Dee for Reggie’s arrest, she still spent time with Dee while Reg was in jail, and Dee gave her money and cigarettes “because she was a girl.” In fact, when Reggie got arrested, Sky immediately went to Dee for solace and assistance in contacting people about bail money. This was a clear example of how Sky looked past previous conflict when her needs became the priority, and also an example of Dee acting in solidarity with one of the few female friends in her social network.

Even in her damaged state, Sky engaged in care by giving Jake several of their couch cushions to take to a boarding house in Pinewood that he was moving into. Jake’s move only lasted a week before he moved back to the Boardwalk and into a room with Marc. Problems arose when Jake returned to the boarding house to retrieve items he had left there (including clothes, DVDs, and Sky’s couch cushions) and found his room completely empty. Jake’s fragility increased again when the ceiling in Marc’s bathroom collapsed, prompting him to move in with Sky.

With Reg in jail, his disability payments were put on hold and without this income, Sky’s ability to meet her needs was threatened. This fragility was exacerbated when Sky was fired from her job at KFC after her boss accused her of neglecting her duties. Without this income, Sky was hard pressed to pay rent. Her economic fragility intensified because she needed to put money on a phone card to call Reggie in jail and provide him with $75 a week in commissary money.

Sky grew angry with Reg because she felt he did not understand her situation:

You got it easy, you don’t have to worry about payin’ for shit. I’m out here, worried ’bout making sure that I paid my rent! I didn’t send him no money, ‘cause
I had to give Elizabeth something! I don’t want her to, serve me papers, I only gave her $45, that’s all I had. I owe $470 right now.

Like he doesn’t understand that I’m fucking going without shit. I have two stamps left, for letters, that’s it. And then waiting for the fuckin’ unemployment with no job. Yah, that’s a lotta fuckin’ money that I’ve gone without for three months. He doesn’t understand that.

In the face of this fragility, Sky turned her friend Fran, who along with Jake, moved into the room to help Sky pay the rent. Good fortune befell Sky when her tax refund arrived, which allowed her to make rent payments. Sky eventually won her unemployment case against her boss, but without Jake and Fran’s financial support, it is likely she would have been evicted because she could not pay rent without her job and Reg’s disability payments. As a token of her gratitude, she cooked us all a taco dinner one evening.

Reggie’s arrest and the events leading to it also caused both couples to seek a move away from the Boardwalk. In mid-January 2013, Dee told me excitedly, “We’re moving!” and she made it clear that the conflict of the motel had gotten to her and Toby:

We’ve lost sooo many friends that took advantage of us, we had a guy here with one leg, he was supposed to be a friend, I ended up, just anyway, long story short, we lost so many cigarettes, money, trust, everything, just lost. And I mean, even now like, with the whole Reg thing, that was just ongoing, that was just the first generation of people that lived here, like, we’re the last two couples left, everybody else is gone.

Her words reflected the reality that community often led to conflict, which broke down social ties and relationships to the point where maintaining those relationships was impossible. When this happened, residents distanced themselves from tense situations devoid of community by moving. By the time Reg returned from jail in April, Dee and Toby had moved, and Sky said, “Second he, we’re straight and he’s home, we’re outta here.” Reggie lamented, “I don’t think anybody from the original crew is here anymore, I really don’t.” In Reggie’s eyes, Dee and Toby represented the last semblance of
community that he had at the motel. When they left, the motel failed to meet Reg and Sky’s needs and they began to search for a more hospitable environment.

This case study embodied the cycle of community, conflict, and fragility as it pertained to social refugees at the Boardwalk Motel. When residents arrived, they sought out others to meet material and social needs. Dee told Toby, “I was angry at you for not giving me female attention, so I went to the toothless wonder. Just basically wanted someone to get in trouble with. I got high with him, he didn’t care.” These community interactions led to conflict, which occurred when Dee slept with Reggie as well as Marc, and when Reggie took offense to Dee’s rumored intimacy with Jake. Dee also claimed that Reg was offended because Dee made friends with another girl in December and therefore spent less time with Sky. The conflict at the birthday party sparked a feud that culminated in an encounter which sent Reg to jail. Reg and Sky’s fragility was increased and Sky was only able to keep from being evicted because of community with her friends Jake and Fran. Conflict again arose when Reg found out that Jake had lost their couch cushions, a move that increased their fragility. Jake reminded Reg that he went out of his way to help Sky and when Reg pressed about “what happened?” Jake retorted, “What happened is you got your ass sent to jail!” Reggie threatened to throw Jake out, but never followed through because he knew that he and Sky were indebted to Jake and that in their fragile state, they needed all the friends they could get.

The Cycle of Community, Conflict, and Fragility

This chapter explored the subculture that resulted from social interactions at the Boardwalk Motel. I pointed out several ways that the motel environment resembled prison, but that comparison is limited by the fact that prison is a “total institution” with
clear restrictions on activity. The more apt comparison is between the Boardwalk and the inner-city. Like the inner-city, the Boardwalk was characterized by impoverished residents looking to improve their circumstances by engaging in social interaction, such as that found in the underground economy. Residents engaged their social networks and formed networks of exchange in ways similar to Carol Stack’s findings in The Flats. Social interaction was also dictated by the “code of the street” and respect was earned by engaging in self-defense when required. Implicit in this code was a ban on snitching, which was manifested at the motel by reporting incidents to the manager or in the worst case scenario, the police.

Despite these striking similarities to the inner-city, the motel atmosphere differed from urban neighborhoods in several ways. Because of the policy that placed registered sex offenders at the motel, no one under the age of 18 was allowed to live there. This created an absence of youth at the Boardwalk, whereas inner-city life is characterized by a large population of youth, often engaging in what is labeled as delinquent behavior. This lack of youth likely led to the complete lack of a gang presence at the motel. Finally, the motel environment was male-dominated, due to the fact that single women on DSS were placed at other motels. That meant most of the women living at the Boardwalk were living there with their partners.

These comparisons and contrasts between motel life and that of prison and the inner-city illustrate a key point about the Boardwalk. Its population was dictated by economic forces as well as the criminal justice and social welfare systems. Because of this, residents were a unique population living in a unique social setting. While conventional measures of social disorganization such as poverty, residential mobility, and
racial heterogeneity were clearly present at the motel, the daily interactions of residents were in fact highly organized around the cycle of community, conflict, and fragility.  

Figure 22 illustrates how this cycle of social organization impacted not only daily life, but the trajectories of residents. “Settlement” at the Boardwalk was the result of a step up, a step down, or a return to society from prison. Regardless of their previous environment, residents arrived at the Boardwalk suffering from fragility. Fragility led residents to engage in “Community” in order to meet the material and social requirements of daily life. “Conflict” emerged when communal interactions created feelings of disrespect among parties, often because fragility had increased due to someone’s actions. Resolution of conflict was achieved through violence, and in some cases, police authority. Conflict resolution itself increased fragility because social networks and community resources broke down. In extreme cases, police intervention led to fragility when sanctions were placed on individuals that depleted their resources. “Fragility” then sent residents scrambling back into the community to address their new lack of resources, and the transgression from community to conflict was primed to resume. Over time, the cycle of community and conflict increased fragility to a breaking point when there were no more social networks to be tapped. “Displacement” occurred when the well of community dried up, and residents were pushed from the motel in search of another settlement that provided the “pull” that they sought.  

This cycle gives insight into why so many residents had stark histories of transience. The motel, like other locations used to house the marginalized, forced residents to live in close proximity to other problematic individuals. Therefore, the culture of the Boardwalk was one where vulnerable individuals attempted to address their
needs with anyone they encountered, and these individuals were included in the interaction only because they shared a common residence. The only way to avoid the cycle was to not interact with anyone, but that required self-sufficiency that was rarely possessed. Even if residents spurned the requests of others, this created conflict because residents did not like to be ignored. Ultimately, residing at the motel was a lose-lose situation for many residents because it increased their fragility, and left them vulnerable to displacement to another similar location.

These environmental symbolic interactions tell an important story that is ignored by stereotypes and likely to be missed by more generalizable theoretical labels. Table 3 lists the Dutchland police responses to the motel that occurred during my fieldwork. These incidents (retrieved through the Freedom of Information Act) show that most police responses were not calls to respond to crimes and rarely did calls result in arrest. Surprisingly, instead of creating a haven for predatory crime, the motel environment saw residents organize around meeting the needs of daily life in the pursuit of survival.

Residents shared the expectation that those with would help those without, and this collective mindset led to the cycle of community, conflict, and fragility. This analysis demonstrates the importance of approaching social settings without preconceptions of social disorganization. Rather, the goal of scientific inquiry in any community is to examine the ways in which it is highly organized and understand why that organization occurs. As sociologist William Whyte demonstrated in his study of Cornerville, telling a community’s story through its organization shows how the community “appears to the people who live and act there” and how they “symbolically represent the world to themselves.” The social organization of residents at the Boardwalk hinged upon the
social interactions between stigmatized groups such as sex offenders, the poor, and the mentally ill. It is a story of resident behavior that can only be understood in the context of which it was formed. Next, I will explore the story of resident behavior in the context of their interactions with the Dutchland community.
Chapter 6: Interactions with the Community

One of the most intriguing aspects of life at the Boardwalk was the way that residents interacted with each other to create a self-contained community. This community helped residents fulfill their material and emotional needs via an underground economy and caring relationships. However, the Boardwalk Motel did not exist in a vacuum. Motel residents interacted with the local community of Dutchland and extended communities of Riverfort and Pinewood on a daily basis. These interactions were unique because Dutchland residents made it clear that they were none too pleased with the presence of the motel. In Chapter 1, I used sociologist Harvey Siegal’s framework of the Boardwalk as “an outpost of the poor located in a comfortable middle and upper-class area which is actively hostile to its presence.” These attitudes can be thought of as efforts to “sanitize” the social space of Dutchland.

“Sanitization” is the action or desired goal to remove an unwanted socio-spatial presence, and as sociologist Jeff Ferrell argues, it is supported by rhetoric about “quality of life,” “civility,” and “order,” that ultimately serves to police and control public space in a way that benefits groups with the political upper-hand. Citizens rally behind sanitization because they fear the potential fallout (sometimes quite literally) that could befall their communities based on their proximity to what they perceive as harmful, and because the spatial presence of particular populations threatens the “Disneyfication” of their social worlds.

This chapter sets out to answer two questions. First, what harms were Dutchland citizens concerned about when they advocated sanitization? Second, how did the behavior of motel residents reflect or not reflect these concerns? I will first examine how
the citizens of Dutchland viewed the Boardwalk in the context of sanitization and the battle over social space. Then I will explore how motel residents used this shared social space a source of food, work, and other social nutrients. These findings will serve to paint a more accurate picture of the Boardwalk Motel as a counterforce to sanitization.

Sanitization

Sex Offenders in Shared Social Space

The concerns of Dutchland residents revolved first and foremost around the presence of registered sex offenders, as evidenced by these anonymous online comments from the local newspaper’s website:

America needs an island prison-colony like Devil’s Island. The rate of recidivism among sex-offenders is far too high to try to rehabilitate them around decent citizens. Sex offenders gave up their right to live among us when they committed their crimes. Frankly, I’d vote for execution.5

The writer of this article is very sympathetic towards the “working poor” but what he does not tell you (but definitely should have) is that these motels also house a very high concentration of the areas registered sex offenders. I do not have any sympathy for these people and I recommend that you not let your children anywhere near these motels.6

Take a look at the sex offender registry and the number of occupants of these hotels who are on it. I just received a notice today that two moved into one of the hotels mentioned in that article this week. You know how far these establishments are from schools, day cares and churches? I am sorry…I dont [sic]care, stay away from my home, my children.7

Dutchland residents were concerned about sex offender recidivism in their community and it is hard to blame them for this reaction to what they perceived as a threat to child safety.8 There is no denying that some residents of the Boardwalk had sexual offense convictions, but to my knowledge, no resident was involved with any law enforcement action because of a recidivistic sexual offense during my fieldwork. Despite this, the mere presence of sex offenders at the motel was enough to encourage some
community members to take action against what they saw as a threat. In these instances, Dutchland residents who were unable to eradicate the motel from the area, engaged in symbolic acts to exert power over the motel residents that they so despised.

While I never observed or heard of any vigilante violence directed from the Dutchland community towards motel residents, the closest residents and community members came to butting heads was on nice days when residents milled about the parking lot. On these days, it was not uncommon to hear motorists call out insults from cars as they drove by. I distinctly remember standing in the parking lot when someone yelled, “Fucking pedophile!” from their vehicle. On another day a passenger yelled out, “Fuck you man!” Reggie and Sky were standing with me at the time and Sky exclaimed, “I told you, the other day somebody drove by and yelled nigger out the window!” Jake told me about an incident that occurred as he was walking back to the motel in early January:

These fuckin’ two assholes in a fuckin’ car ride by, call me a fuckin’ pedophile. I started fuckin’ screamin’ at ‘em, like who the fuck do[sic] you? They fuckin’ start slowin’ the car, like go ahead, get outta the fuckin’ car asshole. You’re the one ridin’ by screaming shit, bein’ a fuckin’ punk.

Sam commented on this verbal abuse when we spoke about the Dutchland community:

All they know is this is a pedophile hotel, everyone sitting out here is a pedophile. That’s all they know. Everyone knew about the Boardwalk. They knew because they had to find somewhere to put these pedophiles, that’s news to Ms. Johnson. She’s sitting at home watching TV, she don’t want these motherfuckers close to her kids. They ship them way out here. Then the people in Dutchland, there was a big protest about this ‘cause they didn’t want them up here neither, ‘cause Dutchland was an old prestigious ass neighborhood for years.

These insights illustrate the fact that members of the public have a tendency to incorrectly equate all sexual offenders with pedophiles. Jake acknowledged this when he told me, “That’s one thing you gotta realize in your book too, just ‘cause somebody’s a sex
offender don’t make ‘em a fuckin’ child molester. That just means they fuckin’ committed a sex crime.” Many types of sex crimes require registration and in New York State, patronizing a prostitute and promoting prostitution can land someone on a registry. In other jurisdictions, public urination, consensual sex between teenagers, and exposing genitals in public are offenses that require registration.\textsuperscript{10}

Motel residents recognized the power imbalance created by bullying from the community. Because those creating the verbal assaults were safely enclosed inside vehicles, even if residents picked the vehicle that the vitriol came from, it was out of sight and earshot by the time residents could respond. Therefore, residents pushed back against this slight to their esteem by engaging in behaviors that reasserted their power in public space. Male motel residents were quick to engage in cat calling when women walked by on the Main Street sidewalk. Because motel residents were often sitting in the middle of the parking lot and fairly far back from the sidewalk, the physical distance allowed their targets to walk by without making any sort of eye contact.\textsuperscript{11} However, this distance did not deter residents from attempting to engage women who showed zero interest in them.

One day in March, a blonde woman walked past the motel with what looked like a very expensive digital camera. Larry waved his arms and called over, “You can take one over here honey! You can take our picture! Over here!” When she refused to turn his way, Larry spat out, “Another miserable bitch. Just playin’ around and she can’t even turn around and smile and laugh.” On another day, Jake, Reggie and I sat outside and Jake noticed a girl walking down the sidewalk across the street. He waved his arm and called, “Hi!” but she failed to respond. Reg made a comment about Jake being persistent and he responded, “If you hit on every girl, eventually you get one.” Other residents, such
as Sam and Trim, waved and whistled at girls they saw walking by. In the same way that insults from passing cars interrupted the peace that residents expected as they attempted to go about their daily lives, the catcalls from male residents to females on the street caused similar harm, and in the eyes of the motel residents, restored the equilibrium between them and the Dutchland community.

_Criminals in Shared Social Space_

Dutchland residents also supported sanitization because they feared that motel residents taxed the resources of local law enforcement. In an editorial in the local paper, a legislator cited the fact that in a little over a year, there were 600 police calls to four different motels in Dutchland. During my fieldwork, I observed police responding the motel on 11 occasions and was informed of 13 other incidents by residents. Table 3 shows 49 police responses to the motel during my fieldwork. Because the parking lot of the Boardwalk was in full view of Main Street, it is understandable that Dutchland residents saw police cars at the motel and assumed that a crime had occurred. However, this was not always the reason for police presence.

While community concerns about crime on part of motel residents were understandable, the data show them to be somewhat of an overreaction. The attorney for the town of Dutchland himself admitted that most of the police calls to the Boardwalk were minor. When crimes did occur, most of the interactions with police that I observed did not result in formal sanctions. These assertions are confirmed by the data in Table 3 that show that only four calls resulted in arrest and that police did not record many calls as responses to crime. It is also important to highlight the fact that “jack-rolling” or the outright robbing of residents by other residents, was very rare.
Even when conflict erupted into violence, police officers took on the role of mediators or peacekeepers and used the threat of arrest to quell disputes. These actions were a form of “order maintenance” policing, in which officers used their discretion to employ the least amount of force necessary to maintain public order and respect of authority. This example of police discretion can be seen in the following police narrative of the birthday fight involving Reggie, Dee, Toby, and Sky:

PR [Dee] called police regarding fight between husband (PI1/Toby) and PI2 [Reggie]. PI2 says he was having birthday party in room and he and PI1 were arguing and PI1 punched him and knocked him down. PI2 says he had to put his finger in his eye to get him off. PI2 had a bloody nose but refused treatment. PI1 says that PI2 grabbed and shoved him first and that PI2 gouged his eye as they were on the ground. PI1 says he only punched PI2 when PI2 went to grab his girlfriend [Dee]. Left eye was red and swollen and transported to EMS for treatment. __ claims she was hit by __ during scuffle. Both parties determined to be mutual combatants and advised to stay away from each other.

Another prime example of “order maintenance” policing occurred in July. Jake was in the process of moving to the Save More and he borrowed his sister’s car for the move. He, Reggie, and I drank beer outside of his room as the car sat in the parking lot with the stereo blasting. At one point, Jake and Reggie decided to smoke marijuana out of a pipe. They had just set the pipe on the ground when a Dutchland police car pulled into the parking lot. The officer informed us that there had been a noise complaint due to the music and that we were not allowed to be drinking outside. Reggie replied that we had done it before and asked why it was not allowed. According to the officer, because those driving by could see us, we were drinking in public and violating the law. As he requested everyone’s identification, the officer noticed the pipe on the ground and a small zip lock bag of marijuana sitting on a table between Jake and Reggie. Another police officer wearing aviator sunglasses arrived on a motorcycle and asked, “Whose weed is
it?” No one said a word until the officer asked again, at which point Jake responded, “It’s mine.” When the officer asked if Jake had any more on him, Jake began to reach into his pocket, which caused the officer to exclaim, “Don’t do that! I asked you a simple yes or no question. If you do that again I will put you on your ass.” Walking over to the table, the officer from the car picked up the bag of weed, stared at the burnt offerings and asked incredulously, “You guys were really smoking this?” The bike cop flashed a toothy smile and remarked, “Times are tough.” His partner then dumped the contents onto the ground and the two smothered the marijuana in gravel using their black leather boots. As the bike cop left the scene, the first officer warned us that we were all very lucky and could have been ticketed for drinking outside and smoking marijuana.

The local legislator who cited the number of police responses to area motels added that the calls “don’t even account for off-site crimes committed by motel residents.” Motel residents committed only a handful of non-violent property crimes off-site that I was aware of. Several were shoplifting offenses committed by Dee, who had a history of stealing and referred to herself as a “klepto.” Dee stole small amounts of shampoo, other toiletries, and jewelry from Giant Foods, the dollar store, and several drug stores. This led to several arrests and an ongoing court case in Dutchland Town court. In consideration of her boundary work described earlier, her shoplifting was likely an attempt to maintain the “homey” feel of her motel room. Fran also shoplifted from CVS and was caught when she tried to steal sleeping pills, gummy bears, and a 30-pack of beer. She was given a court date, but moved out of the motel before I could learn of her disposition. The other instance of shoplifting that I was aware of involved the young couple in their 20s, Nora and Justin, in the early days of my fieldwork. Roy and Biggie
claimed that they were addicted to crack and heroin and Sam told me, “When she ain’t out stealin’, he pimps her off, to supply both of their habits.” Nora was arrested in mid-June after she stole from the local SSK Department Store. Roy described the event to me:

*Blonde girl stole from SSK, she goes to McDonald’s bathroom to change clothes and she cut her foot. Blood trail goes to Boardwalk up there. Cop pulls up, the owner pulls up. Dead serious. They hiding in the bathroom.*

The other class of “off-site” crime that motel residents engaged in was selling drugs, mainly marijuana. Motel residents sold marijuana to residents of the trailer park, residents of the Park Place, workers at the local Giant Foods grocery store, and Sky and Jake’s co-workers at KFC and McDonald’s. Unlike the verbal assaults on motel residents and shoplifting crimes from local stores, drug sales were mutual exchanges. Therefore, while drug sales and drug use were viewed as problematic by some residents of Dutchland, they were certainly not limited to residents of the Boardwalk. However, the feeling still persisted that “As these motels continue to decline, they are bringing our neighborhoods down with them.”

**Surveillance in Shared Social Space**

The state did take steps to monitor the behavior of residents who were involved with the supervisory arm of the state parole system. Residents on parole received visits from parole officers (POs) and were required to report to the local parole office at designated time periods, often every two weeks. The office was located in a shopping plaza off Main Street halfway between the motel and downtown Riverfort and was accessible by bus. When I asked Darryl, a registered sex offender, what the visits with his PO were like, he told me, “I saw him for a whole three minutes. Did you see the police? Did you use any drugs or alcohol? Anything change? Alright, see you in two weeks.”
Those on parole, especially sex offenders, had to abide by conditions of release limiting their movement and behavior in the community. Sex offenders had over 65 conditions to abide by that included: not fraternizing with anyone with a criminal record, not possessing controlled substances (including sexual performance enhancers), avoiding sexually explicit material and the Internet, staying away from locations where children congregated, abiding by curfew, abstaining from alcohol, and keeping a log of all activity.

Parole officers could visit at any time, but several parolees commented that their POs did not come by during certain hours. Curfew for most parolees was from nine o’clock at night until seven in the morning. One night I hung out with Jasper, Tat, and Patch who were all on parole and Jasper said about his PO, “He never rolls after a, like eleven-thirty at night, eleven, but, eleven-thirty definitely ain’t rollin’. But he’ll be here at five in the morning.” Tat nodded and spoke about a recent room visit, “He walked in, went to the bathroom, then seen nobody was there then turned on the TV. Hey, how you doin’? Everything’s alright?” Parolees such as Sonny and Price admitted to sneaking out late at night because they figured their PO would not be by until the morning.

The relationships between POs and parolees were often ones of forced tolerance, and complaints about POs were common at the Boardwalk. Like cops, POs were often referred to as “assholes” and the PO who supervised sex offenders was viewed with particular disdain. Because they were registered sex offenders, Darryl and Tat shared the same PO and when I asked Tat about him he said:

*I’m not gonna say he’s a piece a shit, but from my past experience with him, I don’t like him. Like, I try to tell him everything that’s goin’ on. Everything that’s goin’ on. If I go out, and I’m off course? I call him, you know, I didn’t make it over here, so I’m going over here, taking care of this and this and that.*
Darryl’s mother vocalized her displeasure with this officer because he had played a role in Darryl’s earlier parole violation, “The PO is really bad, he’s a two face. He really has no conscience, no conscience at all.” Tat claimed that his PO had some sort of history with sexual offenders:

*Who knows, maybe he lost his marriage to a guy who used to work with sex offenders? It’s either that or he probably got molested when he was a kid. That’s probably what it is and he, and you know, and he actually did something with his life but now he can get back at all the other ones.*

This was an example of Tat lashing out in frustration, as he probably did not believe his own claim, but tried to conjure up some sort of explanation as to why this particular PO seemed to have it out for him.

Darryl was also turned off by his PO’s attitude about their relationship:

*He thinks it’s all a waste of time, effort and money. He doesn’t think I should be getting disability: it’s not fair that I have PTSD, he doesn’t understand why I have PTSD, and when you tell him you got beat up, robbed and raped in jail, oh that’s what you deserved. What’s too bad is he’s parole officer for eighty-five men. He has a vendetta against sex offenders.*

*My parole officer told me he’s not my friend, he’s not my ally, he’s not here to help me, he’s here to protect society, from me. That’s not his job, his job is to help me reenter society in a successful manner. He doesn’t do that. He doesn’t give me the opportunity to grow, develop and change.*

When I told Tat about Darryl’s experience he said:

*I wish he would say that to me. ‘Cause if he says that to me, I would write his ass right the fuck up. Look listen, you’re a parole officer. You’re supposed to be my big brother, you’re supposed to be helping me re-adjust back to society. Not keep me away from society. That’s a fact.*

I spent a lot of time with Darryl and eventually gave him rides to places such as his mother’s house. Parole required him to report the information on every person he got a ride with, so whenever Darryl got into my car he called his PO to give him my name,
car make, model, and license number. The PO often failed to answer and Darryl then left a message. On more than one occasion the PO’s voicemail was full and Darryl was unable to leave a message.

Darryl’s parole conditions stipulated that he notify his PO when establishing a sexual, developing, or personal relationship, and then disclose his criminal history to the other party in front of his PO. Darryl told me his that PO’s rule was that if he met with someone more than twice “or if I wanna fuck ‘em” he would have to go through a disclosure. The purpose of the disclosure was to ensure the partner or friend was aware of Darryl’s conviction. One of the popular urban legends among POs was that one sex offender claimed that he told a girl about his crime and when he did actually the disclosure with the PO the girl had a heart attack. Darryl and Digital met in January in Riverfort and their relationship progressed to a romantic level that required Darryl to disclose. I asked them to describe this experience:

Darryl: I went through what I convicted of, how I got convicted, and how I knew the victim. And then he asked Digital if he had any kids or if he was around any kids. That was that. He said that we could spend as much time as we wanted together, he can’t stop how much time we spend together as long as I complete my responsibilities.

Digital: He was extra nice, I was surprised that he was so nice. He was so nice that I feel if you talked to him a half hour more he probably woulda just let you free. *laughs*

Eventually Darryl felt that he and I became such good friends that we needed a disclosure. I was incredibly interested in what this would be like and Darryl prepped me:

It’s gonna go something like this. You’re gonna come in, we’re both gonna go wait, in the little waiting room, after we go through the metal detector. Then we’re gonna go into his little office. He’s gonna close the door hopefully. Then we’re gonna tell ‘em that this is a platonic relationship. Then we’re gonna go into the, uh, he’s gonna say, Darryl says that you know everything. He’s gonna tell you this little story about the person that had a heart attack because the other
person really did lie to ‘em. Then he’s gonna have me do the disclosure, uh, where I paid an eight year-old boy, to give me oral sex for two dollars. How did I know the boy? I’ve known his family my whole life. How did I groom him? Um, I was babysitting ‘em at my house, he came into my bedroom to play a video game and that’s when it happened. I did not come in ‘em, uh. He’s gonna say, did you know all that? You’re gonna say, oh yeah Darryl told me all that.

Because Darryl had always claimed innocence I asked if he had to tell me simply what his conviction was for or describe the crime as if he had perpetrated it. He said, “I have to talk like I did it.” We happened to be in the car with Digital at the time and he chimed in, “Yeah that’s what I was unprepared for.” Digital then elaborated:

*It was a little awkward for me. A little awkward. ‘Cause like I said, it was one thing you know hearing Darryl tell you the situation. And then when we got there I didn’t know it was gonna be in the context of him accepting guilt for everything. See that like, it made a big difference. I feel like I got kicked in the gut and I’m look at him like what? He’s like, no it’s just a formality. I’m like, huh? That’s a big formality buddy!*

From the front seat, Darryl admitted that he forgot to warn Digital about that part. Digital laughed and continued:

*No, I had no clue! And it’s funny because the PO officers he’s sittin’ there aksin’ [sic] me. He’s like, um, we do this just to make sure people are aware ‘cause it’s one thing him tellin’ you, makin’ sure he tell you. He says, so after he made ‘em do that, he’s like so did he tell you all this? I’m like, yeah, but you could tell on my face, I musta been shocked. I was like whoa. I felt like I was stuck in a documentary for a second. Definitely crazy. And then I felt bad for him. I’m like, wow bro. It’s gotta take a lot for you to do that.*

On a snowy day in January I picked up Darryl at the grocery store in the shopping center and drove him to the parole office in the corner. We passed through the metal detector into the waiting room where we took seats on grey metal benches that would be at home in a bus stop. A dozen other parolees, all black, sat with us, looking at their feet or the blue walls. Darryl walked up to the receptionist and spoke to her through a microphone in the glass window separating them. Below the microphone was a round
hole in the glass that was covered up by manila folders. The adjoining panes were boarded up with cardboard. A posting of rules on the wall commanded us to not fraternize with other parolees, to clean up if we brought food, to not bring our kids or wives, and to refrain from hanging out in the parking lot.

A door in the back of the room opened and a PO called Darryl’s name. We both stood up and the PO looked at me and asked, “Who’s this cat with you?” Darryl told him we were there for a disclosure and the PO told us to wait while he found someone to help us. A few minutes later, a different PO opened the door and told us that Darryl’s usual PO was out of town. We followed this man into the hallway where I was told to keep my hands out of my pockets and stay to the right, and ended up in the PO’s office.

Once inside I took a seat across the desk from the PO while Darryl sat against the wall to my left. The PO asked for my ID and if I had any arrest history. When I replied in the negative he told me, “Good man.” He then turned to Darryl and said, “Tell me about your crime.” Darryl stated matter-of-factly, “I paid an eight year-old boy two dollars to give me oral sex.” The PO looked at me and asked, “Did you hear that? Did you know that?” I nodded and the PO turned to Darryl and asked, “You paid a little boy to have sex with you?” The PO then inquired as to how Darryl and I knew each other. I began to explain and he became quite confused because he expected our relationship to be romantic. The meeting concluded after I wrote a statement saying that I had met with Darryl and the PO, and that Darryl disclosed his crime to me. I also wrote that I did not have any children, that I was aware Darryl was not supposed to be around underage children, and that there were no reasons for me and Darryl to end our friendship. The PO finished the meeting by making a copy of my statement in a room whose walls were
covered with posters, one of which featured a news item concerning a parolee who shot three people while on parole, upon which someone had handwritten, “level 3 offender.”

Community reactions to the Boardwalk and the behavior and social status of motel residents created what I call “stigmatic interactions.” The social status of the motel and its residents drew hostility from Dutchland residents. Mass media coverage quickly moved the private lives of motel residents into the spotlight of public scrutiny. Deviant behavior by motel residents did nothing to quell calls for sanitization. What is important to note, and what was largely missing from the public’s perception of the motel, was that deviance was the exception to daily life, and not the rule.

As social refugees, the residents of the Boardwalk were placed by social services, or pushed and pulled toward the motel because of their social situations. These residents migrated to the Boardwalk because its location allowed them to meet many of their daily needs, a fact that Dutchland residents seemed unaware of. Next, I will describe how motel residents used aspects of the sustainable habitat to address their deprivations.

Motel Residents and the Sustainable Habitat

Most of the activity by motel residents in the sustainable habitat was geared towards surviving on a day to day basis. As I described in Chapter 2, for many residents, a substantial pull factor of the Boardwalk Motel was its location. Nestled within walking distance of bus stops and businesses, the Boardwalk Motel gave residents the opportunity to engage in the same type of consumer relations that characterized the lives of their Dutchland detractors. Some residents washed their clothes at the laundry mat for as little as $1.75 (depending on the size) and dryers cost $.25 cents for seven minutes of drying time. Larry actually did his laundry in the laundry room of the trailer park. Although he
believed this was against the trailer park’s rules and it was more expensive than the plaza location, he continued to do it because it was closer. Both Giant Foods and the CVS had Redbox DVD rental units, which residents used because watching movies was a popular way to pass the time.

Many residents had positive interactions when they went out into the sustainable habitat. Roy and I went to McDonald’s one summer day with his friendly personality on full display. He called the man behind the register by name and joked with a little kid, saying that he was well behaved and that he did not like to see kids misbehaving at fast food restaurants. The kid gave me several high fives and Roy told me, “It means you have a good heart if kids like you. They’re innocent, so if they come over and aren’t scared, you’re good.” We then headed over to the gas station, where Roy greeted the blonde woman working with, “Hey Miss Lady.” He paid for a 24oz beer and was given two cigarettes for free. Reg had a similar personality and constantly made small talk and laughed with workers at the places he frequented.

Searching for Food

Residents obtained food in various forms from several locations in the sustainable habitat and this was the most important aspect of daily life for motel residents. Where residents shopped depended on their monetary resources, as well as their ability to cook or prepare food in their rooms. There was no guarantee that a room at the Boardwalk came equipped with a refrigerator or microwave. If residents did not bring these items with them to the motel, they obtained them by luck of the draw and many attempted to move to better equipped rooms as they became vacant.

Residents who lacked the means to cook visited local fast food establishments on
a daily basis. Because of dollar menus and two-for-one coupons found on the back of Giant Foods receipts, fast food restaurants provided residents with cheap and filling meals within walking distance. It was common to see new residents who lacked refrigerators or microwaves walk back to their rooms with bags from these establishments around meal times. Residents visited other restaurants such as the Home Cooking buffet and the local diner, however these visits were infrequent because meals there were significantly more expensive.\textsuperscript{22} The local Giant Foods was also a convenient and 24-hour source of prepared food because it had a salad and hot food bar and residents could buy items such as sandwiches and fried chicken that were ready to eat. In the same plaza was a Chinese restaurant and local pizzeria. When I asked Roy what he usually ate, he told me, “Chinese, KFC, Giant Foods, and pizza.”

Having a refrigerator and microwave greatly increased the types of food that residents could buy. Instead of throwing away leftovers, residents could save them for several days. This was important when residents ordered pizza, Chinese food, and other items that provided more than they could eat in one sitting. With a fridge and freezer, residents could also store milk, leftovers, cheese, meat, and frozen items. A microwave allowed residents to cook a wide variety of meals and reheat leftovers. Sam told me:

\textit{I buy everything you can microwave, everything you can think of. I buy pancakes, sausage, hot dogs, um, I buy all kind of TV dinners that be on sale. Mostly stuff so I can live. I make sure I try to get vegetables, stuff that I can just put in the microwave. They got a lot of frozen vegetables and I buy a lot of those bags. Sometimes you get four bags for five dollars. I throw ‘em in the microwave, boom, eat ‘em just like that. Throw me a hotdog in there I’m good.}

Darryl used his microwave to make meals out of precooked packaged rice and various frozen meats such as chicken tenders. He also reheated meals that he brought from his mother’s house. Roy loved his microwave because he could cook “real food”
such as steak and chicken. Meat was a high value food source and considered a key part of the diet among motel residents. Sam spoke about Curtis eating only cereal and soda when he asked, “Where is the meat mothafucka?” Dee told me, “There’s a constant need for food. Meat is our biggest issue.” One reliable source of meat was the local food pantry in the church up Main Street, which gave out donations every other week. The donation bags almost always included hot dogs, in addition to bread, peanut butter, crackers, cheese, and canned items such as vegetables and hash.\(^\text{23}\)

Reg and Sky were unique in that they had many different ways of cooking in their motel room. Not only did they have two refrigerators and a microwave, they also had a toaster oven and electric skillet. They rarely ate fast food (save for free meals at KFC when Sky was working) and did most of their food shopping at Giant Foods because they received $200 in food stamps each month, which Reg claimed got them several weeks of food\(^\text{24}\). They brought me to Giant Foods in October to watch them shop and Sky referred to it as showing me “how to live poor.”

They began by scanning their discount card at a machine that printed out a page of relevant coupons. Their target was the dairy aisle, where they scoured the shelves for any items marked with square orange stickers. These stickers indicated items that were close to expiring and therefore marked down in price. On this particular day there were small fruit and yogurt smoothies on sale for a quarter each. Reggie retrieved a bottle from the giant glass case and popped the top off in the middle of the aisle. He and Sky took turns tasting the bottle and he told me, “If we like ‘em we’ll buy ‘em all.” They both approved of the taste so Sky grabbed a basket which they filled with a dozen bottles. No other items were on sale so they decided to check out. As they arrived at the cashier,
Reggie stopped to look at a selection of discounted bakery items and bought a coffee cake for a dollar. Elizabeth happened to be checking out and we said hello to her as she scratched off several instant lottery tickets. As the cashier bagged Reggie and Sky’s discounted items, I picked up a copy of the New York Times and could not help but note the irony as I read an article in the dining section about $200 12-course tasting menus.

There is a common misperception that those on food stamps buy lavish food or purchase alcohol. In fact, food stamp cards could not be used for any alcohol or prepared food, so residents did not use them at McDonald’s, and could not use them to buy premade food or alcohol at Giant Foods. Many of the residents on food stamps shopped the same way as other budget conscious consumers in a frail economy. Residents of the motel did not eat gourmet meals. Instead, I saw residents eating: ramen (Reg garnished his with crushed Doritos and other chips), jalapeno peppers stuffed with cheese, simple sandwiches of many varieties (cheese, ham and cheese, peanut butter), frozen pizzas, and frozen entrees. When Reg cooked out using his food stamps, his burgers were bought frozen in 24 packs and other meat was always bought on sale. 

Searching for Work

One of the reasons the Dutchland community harbored ill will towards Boardwalk residents was the assumption that they lived off of government benefits and did nothing to improve their life situations. This was summed up by one online commenter who wrote, “I work hard, so should they.” Counter to this belief, many residents of the Boardwalk pursued work within the sustainable habitat. Larry put out 25 resumes into the community but he felt that he was not getting calls back because he was 55 and employers would rather hire someone half his age. Darryl and Spike made similar efforts
to get hired at establishments nearby, but to no avail, aside from Darryl’s conflict with Reggie and Sky over KFC.

Despite some setbacks, many motel residents were involved in the work force and several locations in the sustainable habitat provided employment for them. Sam and Reggie worked at the Home Cooking Buffet before I began my fieldwork, preparing food and washing dishes respectively. When Ramòn lived at the motel, he used to work at KFC and his girlfriend worked at the Big Sales discount store. Marc had a job washing cars at a dealership that was a short bus ride away. Jake and Sky worked at fast food restaurants within walking distance. This proximity to their jobs made them valuable employees because they could work closing shifts well past when the buses stopped running and could come in on a moment’s notice if someone failed to show. Jake later got a job washing dishes at the Indian restaurant next door to the Boardwalk and worked until 2am because he could walk home.

Besides providing an income, jobs gave Jake and Sky beneficial social connections. Sky invited one of her managers and several co-workers to her birthday party. One of them gave Sky a large garbage bag full of clothes that she originally was going to take to the Salvation Army, but as Sky told me, “she doesn’t want people payin’ for them.” Jake had a good relationship with a manager at McDonald’s and the two played Monopoly together in the dining room during their late shifts. These games got so intense that Jake went in on his days off to play.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, the friendship between Sky, Reg, and Jake began when Jake and Sky met as co-workers at KFC. Sky told me:

\textit{Um, Jake actually started working with me. And then, Reg was walking to meet me one day, saw Jake, and had seen him previously before that when I was talkin’ about him and Reg would come see me at work. And then [Reg] invited him over for fish, so they had a fish dinner. Jake brought beer, brought me a little box a}
chocolates, they sat there goin’ through VHS tapes and they been attached at the hip ever since. At that time, Jake was staying at the Save More Inn and then he got him to come down to the Boardwalk.

Sam was a cook whose job search took him to several locations in Riverfort and other nearby cities. He went to look for a job at a local college, could not find the right person to speak with, and left discouraged, “So I said, fuck it, I’m gonna catch the bus.”

He rode the bus into downtown Riverfort with the intention of applying at Waste Management where Cinque worked. Opportunity knocked while he was waiting for the bus outside the downtown Marriott:

I said yeah let me go up here in this damn hotel and see if they hirin’. ‘Cause that Waste Management bus be like twenty two minutes, I said oh I got time to write a few application right quick. So I goes in there, they hired me on the spot. Hired me on the spot. I was so happy.

Sam was hired on an on-call basis at $11.79 an hour, which meant that his hours were varied because the motel only called him in for special events. Despite the uneven work hours, this job meant a great deal to Sam:

Chris, I can say this one more time. You don’t know how happy I am. Chris, part time, this sound like heavens opened up. I can’t wait. Man I told ya Chris I was gonna stay on, I was gonna get something. It’s just it’s funny ’cause Chris I was not thinking about no hotel, hotels are slow this time of the year, they not hirin’.

Sam was so excited that he wanted me to come to the hotel when he had to fill out paperwork, “I’d like you to go meet Mr. ____, the guy who hired me. He told me I had a dynamic personality. That’d be nice for you to get a chance to meet him.” When I picked Sam up at the motel, I found him sitting outside the office with Natalie and Mike. As I walked up, Natalie looked at me and said, “He just feels better than thou ‘cause he got himself a little j-o-b.” Sam replied, “Yes, I do. I feel great about that, ‘cause I been hitting these sidewalks. Every chance I get a few dollars, I run out, run out, run out. My feet got so sore one day from just fuckin’ walkin’.”
When we arrived at the Marriott, Sam and I made our way into the HR office in the basement, where he introduced me to a large black man wearing a shirt and tie. I told Sam’s boss about my project and Sam jumped in, “Been monitoring my progress, finding jobs, going from destitute and dire straits. And I thought it was a wonderful thing.” Sam and I then sat outside the office while a woman instructed him politely about which pieces of paperwork he needed to sign. As we sat in plush, red leather chairs and Sam filled out his forms, he said to me:

You know Chris I was just thinkin’ today. I’m kinda happy, I’d like to see all our people at the Boardwalk move to these levels. ‘Cause most of ‘em look at me, they say, they know I’m kinda smart but they don’t know everything I’m capable of doin’. So if they see me they be like damn Sam. ‘Cause I wanna give ‘em inspiration and hope too.

Other residents found employment in the extended community, but sometimes at great cost. Toby’s unemployment benefits elapsed in January so he looked for work but was unable to find anything within walking distance. He eventually found a job with a temp agency working an overnight shift Monday through Friday out past Pinewood:

We punch in at four-thirty. You never know what time you’re gonna get out. Could be five the next morning, could be eleven that night, you don’t know, it sucks. Generally, it’s right after the buses fuckin’ stop running, and I have to fuckin’ take a cab home so I make minimum wage, and it fuckin’ costs me ten dollars to get home, so it costs, it’s like I’m not making too much to be honest with you.

Dee commented on his hours:

He could be home at six or nine ‘cause we don’t want him home that early. He came home that early yesterday, that was not good. That meant he only got four hours worth of work. But sometimes he doesn’t come home ‘til, you know, after one o’clock in the morning.

To get to work, Toby took a bus into Pinewood and then caught a ride with a coworker to the job site. At the end of his shift he got dropped off again in Pinewood and
had to find his own way back to the motel. He had been walking home recently and it took him an hour and a half to get back to the motel. Toby told me, “this was to save a couple bucks, then it got too cold, then the next night it snowed, and then after that it got fucking cold as hell, and uh, so we kinda take cabs and shit.” The job involved moving produce in a refrigerated area and the layers Toby had to wear got constantly sweaty and dirty, and he and Dee complained about having to spend money on laundry once a week just to keep his work clothes clean. Despite the trials and tribulations he went through to maintain the job, Toby kept it at least until he and Dee moved out of the motel in March.

If gaining employment increased residents’ feelings of self-worth, losing employment quashed it. Roy was fired from his previous job at a local restaurant in the sustainable habitat by his supervisor, who was then fired by the manager for stealing liquor shipments. Roy claimed that the manager had called him recently not to rehire him, but to ask for drugs. When Roy got fired, he spoke with the motel owner about getting work at Home Cooking, “He said he could help me out and said to come by Home Cooking Monday and talk to the manager but I go there Monday and the manager isn't even working that day.”

Roy put in applications at local businesses such as Giant Foods and McDonald’s, but failed to get any interviews. He did get a job interview for a cook’s position at a local college, but it never panned out. One of the most depressing moments came when Roy checked his phone messages and found one from his old boss, telling me, “It’s a job, my old manager said he be trying to hire me.” Roy was visibly excited by this, muttering in disbelief, “Oh fuck,” as he returned the call. His manager answered and Roy asked eagerly, “You called me?” The reply came back cold and confused, “No, maybe the other
“Old message.” I felt genuinely bad for Roy because I liked him and hated to see him lose hope. When he was evicted a few weeks later for not paying his rent, Roy was still unemployed.

*Searching for Treasure*

There is a cliché that one person’s trash is another person’s treasure. For some residents of the Boardwalk, salvaging what others chose to discard was a daily ritual. Although no residents referred to the practice as “dumpster diving,” examining trash in the local community often reaped substantial rewards. One day Sam asked me to drive him over to the furniture store up Main Street because they threw out old mattresses behind the building which he used to take for himself. On this occasion, the workers informed us that they no longer disposed of mattresses in this manner and Sam was disappointed because he hoped to get a mattress for his daughter who lived in Riverfort. When Sky and Reg packed for their move, they raided dumpsters at the local dollar store for cardboard boxes. Sociologist Jeff Ferrell calls this world, “the empire of scrounge” and said in reference to those who populate it, “their role within the larger social ecology is to sort among the daily accumulations of trash, to imagine ways in which objects discarded as valueless might gain some new value.”

According to Ferrell, “scrounging remains an integral component of the economy’s lower realms, perhaps even an increasingly necessary option for many of its occupants,” and this certainly was the case at the Boardwalk. The sustainable habitat not only provided items that could be reused, but also ones that could be turned into currency. Reg frequently relied on the sustainable habitat to gather scrap metal and cans. While his can collections netted him around ten dollars when he returned a big
bag to the store, the scrap metal Reg collected garnered significantly more income. One day in June 2013, after I had completed my fieldwork, I picked up Reg at the motel to drive him to a scrap yard in a suburb of Riverfort because he needed rent money. He had filled a plastic garbage bag, black plastic crate, small black canvas bag, and monstrous tan canvas bag with wire, batteries, piping, and other scrap metal. I attempted to lift each bag into my trunk, but loaded the crate instead because I was afraid of throwing out my back. At the scrap yard, Reg turned aluminum copper radiators, electric motors, compressor motors, yellow brass, and batteries into $92. As we drove back to the motel and Reg counted the money, Sky exclaimed from the backseat, “Woohoo! We’re rich!”

I asked Reg about gathering metal and he told me that he just walked around finding it. Reg considered himself an expert on scrapping and had previously scrapped on a regular basis before moving to the Boardwalk:

'It’s not the issue to know where it’s at, it’s just the issue to get your ass out there and look for it. Ride around, look for construction dumpsters, look for cleanouts. Look for any job you could do with a truck. Oh, you guys are trying to empty this house? Once I get some money flowing in, I’m gonna throw an ad in the paper, for house cleanouts and everything. Get insured all through Jake, if we wanna make it legal. If not we can just do it all tax free. Cash money. I’m telling you, scrapping is a fucking art but it can be done easily. It’s a fricken game man, you go out, you ask around, you throw out business cards. Fricken see shit in people’s yards, ask ‘em about it. Putting yourself out there, seven days a week.

Reg claimed that he could make a hundred dollars with a truck “in a tenth of a morning. I salvage that shit from fricken dumpsters, people throw out a lotta shit that’s worth a lotta money.” In fact, purchasing a truck to haul scrap was a goal that Reg consistently talked about because it offered a quick source of off the books income, “I’m talkin’ hundreds a dollars a day, tax free in my pocket. And doin’ it on my own time, my own way.” When Reg returned from jail he told Jake:
Here’s the deal, when I get my social security check, I’m getting’ a fuckin’ pickup truck. So if you’re down with me, we split insurance, we split the fuel, any repairs we split the costa the repairs, truck will be half yours, half mine, pay you back for the half. And then, we’ll split any money that comes in from it. We’ll scrap seven days a week if you want. Fuckin’, we could make some bookoo fuckin’ bucks dude. Five, six hundred bucks a week, tax free.

Like many plans made at the motel, this one failed to materialize because Jake quit his job and Reg began to save money in order to move.

Scrounging also provided a benefit to the town of Dutchland itself. When talking about his daily treks through the local streets, Reggie observed, “We’re a very wasteful nation.” The work done by Boardwalk residents improved the physical landscape of Dutchland and reduced visual disorder, becoming what Ferrell called an “essential counterforce to the ecological overload offered up by consumer society.”

Motel residents took items that those wealthier than them considered devoid of meaning, and used them to improve their lives. As a comic and music aficionado, Jake was happy to find a toy Batcave and Batmobile in a recycling bin, as well as Motley Crue and Bon Jovi CDs in a dumpster. Remember that Dee furnished her room with a wooden entertainment center that Toby and Reg found by the side of the road. Reg found two light-up Christmas trees made out of white wiring and set them up during the winter. As he put it, “I find things everywhere I go man, never fails.”

The modern day alchemy of scrapping was not the only way in which residents turned items into cash. Situated in a plaza off of Main Street was an electronics and media store that accepted trade-ins for store credit or cash. It was within walking/biking distance of the motel and because of this, Jake frequented it when he needed money. Sometimes Jake used the proceeds from his sales for rent, but more often than not he immediately spent the cash on beer. This was the double-edge sword of the sustainable
habitat. Because so many locations sold binge-ready resources such as beer and tobacco, residents often spent money on these fleeting items instead of saving for other purposes. This is behavior is similar to the findings of Sociologist Nels Anderson, who writes that “The homeless man on a spree usually drinks as long as his money lasts, and then he usually employs all the devices at his command to get money to prolong the debauch.”35

There was a sentimental aspect to Jake’s relationship with the trade-in store that was sad to observe. Jake was a huge movie/comic buff with aspirations of being a movie director or writing movie reviews in the vein of Leonard Maltin. When I first met him, he had a sizeable DVD collection, as well as a Playstation 2 and several video games. These items were quite important to Jake and he talked me through his collections on several occasions. However, when Jake got intoxicated and ran out of beer his first instinct was to take these items to the trade-in store and purchase more alcohol. The one item that he did not sell was the complete series of The Twilight Zone on DVD, which he proudly showed off after his sister gave it to him for Christmas. However, it was not for lack of trying. Jake vocalized his intentions to sell it one drunken night, so Reg and Sky hid it from him because they knew he would regret it later. Reg shook his head and told me, “He’s gonna get like six bucks for it and it’s an eighty dollar DVD set.”36

*Death in Shared Social Space*

For all of the concerns about the Boardwalk Motel, there was a dangerous side to the interactions of motel residents with the Dutchland community, but not in the way that one might expect. Over the past 12 years, 6 of 16 fatalities on the 5-lane, 40mph Main Street occurred in the area of the Boardwalk Motel, where the gaps between crosswalks were almost half a mile.37 When I asked Reg about not using crosswalks he said, “When
you have to walk everywhere you want to get from Point A to Point B as quickly as possible, especially when it’s hot.” Main Street became even more dangerous during the winter because the sidewalks remained mostly unplowed. Pedestrians had to walk in the road and I saw several people in wheelchairs using a car lane because the sidewalks were impassable. I even noticed that during my year at the Boardwalk I became reluctant to walk to the crosswalk and found myself running across the highway.

In May 2013, a “use crosswalk” sign appeared at the bus stop outside the motel, although the closest crosswalk remained almost a half mile away. Even when residents used the crosswalk they often disregarded the pedestrian signals and crossed before the lights had changed. For the most part, when residents found themselves on the opposite side of Main Street, they enacted a real-world version of Frogger and dashed across the lanes to the safety of the sidewalk. The most frequent culprits were Jerry and Vito, who did not dash, but rather drove their electric wheelchairs between groups of cars to cross the street. I never witnessed any pedestrians being struck, but Steve told me he was clipped while crossing near the gas station and many residents worried about Ed being hit because he was usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These accidents epitomized the irony of the relationship between the Boardwalk and the Dutchland community. While motel residents were vilified for their presence, they were often content to go about their daily lives without doing harm to the local sustainable habitat. In some ways, the greatest dangers faced by any players in this game fell upon motel residents when they attempted to cross the busy lanes of Main Street.

Sanitization is a powerful social force. At its root, it is fueled by a fear of the unknown. Residents of Dutchland called for the eradication of the motel because public
discourse failed to address the realities of who motel residents were and how they behaved in the context of their social positions. Because these realities of motel life were hidden from the public, this study attempted to paint a more comprehensive and accurate portrait of the Boardwalk Motel and the social refugees who settled there. When I began this study, it was my hope that this insight into the Boardwalk and its residents could be used to address their vulnerabilities and improve their lives. However, as the final chapter of this study will show, hope sometimes only goes so far.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Beginning of the End

My final day at the motel was a sunny June day with an amazing temperature of 64 degrees. In respect to the weather, it was almost identical to the day I moved in one year before, but there the similarities ceased. Much had changed since my arrival, especially in terms of the true residents of the motel (who unlike me) did not have an alternative living situation to retreat to. Of the participants who resided in the motel when I arrived, only Sky, Reggie, Jake, Nolan, Rudy, and Kelly remained when I left. As for me, I was no longer trying to get my footing in a new environment. Rather, as residents let me into their daily lives, I had observed and partaken in enough activities to be viewed as somewhat of an “old head.”1 Through this experience, many participants viewed me as a motel friend and a real friend, whose acts of care viewed residents as human beings, and not just research participants.

Sky, Reggie, and Jake gave me a sendoff on my last day at the motel. I packed up my car and defrosted my refrigerator as they prepared a delicious meal of baked beans, deviled eggs, macaroni salad, grilled chicken, and hot dogs. We spent the afternoon in traditional motel fashion by stuffing our faces and drinking beer. As the sun set in the evening, I said goodbye to those I had met and headed home with a mixture of emotions. I was grateful to the residents who allowed me into their lives and I was hopeful that I could stay in touch with them. There was also a sense of finality, in that the motel had played such a large role in my life for the past year. However, the most pressing emotion was that of apprehension because I wondered what would ultimately happen to the motel and those who relied on it.
It turned out that my fear was not misplaced. A month after I finished my fieldwork, the Dutchland Town Board voted 6-0 to pass a set of regulations discouraging the construction of new motels on the Main Street corridor. During an open town hearing which I attended, the Board passed regulations that required prospective motel owners to not only get a building permit, but also prove that a motel was needed, have a plan for reducing pedestrian accidents, and show how single-family residences would be minimally impacted. The Board passed these new laws with the explicit goal of shuttering the motels for good, as the Town Attorney stated, “What's going to happen economically is it's going to be in these operators' best interests to get out of the business. Is it going to solve the problem overnight? No.” While he was correct that the Boardwalk did not close overnight, a series of events occurred months later that made many residents feel as if it had.

In early December 2013, a resident was injured when he fell through a floor in the Boardwalk; the Town of Dutchland responded by obtaining a search warrant and sending in building inspectors to inspect every room of the motel. The violations observed by the Town Attorney during this inspection were enough to move him to file a case with the state Supreme Court to shut the Boardwalk down. This was reported by the local news and when I asked Elizabeth about this, she waved her hand and said:

*No, he’s just gotta, don’t read the paper. They exaggerate, they lie a lotta times, the paper. The news people, they make it sound worse than what it was. Just he had to fix up some rooms that, like put heaters in ‘em, that were old. The owner is gonna talk to people who will talk to people to make sure, ya know. He ain’t gonna get shut down.*

I asked Natalie what she thought and like Elizabeth, she dismissed the story, “It sounds worse than it is.” Larry was working on cleaning out an incredibly messy room, but
spared a minute when I asked him what he would do if the motel was shut down. He laughed and said, “Drop back and punt. I dunno, they have to, I don’t think they will.”

While I was surprised by the lack of concern among Larry, Natalie, and Elizabeth, it made sense because they were used to inspections and threats against the motel. It was simply another day in the life of the Boardwalk. Circumstances changed quickly on January 14, when it was reported that over 250 code violations were found at the Boardwalk and that the owner would be fined as much as $750,000. Dutchland officials issued an ultimatum and gave residents until the 23rd of January at 4pm to find another residence, as at that time, the Boardwalk would be rendered unlivable.

I again sought out Elizabeth and Natalie in the motel office and enquired as to what was going to happen. Natalie replied, “We don’t know yet. I hate to say it, but he [the motel owner] waited ‘til the last minute.” Natalie and Elizabeth were sorting through guest registration cards and at the owner’s behest, writing a petition for the 12 remaining residents to sign stating that they still wanted to live at the Boardwalk. Mike walked in and offered to help the owner with any repairs and Natalie sighed and said, “Mikey. It’s beyond that Mikey, come on. Let’s just.” I asked if they had told residents about the closing and Elizabeth said the owner instructed her to do nothing but create this petition and wait to hear from his attorney.

As the date of closing drew near, several developments occurred that epitomized the unfolding chaos. On January 19th, Elizabeth and Natalie read the writing on the wall and fled the area with all of the money that was stored at the motel. This left Larry in charge and when I saw him on the 22nd, he pointed out that contractors had begun work on the motel and admitted that he did not know whether the motel would actually be
closed the next day. Many rooms were in the process of being repaired and the sole available room had a frozen sink and a broken window which was covered by plywood in a futile attempt to keep the room warm. A large green industrial dumpster sat outside the second stairwell and two contractors tossed the remains of rooms into it all day long.

The morning of January 23rd brought an unpleasant surprise for the remaining nine residents, as the wind chill was hovered around -5 that day and gusts were recorded as high as 30mph. This was ironic given that when the closing was announced the week before, the Town Attorney said residents were being given time to find other housing because “We just didn’t want to evict them in this kind of weather.” News trucks arrived from local stations to broadcast for the 12 o’clock news. They were accompanied by local law enforcement officers who knocked on every inhabited room and informed residents that the motel was scheduled to be shut down at 4pm that afternoon. This caught them off guard because they had not been informed by management that the motel was set to close. The town had posted signs on the motel several days earlier declaring that the motel was to be rendered uninhabitable, but no residents saw them because the rumor was that Elizabeth and Natalie were instructed to tear them down.

Thomas was one resident who would not accept the possibility of having to move and told me, “If you can’t move on, you can’t move on, they’re not gonna throw us out on the street.” He defended the owner and said the contractors had been working hard and because he had heat and hot water he was satisfied to stay. Thomas told me that he had nowhere else to go and when I asked him what was going to happen at 4pm he said, “Nothing, they can come here and they can just tell ya look, you’re s’posed to be out.
You know if you can’t get out, you can’t get out.” He claimed that his wife had diabetes and they could not find another place to live with such short notice.

The shock of the morning sent many residents into the office in search of heat and solace. Sarah lamented that if the closing could be postponed by three weeks, the apartment that she was eyeing would be ready to move into. Unfortunately, her husband was forced to get an advance on his work paycheck in order to rent a moving van so they could move into another motel on Main Street that afternoon. She told me, “Fuck it, if all else fails, I’ll just sleep right in the van.” Dusty complained that it was too cold to move people out and the town should have closed the motel the week prior when it was warm enough to survive outside in the elements. When I asked Dusty where he planned to go, he told me that God would take care of him and he spent the afternoon drinking tall cans of Natural Ice. Larry tried to calm people down by saying, “We’ve all been in worse situations before, maybe when we were younger.” Sarah shook her head and said, “I haven’t had a few hours to move out before.”

Residents were angry that they had paid the owner as recently as the day before and were told nothing about having to leave. Lenny was one such victim and he stood in the office and railed against the absent owner, demanding that someone get in touch with him to fix the situation, “How are they gonna do that when I just paid him the money?” He kept staring intensely at me and it became clear as to why when he asked, “That’s [the owner] your father right?” Dusty then gave Lenny the number for a Dutchland detective who had visited the motel earlier to facilitate the closure and told residents to call him if they were facing troubles moving out. In fact, Dusty had an idea of his own to pack up his things and ask the detective for money. Lenny then walked up Main Street with his
dog to drop it off at a shelter because he was sure that wherever he was headed would not allow dogs.

The exodus started to pick up around 2pm as reporters returned to prepare stories for the evening news, and town representatives, including attorneys and law enforcement, arrived to knock on residents’ doors and instruct them to leave. Sarah’s husband returned to the motel with a moving van and they packed up their belongings in short order and left for another motel. Dusty was fairly intoxicated at this point and could not even form a coherent sentence. He slung his backpack over his shoulder and trudged down Main Street towards Riverfort in jeans and a red and blue winter jacket, without telling anyone where he was headed. Harry was the last registered sex offender at the Boardwalk and his parole officer made arrangements to send him to another motel.

By 4pm, the only people remaining at the Boardwalk were Thomas and his wife, Lenny and his girlfriend, and two contractors who were working on the motel. Everyone else was barred from setting foot on the property. To their credit, town officials allowed Thomas and his wife, and Lenny and his girlfriend to stay until the 27th because they lacked the money to move that day. Lenny and his girlfriend planned to move to another motel as soon as they could and one of the contactors actually gave Lenny over a hundred dollars to help pay for it. I felt a true sense of sadness as Larry packed up his belongings and moved into an available room at the Park Place. We told each other that we would keep in touch, but my phone calls to him went to voicemail and he never called me back. My inability to stay in contact with the majority of the Boardwalk’s ex-residents is evidence itself of the problems they faced maintaining stability and social capital.
As of January 27\textsuperscript{th}, the motel was emptied of all residents and yellow signs were posted on all of the rooms stating that it was uninhabitable. Tragically, it was reported that Mocha had been locked in the office unattended and Animal Control took her to a shelter.\textsuperscript{10} The Town of Dutchland considered filing criminal charges against the owner because he had started unauthorized repairs in a frenetic attempt to keep the motel open.\textsuperscript{11} An investigation into the Park Place began at the end of January and on February 18\textsuperscript{th}, it too was shut down.\textsuperscript{12} At last count, the owner had pleaded not guilty to over 290 code violations at the Boardwalk and 418 violations at the Park Place.\textsuperscript{13}

Given the volume of violations, there was no doubt that the Boardwalk Motel was unsuitable for habitation. However, these violations existed when I began my fieldwork. A common theme among residents was considerable frustration with the living conditions. Some even joked that getting locked up in jail would be a better experience than living at the motel. Residents felt demeaned with what they perceived as the owner’s lack of care for them and the motel. Noonan said, “This guy gets away with murder. He’s got three Home Cookings, he’s a millionaire, drives around in his Escalade, and, you know what I mean? Talk about slum lords, wow. He’s definitely a slum lord.”

When Roy moved into a room that had just been vacated by long-term residents, he was forced to clean it himself and complained, “Some of the rooms, there are about three rooms that if OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) come up here, they would not pass.” Later that day, we sat in his room and he wondered aloud, “What's in my room that's missing? It's simple.” I looked around and noticed a faint outline on the wall where a smoke detector should have been and said, “A smoke
detector.” Roy nodded and said, “Smoke detector! Word bond. That's the impression I get here, nobody gives a fuck.”

In October 2012, Natalie gave Sam a smoke detector and told him he had to put it in his room because the inspector was coming back. Sam wondered why the rooms did not have carbon monoxide detectors as well, because there was so much use of heaters in the rooms. He was also concerned about fire hazards because he had seen melted and exposed wiring in the rooms. Sam told me, “Man this place is just a goddamn, we sittin’ on a keg a dynamite. Just a matter a time.”

Residents were surprised that the motel could remain open and several assumed that the only reason it did was because the owner paid off inspectors. When Natalie told Roy that the rooms had passed inspection several times he shook his head and muttered, “They pass? Then someone giving someone some money. It's a hustle.” Reggie was also convinced that the owner bribed inspectors to stay afloat and claimed, “He has someone in his pocket.” Shockingly, Reggie and Roy were not far off in their suspicions. After the Boardwalk was shut down, it was revealed that inspectors were not paid off, but rather, sometimes they did not conduct inspections at all. An August 2013 inspection of the Boardwalk was faked by a Riverfort County DSS inspector and DSS claimed that although it conducted inspections of rooms, “We do not have authority to do code enforcement at any of these motels that we have people in.”

These complaints ran counter to Elizabeth’s view that residents did not care about their living environment. Elizabeth equated living at the motel with condoning the conditions. When residents complained her response was, “Just leave!” or, “You want your room fixed? Go buy something, fix it.” She failed to realize that residents simply
wanted the motel to provide a safe and secure place to live. Larry genuinely felt for the residents and complained, “People can’t live like this, they shouldn’t have to live like this, this isn’t right.” Larry made an effort to improve the living conditions but was stymied by Elizabeth and the owner. He complained, “No one gives a fuck, the owner should fix the driveway but he won’t, ‘cause no one cares. When I try and do stuff, they say oh let it go, let it go, let it go.”

In an expression of their powerlessness over the motel’s conditions, many residents fantasized about bringing the owner to his knees. Before Reg and Sky moved out, Sky claimed she was going to call the health department when they left and Reg wondered how DSS could place handicapped people in a motel with no air conditioning. He told me:

*I know once I do move, I’m letting fucking everybody in this fucking room, I’m gonna pull that fuckin’ ceiling down in that bathroom, show everybody the black mold. Show ‘em plumbing, electrical problems that I know are throughout this whole building, and let ‘em go from there.*

Roy told me, “This is not a safe place to live, I don't think passes inspection, no way it passes inspection. I'm gonna call the, the Betta, the Betta, Better Business Bureau and ask what is the policy for living in a motel.”

Despite these fantasies, those who wanted the motel shut down acknowledged that closing the motel would create a logistical problem for those in need of housing, themselves included. In one of our discussions about the motel, Darryl told me:

*When I first moved into the Boardwalk it was bad, with the bedbugs and everything and I was like, you know I had spoken to parole about it and I had spoken to DSS. And they said, you know you can file a complaint if you want and get ’em shut down and you’re goin’ back to jail.*

Jake expressed his desire to report the conditions but said, “I can’t just like fucking call
the goddamn powers that be ‘cause then fuckin’ everybody here’d probably be homeless and I’d feel like a dirtbag.” Digital was equally prophetic, “If someone got hurt and they had reported code violations there would be a problem. It’s gonna take somebody getting seriously hurt or injured, then everyone’s gonna be on the bandwagon.” His voice got quiet and he said, “It’s just really sad.”

The saga of the Boardwalk Motel and its closing raise several disturbing red flags about attitudes toward marginalized populations. When Elizabeth and the owner neglected the living conditions at the motel, not only did they put the safety of residents at risk, they sent strong statements to the residents themselves. Elizabeth felt that residents did not care about the living conditions and justified the minimal effort that went into rooms with, “You’re only getting guys from social services, they don’t give a shit.” She was wrong on both counts and her statement showed a lack of awareness of who residents were and what the motel meant to them. This statement also claimed that those from a certain class were willing to accept any living situation. The fact of the matter is that many residents would have left for better quarters if they had the means. Another truth is that Elizabeth did not authorize or fund repairs; ultimately, care of the motel was in the hands of the owner.

It was obvious that he did not want to exert the effort or money into making the motel a suitable living environment. This made residents feel that they were not worth the money and effort, and this negatively affected their conceptions of self. Local media portrayed the owner as a slum lord profiting by housing the poor, and during a town meeting about the motels the Town of Dutchland Attorney claimed that the owner made only the minimal repairs required by inspection. Since the owner’s prerogative was to
make as much money from the motel as possible, it was almost understandable that he avoided pouring money into substantial repairs if the Town did not require him to.

The Town of Dutchland used the closing of the Boardwalk as a chance to sound-bite their commitment to cleaning up local problem motels. The Town Supervisor claimed that the town’s action would send a message to other motel owners that “We can’t have people living in these conditions.”16 This naïve pat on the back epitomized the saga of the Boardwalk Motel. Closing the Boardwalk was not a victory for anyone involved. If anything, it was the result of the dangerously potent combination of government ineptitude and efforts to sanitize social space.

In a town meeting held on July 25th, 2013, the Town Attorney stated that building inspections took place at the Boardwalk every two weeks. Given that the conditions of the motel were no worse when it closed than when I moved in, this claim is hard to believe. A local legislator then wrote a letter to the local paper stating that she received documents through Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) which showed that such inspections were not occurring.17 Considering the revelation that building inspections of the Boardwalk were faked by Riverfort County DSS, the government’s dedication to providing livable conditions for marginalized populations must be called into question.

It was painfully obvious that nobody in any position of authority took responsibility for the well-being of the Boardwalk’s residents. Riverfort County DSS claimed that it was unable to enforce any code violations found at the Boardwalk, despite the fact that as an agency, it conducted inspections, placed individuals at the motel, and paid the owner to house clients. According to DSS, Dutchland was responsible for enforcing municipal codes at the motel.18 When the town inspected the motel in
December, the Town Attorney reacted as if the conditions of the motel were a complete surprise. If inspections were being conducted and reported to the town, this would not have been the case. Both Riverfort County and the Town of Dutchland exhibited extreme negligence in monitoring a location that housed the area’s most vulnerable individuals. Why did these governments turn blind eyes as the Boardwalk Motel languished on life support and its living conditions endangered residents’ lives?

The answer lies in the concerns about social space that plagued the Boardwalk for years. It was no secret that Dutchland residents and government officials actively sought to remove the motel from the area through political action. This was a difficult process because the motel’s contract was with the Riverfort County and not the Town of Dutchland. In a way, the perceived powerlessness on part of the Dutchland Town Board may have contributed to the accumulation of code violations that were eventually found at the motel. If Dutchland officials feared that the motel owner would only address minor violations enough to meet code and remain in business, then allowing violations to reach a crescendo of no return would place the blame squarely on the owner’s shoulders. This would then give them cause to shut the motel down for good.

When the town moved to make it harder to build new motels in Dutchland, the Town Attorney set the stage for the blame game when he said, “We have operators willing to take these people.”19 A legislator complained at the time that, “We are not addressing the root of the problem” and called for Dutchland to enforce the town’s definition of the motel as a location that provided “transient overnight accommodations from persons away from their place of residence.”20 She was indeed correct that making it harder to build motels did not address the root of the problem, but her definition of the
problem was constrained by the concerns about social space that permeated relations between the Boardwalk Motel and the Dutchland community. The “problem” that plagued the town of Dutchland could not be fixed by regulating how many sex offenders could live at the Boardwalk, nor could it be addressed by making it harder to build motels. It would persist without the presence of the Boardwalk Motel. In 1923, sociologist Nels Anderson came to a similar conclusion when he wrote about his study of Hobohemia, “Some have proposed abolishing Hobohemia as a slum, but the many roads that lead to such a place as Hobohemia would still have to terminate at a common point.”

The problem posed by the Boardwalk Motel was not the fact that it existed, but the fact that it was needed. To further explore this context, we return to the origins of the study.

**Understanding the “Problem”**

This study was motivated by a desire to understand how residents lived in Boardwalk Motel; a space where the effects of criminal justice and social policies were visible. Understanding requires a deep appreciation of where residents came from and what role the motel played in their daily lives. It was this appreciation of how others lived that discourse about the Boardwalk tragically missed. The stigma of the motel was so blinding that many were unable to see the residents as human beings with their own history, behavior, and culture. These aspects of motel life are illustrated in the following summaries of this study’s findings.

**How Did Residents Come to Live at the Boardwalk Motel?**

Erving Goffman describes stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” to the point “where we tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis on the
original one.” The stigma attached to the Boardwalk Motel was so powerful that its residents were viewed by outsiders as nothing but a social problem. This stereotype masked the complex ways in which life experiences and social forces combined to lead individuals to the Boardwalk. To describe why residents ended up at the Boardwalk, I conceptualized them as “social refugees” or persons who forced or impelled to relocate within their own country of citizenship due to the influence of social context and/or social policy. Because the motel was designated as an “emergency shelter” by the Riverfort County DSS, the social refugee metaphor is quite apt to describe this experience.

Many Boardwalk residents were returning to society from prison and their residences had to be approved by parole. For registered sex offenders, the Boardwalk was often the only option because of local residence restrictions and/or parole prohibitions on residing with family or friends. Other parolees simply could not afford another residence and were placed at the motel by the Homeless and Traveler’s Aid Society (HATAS) until they could find work and a suitable place to live. In this respect, the criminal justice system directed these residents to the Boardwalk as part of the reentry process.

Some residents “stepped up” to the Boardwalk after living in boarding houses, shelters, or literally in the backseat of their car. These residents were pulled towards the motel because it represented better living conditions than what they endured previously. Another group of residents “stepped down” to the motel after their living situations became untenable. This displacement was usually the result of some sort of vulnerability, such as losing a job, and residents intended to use the motel to get back on their feet. These typologies demonstrated that the paths that brought residents to the motel played an important role in how residents viewed the motel.
Other residents were placed the motel by HATAS and the Riverfort County DSS (including Adult Protective Services) because they lacked appropriate housing for one reason or another. These residents often suffered from some sort of disability that rendered them unable to work and/or unable to take care of themselves. These placements illustrated the myriad conditions that afflicted residents before they arrived at the motel. Exploration into these experiences revealed that the majority of residents had histories of trauma, criminal behavior, substance use, disability, and previous bouts of transience and residential instability. By parting the clouds of stigma shrouding the motel, we see that the lives of many marginalized populations were shaped by a multitude of factors both in and out of their control. When we consider the complex histories of vulnerability, we gain better insight as to how policies can be directed to help those in similar situations.

**How Did Residents Interact with the Local Community?**

The Boardwalk Motel was located within a Dutchland community that was demographically white, affluent, and residentially stable. By contrast, motel residents were racially diverse, poor, and transient. Because of this, Dutchland residents viewed the motel as an eyesore and worried about how the motel residents affected their community. This was problematic because what made the Boardwalk so attractive to social refugees was the sustainable habitat that provided numerous amenities within walking distance.

While the tensions between both communities never erupted into physical violence, community members on both sides engaged in a symbolic battle of behavior designed to assert their presence and rights to public space. Boardwalk residents were often victims of verbal abuse and they could not sit peacefully outside of their rooms without hearing insults shot out from passing cars. These insults made it clear that motel
residents were unwanted in Dutchland, despite the fact that many received emergency housing assistance and had no control over where they were placed. In an attempt to regain some sense of power within their community, male residents engaged in cat-calling women who walked by the motel. A few female residents also shoplifted from local businesses in a symbolic retaliation against the Dutchland community that stigmatized their very existence.

Despite those transgressions, the majority of motel residents had a mutually beneficial relationship with the sustainable habitat. They purchased food at the local grocery store and fast food locations, and some residents, such as Jake and Sky, had legitimate jobs within the community. Other residents embarked into what Jeff Ferrell calls, “the empire of scrounge” by collecting scrap metal and other discarded consumer items from dumpsters or public areas. This underground environmental action gave motel residents income and meaningful goods, while reducing the amount of visible waste in Dutchland and saving valuable landfill space.

How Did Residents Interact with Each Other at the Motel?

Of all the findings that emerged from this study, the most surprising was the discovery of the motel’s vibrant culture. This culture revolved around satisfying the wants and needs of residents through social interaction. These needs were both material and social, and addressing them created community among motel residents. Residents satisfied their material needs by fostering an underground economy where goods such as cigarettes and food, as well as services were exchanged on a daily basis. Some enterprising residents realized the importance of this exchange and sold items such as drugs or individual cigarettes for substantial profit. Because many residents lacked cash,
the underground economy was a web of exchange that allowed them to negotiate prices based on the resources that each participant brought to the table.

Another surprising aspect of the Boardwalk community was the way that residents went out of their way to care for each other. Despite the fact that residents functioned with few resources, many recognized that some were more vulnerable than others. It was common to see residents donate food and clothing to those who lacked the means to care for themselves. The residents who engaged in care work often provided for disabled residents placed at the motel by DSS with little financial or social support. These efforts were motivated by a widespread belief that case workers simply placed clients at the motel and left them “to die.” Other instances of care involved summer cookouts and parties celebrating special occasions like holidays or birthdays. Despite their meager resources, residents understood that the effort of preparing and sharing food was a universally accepted symbol of care. By caring for each other, the relationships between residents progressed beyond underground business transactions to emotional connections.

Conspicuously absent at the motel were robberies, burglaries, other visible interpersonal crimes characteristic of locations that scholars may consider socially disorganized. Inspections of police records indicated that most calls to the motel were to check on disabled individuals and resolve interpersonal conflict. These confrontations were not random acts of violence, but arose instead from community interactions gone wrong. This conflict was created when social interactions created feelings of disrespect between residents. Such occasions often occurred when residents attempted to care for others by sharing resources and did not receive material or emotional support in return.
The primary culture of the motel was one of community, which unavoidably led to conflict. Because residents had so few resources, threats to those resources were taken very seriously. Conflict arose out of and created fragility, which was a shortage of material goods and social capital that left residents vulnerable to unexpected or self-inflicted disruptions to short and long-term goals. This hallmark of motel life created a cycle that began when residents were displaced from previous environments in a state of fragility and arrived at the motel from prison, or after stepping up or down. When they arrived, residents engaged in acts of community to satisfy their material and social needs. These actions often led to conflict, which increased fragility and left residents in greater need of material resources and social support. Residents fluctuated between community and conflict until the living environment became untenable, at which point they were displaced from the motel and became social refugees in search of another settlement.

Where Did Residents Go After the Motel?

Upon leaving the motel, residents either stepped up or down, depending on their social situations and the available housing options. The locations that residents migrated to depended on the circumstances that led to their displacement from the Boardwalk. Many residents, such as Ed and Anthony, simply disappeared and left no indication as to where they went or why. For those residents whose moves were known to me, migration from the motel was either by force or by choice.

As I discussed, closing the motel was the ultimate forced move and the social refugees involved in that situation scattered to any settlement that would take them. Closing the Boardwalk Motel was a modern day version of the response to “urban nomads,” who according to sociologist James Spradley, live largely hidden from society.
and are “run out”, “pushed from a destination,” and told to “keep moving” when discovered by citizens and police. The other common form of displacement by force was eviction for non-payment of rent. To their credit, Elizabeth and the owner were fairly accommodating of the financial needs of residents. Residents were in such dire straits that coming up with $250 a week was a challenge that often came down to the wire. In these instances, management allowed some residents to get days, sometimes even weeks behind rent before starting eviction proceedings. This policy appeared to be reserved for long-term residents, as short-term residents such as Burt and Tat were sent packing days after they failed to pay.

Removing residents who had been at the motel for over 30 days was a more involved process because after thirty days the motel evicted the resident with the aid of the county sheriff. Roy was a victim of eviction in July 2012 after he failed to secure a job and fell behind with his rent. His eviction caused quite a stir because he had a verbal altercation with Elizabeth in the parking lot over items that he claimed were missing from his room. Elizabeth told me later that she gave him time to clean out his room before the sheriff’s placed a lock on the door and he did not use the opportunity. Roy eventually took the owner of the motel to court and Elizabeth claimed that the owner settled with him for an unspecified amount. After Roy was evicted, Natalie claimed that she saw him sleeping in bus stops in the fall and then eventually ran into him during the winter at another hotel used by social services. Roy was arrested in early February 2013 in a statewide bust of a large cocaine ring and sent to jail. As of spring 2014, records revealed that his earliest release date would be July 2016.
Because the root of eviction was non-payment of rent, evicted residents lacked the financial means to find other housing and without social support, they became literally homeless. This was the situation that the older resident Love, her son Ben, and his girlfriend Lisa ran into in early January 2014, just weeks before the motel was shut down.

Ben had been out of jail for a week and he and Lisa were staying with Love at the Boardwalk because they had no other place to live. The news of the Boardwalk’s closing stressed Ben, “Shit is fuckin’ drivin’ me crazy. I don’t know what’s gonna happen now, this place is closing, I’m sure my probation officer is gonna be like, where the fuck you gonna go now?” DSS told him to go to the mission, but Ben felt that he would be better in an apartment because the mission was, “just not what I need.” He seemed less worried about his mother because DSS would “put her in a nice little shelter that’s all women. They’ll look out for her.” However, the closing of the Boardwalk posed a problem because Ben, Lisa, and Love could stay together as a family unit in the room that Love paid for. If the motel closed, then they would be separated and Ben said that Love had no resources to pay for an apartment:

She’s been there six months payin’ two hundred dollars a week but she only gets like 650 for fuckin’, stupid social security or SSI or whatever the shit is that she has. And then fuckin’, like she blew through all of her savings that she had.

This situation came to a head a week later when Elizabeth started eviction proceedings against Love. The date of their eviction was a brutally cold Friday in January and two sheriff’s deputies arrived to force Love, Ben, and Lisa out of their room. They lacked a housing option other than DSS, and had no mode of transportation, so I offered to drive them to DSS. The family filled as many garbage bags and canvas tote bags as they could, but they were still forced to leave belongings in the room when they left.
The one item that they did not leave behind was a small, grey, one-year old cat, who Love brought down to my car in a cardboard carrier that was falling apart in every way imaginable. Love pleaded with me through her tears to take care of the cat and I assured her that I would. As we drove down Main Street towards DSS, Love sobbed uncontrollably in my front seat, only pausing to apologize to her son Ben, and wailing, “I fucked up my life. I fucking up everything by living there.” Ben was far less emotional and instructed her, “You can’t do this shit down at DSS. You can’t be cryin’ in front of them.” Love worried that they were going to be split up and could not bear the thought of being separated. Ben assured her that she would probably be placed in a good living situation, while he would have to fend for himself in a mission. Lisa was unable to go on DSS because of an earlier sanction and Ben told me that this event would likely end their relationship. I dropped the three of them off at DSS and we exchanged phone numbers, although all three of them told me that they had no more minutes on their pre-paid phones. Since then I have not been able to get in touch with them, although I honored my promise to Love by adopting her cat in order to give her a good home.

Other residents were removed from the motel by their case workers. After Reggie and Larry complained to Curtis’ family and case worker, he was moved to an apartment and then the same motel where Natalie had seen Roy. Natalie remarked to me, “So yeah, I couldn’t believe it. It was like a, fuckin’, Boardwalk reunion.” Steve was moved to an adult care facility by his case worker after Reggie contacted DSS about Steve’s living conditions. Vito worked with his case worker to get moved out of the motel and left mere weeks before the motel was shut down. He was placed in an adult care facility that I suspect was the same one that Steve went to.
Residents who were placed by DSS and violated their conditions of emergency housing were also forced to leave. In these instances, DSS called Elizabeth, who then instructed the residents to leave peacefully without police involvement. This happened to Jasper and Patch, who were both kicked out on the same day in April. I saw Jasper standing next to the second stairwell wearing a grey hooded sweatshirt and guarding half a dozen bags of belongings. He told me he was waiting for his co-workers to arrive because he was going to stay with them. When they pulled up in a black minivan with stenciled advertising for a cleaning service, I helped Jasper put his bags in the van and he gave me a hug, and told me to take care. I was never able to reconnect with Jasper and I am unsure what happened to him.

Because Darryl was paroled as a registered sex offender, he had to work with both his parole officer and a case worker from DSS to find alternative housing. DSS’ goal was to move him to a location that was cheaper than the Boardwalk and a few options were available, including a rooming house with an awful reputation outside of Riverfort. In January 2013, Darryl’s PO moved him to a motel in downtown Riverfort, which Darryl hated because he had to share a room with two other men and he told me, “I’m not good with this, I’m not good with living with other people, I freak out.” He and his partner hoped to get an apartment together and Digital searched Craigslist postings for locations that would accept DSS payments, but ultimately, Darryl’s PO had to approve any move.

At the end of January, Darryl was approved to move into a 12-room boarding house outside of Riverfort. Digital soon moved into the same boarding house, but in a different room, and they were happy to be only a hallway apart. This rooming house was an hour and a half bus ride from Riverfort and at the end of a pockmarked dirt road.
When I visited Darryl told me, “This is like slum city,” and admitted he thought it was worse than the Boardwalk. On each of my numerous visits, the same two men sat in the living room huddled under blankets watching a tiny television with the lights off. There was one working bathroom, one working shower, and a shared kitchen. Residents often turned on the oven to 450 degrees and then left the door open in order to heat the first floor. The only working bathroom had a toilet full of murky water and scattered across the floor were the carcasses of expired air fresheners. A nugget of soap sat on a sink basin covered in so much grime that using the soap was probably more hazardous than not.

In April 2013, Darryl told me that a park was under construction behind the building and because he could not live within 1000 feet of a park, he was being evicted from the boarding house.²⁷ He and Digital found an apartment in a nearby city and asked me to help them move. It was fortunate that I did help because on moving day, Darryl’s nephew was supposed to provide additional transportation but never showed; without me, Darryl and Digital would not have been able to move.

Their new apartment was located in an unassuming two-story white building with four units. They felt good about this step up and were eager to decorate and spruce it up with a fresh coat of paint. Digital told me that it was a lot of space for the $600 they paid and it was quiet in all directions. Unfortunately, less than a month later, parole informed Darryl that he could not live there because there was a daycare within 1000 feet. Darryl and Digital again went on the hunt for apartments and found a list of 10 that they brought to parole, out of which four were approved. Darryl complained that the local police department they did not say anything about the daycare when he registered. His
displacement was due to a statewide law restricting where registered sex offenders could live which trumped any decisions by local government.

I was out of town when Digital and Darryl moved to a new apartment in downtown Riverfort so I was unable to assist them. Darryl’s nephew did come through this time to drive the moving van, but the move was not without hardship, as Darryl later told me:

*Moving was a crazy day. We were supposed to move to a two bedroom in ___, the day we were supposed to move the landlord canceled on us. He rented it to somebody else. So we ran around all day finding a different apartment and moved in the evening.*

Digital called it a “desperate move” because each address had to be given to the PO and checked out in a period of a few hours, “It was just so hard. It wasn’t just it had to be a vacant apartment and we could move there, it had to be within ya know, the guidelines.” The apartment they ended up taking was the only one that parole approved and they showed up at 7pm with a truckload of their belongings, praying that the landlord still had the apartment, which he did. Despite their dramatic arrival, Dig and Darryl were very happy with their new apartment and it provided them with the stability and security to improve their lives. Darryl started working with a local company that unloaded freight cars and he quickly earned an administrative position. Sadly, when I spoke to Darryl in May of 2014, he had lost his job because a supervisor did not agree with the company’s policy of hiring registered sexual offenders. His relationship with Digital was also crumbling and Darryl was giving consideration to moving to New York City or Florida for a fresh start.

Most of the residents I encountered at the Boardwalk had the goal of stepping up to a better location when their resources permitted. Numerous residents expressed the
desire to move, but admitted that since they arrived at the motel, all of their resources had
gone towards survival and they had no money to save for a new home. Because of this,
those who moved out on their own terms never did so without a drastic change in life
circumstances. This high cost of being poor has been well-documented by Barbara
Ehrenreich, who calls being poor “a perpetual high-wire act.”

It was only after securing two jobs that Sam was able to save enough to move into
an apartment with his partner Justine. We spoke via phone on several occasions about me
coming to see it, and Sam seemed genuinely excited to show how his circumstances had
improved. Sadly, he stopped answering/returning my calls and I was never able to find
out what happened to him, though rumors abounded that he fell back into drug use. The
young couple of Avery and Elisha had a relatively short stay at the motel of several
weeks and moved out into a newly purchased trailer. The change in circumstance that
facilitated the move was an influx of money from Avery’s worker’s compensation case
and without it they would have stayed at the Boardwalk. Biggie and Deirdre moved into a
trailer park in December 2012 after months of planning. Their move was facilitated by
the purchase of a car that allowed them to move their possessions. The car purchase was
made possible by the owner and Elizabeth giving the couple leeway on rent payments so
they could save enough for the car. Sadly, Reggie and Sky claimed that they ran into
Biggie over the 4th of July 2013 and he told them that Deirdre had died of a stroke, and he
was back to living in a motel after spending some time living out of his car.

Dee and Toby moved out of the motel in March 2013 into an apartment in
Pinewood that cost $450 a month. This move was facilitated by financial resources from
their limited social networks. Toby’s sister offered to pay the first month’s rent as long as
Dee and Toby could come up with the security deposit. Without this offer, they would not have been able to move and Dee told me, “You know we got no savings, all our savings went to rent for this place at $205 a week.” Dee and Toby recognized how lucky they were to receive this financial aid because they felt they had burned all of their social bridges through their addictions. Like Biggie and Deirdre, Dee and Toby benefited from some managerial wiggle room when they were short on rent. Furthermore, Dee’s friend and ex-client, Guy paid their week’s rent on over a dozen occasions. Without this support from Guy and motel management, Dee and Toby would have been evicted from the motel long before they moved out by choice.

In August 2013, Jake, Reggie, and Sky moved out of the motel and into a 2-bedroom apartment in Pinewood for $675 a month. As a makeshift family unit, they planned on moving out for quite some time, especially since most of their friends had left. Reggie told me, “I had enough, fricken tired a livin’ there, tired a da people, the place is changed so much from what it used to be bro. From when it used to be Sam and all a us, it changed so much man.” Another impetus for the move was the fact that the owner wanted to charge them an extra $30 a month because Jake shared the room. Reggie complained, “The second you tell me you’re gonna jack my rent up, keep taking stuff away, nothing works, then you tell me you wanna jack my rent up, it’s the last straw.”

The three of them pulled together enough money to move through a variety of ways. Jake was indebted to Reggie and Sky and although they were angry at him for delaying his payments, when he finally paid up the money came in such a large sum that it could be put towards the move. Ironically, Sky’s loss of her job was also a blessing in disguise because her unemployment payments were initially delayed, so the lump sum
she then received helped to pay for the apartment. The move was a huge step up and in
the weeks leading up to the move, Sky giddily said, “I’m just so excited, to get the hell
outta here. We need stability is what it is. Especially tryin’ to get outta a motel, it’s hard
to save money.” This speaks to how punishing it was for residents to live week to week at
the motel while draining any sort of savings. Because of this, lump sum entitlements such
as the Earned Income Tax Credit, are lifesavers for people looking to improve their
circumstances, echoing Carol Stack’s argument that “random fluctuations in the meager
flow of available cash and goods tend to be of considerable importance to the poor.”
These random fluctuations are incredibly important when it comes to finding housing
because housing is a unique need. Urban planning specialist Chester Hartman states:

\[
\textit{One pays for housing well in advance. The entire month’s rent must be paid on}
\textit{the first day of any rental period. One pays for food only a few days before it is}
\textit{consumed, and one always has the option of delaying food expenditures until just}
\textit{prior to eating. Housing is a nondivisible and not easily adjustable expenditure.}\]

Despite their increased financial resources, Reggie, Jake, and Sky still needed
other moving support. None of them had a valid license or credit card, so they required
someone to rent and drive the moving van. That someone turned out to be me and Reggie
admitted that without me, he would have had nowhere else to turn. They also needed
bodies to move the large amount of possessions that they had accumulated in their room
and storage unit. Reggie recruited several individuals with motel connections after
bribing them with cash and marijuana. Without these social networks, it is likely that they
would not have been able to move.

Almost a year after they moved, Reggie, Sky, and Jake were still living in the
same apartment and turned it into a comfortable home. Reggie adopted a dog from a
family who used to live at the motel, and found a purpose in helping an older gentleman
who ran a store nearby. Sky found a job working at a local fast food restaurant and Jake got a job at a clothing store. When I visited them in spring 2014, Sky proudly showed me an impressive scrapbook that Reggie had given her for Valentine’s day which contained: pictures, cutouts from magazines, and other totems of his love for her. Fran reappeared out of the blue in the summer of 2014 and moved into this apartment. I was saddened to hear that Sky’s father passed away in the early summer of that year as well.

It is important to note that all of these instances involved couples, who were able to pull together resources through expanded social capital that single residents lacked, perhaps visible most clearly in the case of Biggie and Deirdre. Despite these success stories of Dee and Toby, Digital and Darryl, Reggie, Sky, and Jake, the majority of residents who left the motel continued their lives as vulnerable social refugees. Like the urban nomad culture, motel life was characterized by “mobility, alienation, poverty, and a unique set of survival strategies.” Residents migrated to the motel with histories of transience and vulnerability, and left rarely having improved their situations. This was due largely to the cycle of community, conflict, and fragility that existed at the motel. Although the motel was used by social services as an emergency shelter, it did nothing to prevent/fix the transient careers that many of their clients faced. The residents who arrived at the motel without the assistance of DSS or HATAS often turned to DSS when they were displaced because their financial resources and social capital had been drained.

If there is one thing that the findings of this study should make clear, it is that the story of the Boardwalk is a story of homelessness. It is a story of how people lose their homes, where they go to find shelter, and how they create identity and meaning in their lives through interactions with other homeless populations and middle class society.
Although the residents of the Boardwalk Motel represent a drop in the bucket of the overall homeless population in the United States, their stories offer an invaluable look into what it means to be homeless. In the next section, I will show how their experiences can translate into meaningful public policy that addresses the plight of the over 500,000 social refugees who struggle to survive each and every day.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Turning Problems into Policy}

From a policy standpoint, the first question to ask is, was using the Boardwalk as a housing solution for social refugees a good idea? The answer is a resounding no. As the findings of this study showed, the motel housed so many types of social refugees that it failed to serve as a stable settlement for any of them. By exploring the ways in which the motel failed, we can get an idea of how motels could care for vulnerable populations in ways that meet their needs without creating cycles of displacement. Failures of the motel settlement can be viewed in terms of factors universal to the Boardwalk, and factors specific to its populations.

The most obvious universal factor that affected the Boardwalk was the uninhabitable physical condition of the motel. Code violations existed long before I began my fieldwork and were constant sources of stress that endangered residents’ health and well-being. The other universal factor that impeded residents of the Boardwalk was the hostility from the local Dutchland community. Over time, the Boardwalk became synonymous with deviance to the point where motel residents were powerless to overcome the motel’s master status. It is easy to see why the Boardwalk Motel was so threatening to residents of Dutchland. In essence, the motel brought characteristics of the city; minorities, poverty, and residential instability, -- into the suburbs. Dutchland
residents moved to the suburbs precisely to escape these urban problems. Although motel residents largely kept to themselves as they interacted with the local sustainable habitat, they acted with the constant knowledge that their presence was undesired. As Nelson Mandela writes in his autobiography, “If wealth is a magnet, poverty is some kind of repellent.”

Aside from these universal factors that afflicted every resident of the motel, specific populations of social refugees experienced life differently because of their social positions. From a criminal justice standpoint, placing parolees and sex offenders at the motel did nothing to promote successful reentry. Conditions of parole prohibited parolees from interacting with anyone with criminal history. At the Boardwalk Motel, this comprised the majority of residents, so parolees risked violating their parole in their attempts to meet their resource deprivations. Parolees were also instructed to abstain from alcohol and drugs, which was difficult because drug use was a common coping mechanism and form of social currency at the Boardwalk. By the same token, those with drug addictions found it difficult to ignore the temptations around them. Likewise, parolees and sex offenders had to meet with parole officers and attend treatment locations that were several miles away. Meeting those requirements involved taking buses that were not always reliable and used valuable monetary resources. Because of this, the temptation to skip a meeting was always present and the immediate benefits of not attending, such as having money for food, outweighed the long-term costs. While such decisions may appear to gross errors in judgment, research finds that poverty and scarcity in the form of poverty actually reduces cognitive function, leading to choices that favor short-term benefits.
Finally, because of their stigma, sex offenders became targets of abuse from other motel residents. One day I sat outside with new resident Jonny, who told me that he was staying for a few days on his own volition because he was visiting the area and did not want to burden his relatives with his presence. He was unaware that sex offenders lived at the motel and when I mentioned this, he bolted upright in his chair, almost knocking his sunglasses off his face, and asked if I could point any out. I denied knowing any and he spat, “Fucking kiddy touchers. I can take people on parole, that’s fine, but I can’t handle fucking kiddy touchers.”

For populations placed at the Boardwalk by DSS, especially those with mental health issues and other disabilities, the motel was a dangerous environment. Some residents were unable to articulate when living conditions became hazardous and this was problematic because management did not proactively inspect rooms to make them inhabitable. Furthermore, for many residents with mental health issues, their social interactions quickly developed into conflict. The sad irony is that many of them were sent to the motel because their case workers worried that they would be unsafe in shelters. Those placed by agencies were not in control of their housing and therefore powerless to move when hostility or unsafe living conditions arose. As the calamity of code violations at the Boardwalk indicated, the agencies who placed individuals at the Boardwalk suffered from a lack of oversight. Residents who were not placed by DSS consistently told me, “They shouldn’t be here,” referring to those with mental health issues. It was recognized that there was too much danger and too little supervision at the motel to make it a safe environment for those unable to care for themselves.
Residents who stepped up or down to the Boardwalk to regain stability found that the stigma attached to the motel negatively affected their lives. What distinguished these residents was that they had the most to work with/ofer in terms of material resources and social capital. Over time, these resources were drained as long-term residents fought a losing battle against the motel’s living environment (Figure 23). Many of my colleagues pointed out that someone could rent a decent apartment for the $820 monthly rent that residents paid at the Boardwalk. This $820 a month did not guarantee heat, air conditioning, a fridge, kitchen, or even drinkable water. Offsetting these conditions exacted so much material costs to buy fans, space heaters, refrigerators and microwaves, and bottled water, that once residents settled at the motel they found it very hard to leave. They struggled to make monthly, even weekly rent payments, and because of this, putting down a security deposit and first month’s rent for an apartment was nearly impossible. The paying residents were also resentful towards those whose stay was paid for by DSS or HATAS. Roy had a hard time understanding why sex offenders were “rewarded” with free housing while he struggled to pay for his room.

*Micro-Level Policy Implications*

Given this knowledge, what sort of policy recommendations could be made regarding motels that house social refugees? Although the Boardwalk and Park Place were shut down, DSS continued to send individuals to other area motels. Research indicates that using motels to shelter social refugees is a widespread practice. States such as Vermont, Massachusetts, California, New Jersey, Missouri, Oregon, and the District of Columbia have placed or considered placing the homeless in motels. Massachusetts spent $48.1 million in 2013 to house nearly 2,000 families in motels.\(^{36}\) Portland, Oregon placed
families at motels for 198 nights in 2013, compared to 68 nights in 2012, an increase of 191%. \textsuperscript{37} Children are also affected by the use of motels and statistics show that from 2008-2009, 892 children lived in motels/hotels in Orange County, California.\textsuperscript{38}

If motels are going to be used as settlements, how should they be used? One idea would be to segregate different populations to different locations. While citizens might be concerned that clustering sex offenders in one location would lead to increased crime, there is little evidence that spatial clustering increases recidivism.\textsuperscript{39} On the contrary, clustering may actually make it easier for law enforcement to monitor sex offenders’ behavior. Significant problems could arise if a motel was dedicated to strictly housing those placed by DSS, especially individuals with mental health issues. What was impressive at the Boardwalk was how the diffusion of residents created an environment that kept some populations in check. Many residents attempted to help those with mental health issues by giving them food and clothing, helping them shower, and helping clean their rooms. While it is undeniable that a hierarchy existed at the motel, care, support, and community triumphed despite it. Therefore, motel-related policies should tap into the support structures created by residents and reinforce that culture to improve their lives.

At the motel level, this would involve a private/public partnership between the motel, the criminal justice system, and social services. All parties have an interest because motel owners want sources of income, and the justice system and social services are looking for housing options. Motels like the Boardwalk represent a captive audience of citizens with similar vulnerabilities and therefore, similar needs. Public policies should wrap these residents in support so that whenever possible, they can move to more stable living conditions and regain a foothold in society.
The first step would be to create a better connection between the motel and social services. This could be accomplished by placing social workers at the motel on a 24-hour basis. These social workers would serve as non-criminal justice authority figures, who could act as liaisons between residents and DSS. This would allow residents to have questions and concerns addressed immediately and save from traveling to or calling DSS. Social workers could also attempt to resolve disputes before police were called, and they could provide a watchful eye over vulnerable residents.

In addition to bringing social workers to the motel, a glut of other services should be brought to the motel on a regular basis. Residents at the Boardwalk lacked experience with many social institutions that allow people to live autonomously. Financial planning was almost non-existent at the motel and Sam told me how he wanted to set up a bank account for the first time in his life. Budget counseling would assist residents in rationing their funds, much of which arrived on the first of every month and led to spending binges that left residents scrambling at the end of the month. Residents could also benefit from life skills courses on how to cook and care for themselves. At the Boardwalk in particular, a shuttle service to and from the grocery store would have spared residents the danger of crossing Main Street, and one could imagine that having a dietician on such trips would be equally beneficial. Bringing other services to the motel, such as drug and alcohol counseling, psychological counseling to teach conflict resolution and resilience, and general health advice, would help address residents’ vulnerabilities while incurring little cost to residents themselves. Many residents wished to move but lacked the necessary funds and driver’s licenses to rent moving vans if they did not have vehicles. If social services worked with residents to find affordable housing, it would be ideal to
provide moving support as well, because it would be tragic if a resident could not leave simply because they lacked transportation.

There is precedent for this sort of policy that wraps vulnerable populations in support and care, instead of subjecting them to scrutiny and stigma. Project Homeless Connect brings homeless people to one location on a single day in order to “obtain as many services in one day as would otherwise take months.”\(^{40}\) This program was declared a national best practice model by the federal government’s Interagency Council on Homelessness and in San Francisco, fairs include services such as:

- dental care, eyeglasses, HIV testing, housing, food, hygiene products, medical care, mental health services, SSI benefits, legal advice, California identification cards, voice mail accounts, employment counseling/job placement, wheelchair repair, addiction services, and more.\(^{41}\)

Local governments that use motels to house the homeless should strive to bring residents to Project Homeless Connect events, or create something similar at the actual motel.\(^{42}\)

Another example of care occurred in the late 1980s, when a single room occupancy motel opened in Pittsburgh that was specifically designed in partnership with social services “to provide safe, affordable, and supportive housing” to its residents.\(^{43}\) In stark contrast to the Boardwalk, this location had a strong presence of social workers and community partners who supported residents.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, poor living conditions were viewed as “pathological” and a threat to social stability, so efforts were made to fix problems whenever they arose.\(^{45}\) Consider this mindset versus that of the Boardwalk and another clear policy recommendation emerges. If a motel is supported by government funding, such as the Boardwalk, some of that funding should go directly towards making the motel a safe living environment. This funding should bypass the owner and involve a direct contract between the government and building repair companies. This would avoid
the code issues that plagued the Boardwalk, ensure that living conditions did not disrupt lives, and would also help to combat the stigma from surrounding communities.

Before it was closed down, the Boardwalk Motel represented a golden opportunity to change how vulnerable populations were served. The Boardwalk was a for-profit halfway house/shelter with none of the structure and support provided from a non-profit organization. Despite the Boardwalk’s closure, the need for locations like it persists. With this need comes the opportunity to optimize such locations to empower and support the social refugees who live there. These policy recommendations that I have outlined are important steps to operating shelters that support those in need.

*Macro-Level Policy Implications*

The Boardwalk Motel was born out of the necessity to house those who would otherwise be homeless. On a societal level, our duty is to correct policies that create homelessness, while enacting policies that provide residential stability. I described motel residents as suffering from fragility, or a lack of financial and social support that left them vulnerable to unintended or self-inflicted disruptions to short and long-term goals. This fragility was the root of homelessness for the social refugees who fled to the Boardwalk. Effective macro-level policy must then address the deterioration of financial and social resources that lead to homelessness.

One major institution that contributes to homelessness in the United States is the criminal justice system. Part of the need for the Boardwalk was created by sex offender residence restrictions that barred many registered sex offenders from other housing options. Study after study has determined that these policies are ineffective at preventing sex crimes. The unintended consequence of such legislation is that residence restrictions
limit housing options for registered sex offenders and create residential instability.\textsuperscript{47}

Darryl voiced this opinion when he told me:

\textit{Sex offender registry laws are ineffective, stupid, all the professionals, all the experts, all say that all it does is disenfranchise people, it does nothing to protect society. Ninety-six percent of all sexual offenders are known to their victims prior to any sexual offense. The four percent that aren’t known, are never gonna be known prior to any sexual offense because they’re chosen at random. They few ones that are stalkers, are so minority wise that you, even if you’re on a registry, it’s not gonna change anything. So the registry is ineffective, it does nothing but waste money and disenfranchise.}

In light of these findings, jurisdictions should immediately rescind laws that restrict housing options for sex offenders and place a moratorium on passing such policies.\textsuperscript{48}

Research indicates that the connection between homelessness and incarceration is a two-way street. Those who are incarcerated have higher histories of previous homelessness than the general population, and a significant portion of the homeless have histories of incarceration.\textsuperscript{49} Remember that while residents only left the motel because of increased financial and social support, many reentering ex-offenders suffer from a lack of these specific resources. In fact, it could be said that while incarceration does not prevent crime, its collateral consequences include financial and social disruption.\textsuperscript{40} It is estimated that incarceration reduces former male inmates’ earnings by 40%.\textsuperscript{51}

Therefore, several courses of action need to be taken. In an era of budgets, there is an increased focus on the costs and benefits of punitive sanctions. From 1998 to 2009, state correctional budgets increased from $12 billion to more than $50 billion per year with little utilitarian benefit to show for it.\textsuperscript{52} Incarceration should be an option of last resort because it is a costly endeavor that strips inmates of social networks and the ability to work. Whenever possible, those sanctioned by the criminal justice system should remain in their communities so they can continue to work and be a part of social
networks. If an individual must be incarcerated, there needs to be increased attention on reentry planning so that ex-offenders are released to stable living situations that address their vulnerabilities instead of exacerbating them. Furthermore, we must continue to encourage employers to provide jobs to ex-offenders so that they can become financially independent and avoid residential displacement.

Many of the homeless residents of the Boardwalk were military veterans.\(^{53}\) It was estimated that on a single night in January 2013, there were 57,849 homeless veterans in the United States, representing 12% of the homeless population.\(^{54}\) The Veteran’s Administration has committed to ending veteran homelessness by 2015, but this is a tall order considering the many factors that contribute to veteran homelessness. While the issue of how to support veterans is well outside the scope of this project, hiring able-bodied veterans of all ages must be encouraged if they are to build financial and social nest eggs.\(^{55}\) For those veterans who lack stable housing, programs such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program that provides housing vouchers to veterans, must continue to be implemented and refined.\(^{56}\) Veterans must also be given the social support and mental health treatment that they require to adjust to civilian lives.

The aforementioned policy recommendations focus on empowering individuals to improve their financial stability so that they may find affordable housing and insulate themselves against life events that drain their financial resources. This can be achieved by increasing streams of income and decreasing burdens on savings. One way to achieve this goal would be a substantial increase in the minimum wage. It was estimated that in order to rent a 2-bedroom apartment in Riverfort County, a person must earn $13.06 an hour, while the minimum wage of New York was less than $9 an hour.\(^{57}\) There also needs to
be a substantial increase in the availability of affordable housing. In 2000, Riverfort County estimated that among renters making less than $10,000 a year, 81% directed more than the HUD-recommended ratio of 35% of their income towards housing. This is precisely what kept many motel residents from leaving the Boardwalk and is perhaps the single biggest determinant of fragility because any destabilizing event such as the loss of work or health related crisis, could lead to displacement. On a related note, extending affordable health care to vulnerable populations must be a priority if we intend to stem the creation of social refugees.

There does remain the question of how to serve and empower homeless populations with disabilities that render them unable to work and/or live autonomously. Without strong social networks, these individuals will likely rely on public assistance throughout their lives. Therefore, when it comes to housing and caring for these individuals, we must ask ourselves, what are the minimum standards of living that all citizens deserve? The living conditions of the Boardwalk Motel were morally offensive to say the least, but more disconcerting was the fact that they were allowed to get to that point. County government was responsible for inspections, but local government was responsible for code enforcement, and both entities failed to communicate and act in ways that protected the most vulnerable of citizens. There needs to be some sort of discussion at all levels of government about what this country is willing to accept in terms of housing standards and how building codes can be more effectively enforced.

When one considers the policy recommendations that I have laid out, it should be clear that addressing homelessness is a complex task requiring action on many fronts. However, it does not mean that inaction is acceptable simply due to the scope of the
problem. Changes in important social institutions such as criminal justice, veteran’s affairs, and labor can significantly improve the lives of many. Furthermore, the complexity of the problem presents unique opportunities for innovative programs that think outside the box to address the web of problems that vulnerable populations face. One example is Health Leads, which envisions a health care model “that addresses all patients’ basic resource needs as a standard part of quality care.” In Health Leads clinics, doctors assess the basic needs of their patients, such as access to heat and food, and then “prescribe food, heat, and other basic resources their patients need to be healthy, alongside prescriptions for medication.” Patients then work with college-student advocates who connect them with community resources that address their needs.

Considering the complexities of homelessness creates policies like the one found in the state of Utah. In eight years, Utah reduced its rate of chronic homelessness by 74% through a program that simply gave apartments to the homeless without stipulations. The impetus behind it was research that concluded that the annual emergency room and jail costs for an average homeless person was $16,670, compared to the $11,000 required to house them and pair them with a social worker. Other positive programs include: the Downtown Street Team in Daytona Beach which hires the homeless to clean up the downtown area while giving them a place to stay at the Salvation Army, A Key Not a Card in Portland which provides immediate permanent housing so the homeless can stabilize their lives, and 1811 Eastlake Project in Seattle where homeless addicts are housed while receiving 24/7 support. These programs have achieved tangible results. A Key Not a Card housed 936 people from 2005 through 2009, and in the first year of the
1811 East Lake Project, the county was saved $2.5 million, compared to the program’s cost of $1.1 million, and 66% of residents remained housed after one year.65

Ethnography’s Role

This study is the result of over a year of fieldwork that involved intense observation and close relationships with participants. Therefore, it is important to consider how this endeavor and ethnography in general, contribute to our understanding of the world that we share. Merriam-Webster defines the term “empirical” as, “originating in or based on observation or experience.” By relying upon the observation of human experience, ethnography creates knowledge in ways that other methodologies cannot.

The driving purpose behind this study was my desire to understand what life was really like at the Boardwalk Motel. As the online comments from Dutchland residents demonstrated, observation that occurred while driving or walking down Main Street was not sufficient to paint the full picture of the Boardwalk experience. The story of the Boardwalk could only be told by those living there. Ethnography’s power rests in its ability to capture the voices of underground populations in order to dissolve stereotypes and humanize those labeled as less than human. Residents of the motel were fueled to participate in the study because they had a burning desire to retain control over their humanity. When Dee and I talked about the reputation of the motel she said, “Slowly but surely we're getting the crackheads and prostitutes out of here. Hi, we're real people living here. That's why we put our plants outside, to show that real people live here.”

In Chapter 3 of this study, I presented the voices of these real people in order to examine the complexity of life events that led them to the Boardwalk. These life histories
would have not been captured through surveys or any other type of data collection. The examination of stigma in Chapter 4 relied on examining presentations of self and the role they played in creating identity. Ethnography allows researchers to examine the symbolic creation of meaning. As sociologist Jamie Fader writes, “The meaning that individuals construct helps us understand why they make the choices they do and why they behave in certain ways and not others.”

In Chapter 5, I used ethnography to uncover the meaning behind violence and disagreement at the motel, and showed how resident choices and behavior revolved around a subculture of community, conflict, and fragility. Finally, in Chapter 6, I confronted Dutchland residents’ concerns over shared social space by chronicling how motel residents interacted with the surrounding community.

By observing people and behavior over time, I was able to examine the Boardwalk Motel not at a cross-sectional moment in time, but instead over what turned out to be the tail end of its lifespan. Therefore, this study chronicled not only the lives of motel residents, but the culmination of social forces that had impacted them over time and which eventually led to their displacement. This was a watershed moment in the lives of the Boardwalk’s residents and the Dutchland community. Because the closing occurred at the end of my research, this study captured a story that otherwise may not have been told. In that respect, this study is not just research. It is history.

In his classic book, *A People’s History of the United States*, Howard Zinn writes:

*If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win.*

While I hoped to conduct a study that would ultimately help the lives of the Boardwalk’s residents, the motel’s closing made that impossible. However, it cannot be denied that
motel residents did indeed show brilliant flashes of resistance to stigma, and the ability to join together and care for one another. Because residents had the courage to share those flashes with me and the ultimately the world, they can claim a victory. They can claim a victory because their voices, as they should, now lay claim to their existence as human beings. Ethnography can claim victory because it captures the lived experience of people and preserves their memories as historical record of their universal right to exist. As Zinn reminds us, “History which keeps alive the memory of people's resistance suggests new definitions of power.” In consideration of this power, I will close by reflecting on the possibilities that arise through new definitions of the past.

A Call for a Fresh Perspective

When President Barack Obama was elected to a second term in November 2012, I asked residents what they thought about this development. After all, President Obama marched to victory on the back of “hope” and “yes we can.” I was saddened, but not surprised to hear residents tell me that “it doesn’t matter” and that “nothing is going to change for people like us.” These beliefs were symbolic of a larger society pandemic that can be conceptualized as widespread disenchantment with the American Dream.

Those feelings of motel residents are testament to the significant barriers to action in their defense. Many powerful voices continue to rally against the most vulnerable citizens of this country. Parts of the political machine have been hijacked into a destructive force, as evidenced by recent cuts to food stamps and the behavior of politicians such as Democratic State Representative Tom Brower of Hawaii, who walked the streets in an Armani Exchange hat while smashing the shopping carts of the homeless with a sledgehammer in an effort to “clean up the streets.” Political action against the
homeless has included: instructing the homeless to relocate or be arrested, granting police 
the power to arrest those sleeping in public and storing personal property in public, and 
banning the feeding of the homeless in local parks. Business owners have taken steps 
such as putting bleach on food in dumpsters and designing gutters to drip onto the street 
so the homeless cannot take shelter. Such actions “ensure that homeless populations are 
perpetually in the wrong place, that they are perpetually and unavoidably occupying 
space that has been legally defined as outside their rights and control.” Therefore, 
perhaps the most pressing need is to change the public perception of homelessness. While 
policies must be compartmentalized to different institutions, the cultural zeitgeist of 
stigmatizing social refugees amounts to institutionalized violence or what Jonathan Kozol 
calls “state terrorism as social welfare policy” that requires nationwide attention.

This zeitgeist also suggests that a far more radical social change that attends to the 
foundation of American and the ways in which inequality is created through capitalism 
and consumerism is required. The efforts of the Dutchland community to sanitize its 
social space of the Boardwalk and its residents are clear evidence that the melting pot of 
America is indeed a myth. English vagrancy laws have evolved into U.S. ordinances 
that “are a reflection of society’s perception of a continuing need to control some of its 
‘suspicious’ or ‘undesirable’ members.” That these labels have been affixed to those on 
the economic and social margins is an artifact of a capitalist society that equates explicit 
material consumption and buying power with human worth and dignity. Sociologist Jeff 
Ferrell describes this cultural process as “the regulation of public interaction, the 
restoration of exclusionary community, the reencoding of cultural space along the lines of 
order and privilege.”
The warning signs have existed for decades. In 1890, journalist Jacob Riis asked, “When another generation shall have doubled the census of our city, and to that vast army of workers, held captive by poverty, the very name of home shall be as a bitter mockery, what will the harvest be?” Over a century later, Sociologist Joel Blau wrote that homelessness is “one of the clearest examples of the new willingness to write off the poor.” He further questioned the organization of the United States economy, saying:

Conservatives argue that the United States “won” the Cold War; it triumphed over communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But the economy that won this victory cannot house its own people and condemns a significant percentage of the population to a life of poverty and struggle. If this is victory, it is a hollow victory indeed.

Marginalization will continue as long as stark class inequality exists and as long as capitalism creates commodity from basic human needs that some would consider rights. It will continue as long as the economically and politically wealthy continue to build up symbolic and real walls in social space. The borders of shared social space will continue to be drawn by those with the economic clout to ensure that their notions “quality of life,” “civility,” and “order” are not disrupted by the presence of those who make them uncomfortable, echoing the words of philosopher Friedrich Engels who declared, “The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of product confines our workers night after night are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere.”

Sanitization will continue until everyday efforts are made to take back public space in the name of outsiders, efforts like pouring concrete over “anti-homeless spikes” outside a business in London and challenging the criminalization of sidewalk use via sit-ins. There is a call for those who are inclined to act, and that call is to resist the
corporate culture of control, whereby “the destruction of order and privilege, the cracking open of closed spaces, results not in mean-spirited recrimination, not in the revenge of the oppressed – but in the festival of the oppressed.”

These changes that I have proposed regarding homelessness and social refugees may seem too daunting, as if the cultural infrastructure is too sound to dismantle and repair. However, every action must begin with an idea, so I propose that it is a human right to sit equally in the horizontal and vertical dimensions of social space. When I first introduced the social refugee, I stated that motel residents were quite different from those crossing international borders due to crisis in their homelands. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and The National Coalition for the Homeless, might disagree. In 2009, these organizations published a report arguing that criminalization of the homeless in the U.S. violated international human rights law, claiming that the “human rights framework can serve as a useful tool in the fight against criminalization as it recognizes a full range of rights that protect the fundamental human dignity of people experiencing homelessness.” After spending time in welfare motel motels, writer Jonathan Kozol argues that “shelter is not a gift; it is among the first of all rights civilized societies owe to their citizens.” Sociologist Joel Blau writes:

Since homelessness cannot be solved alone, it would be short-sighted to put forth single-issue proposals on housing without tying them, for example, to campaigns for higher wages and national health care, all united through the theme of common economic – read human – rights. Then, and only then, will it be possible to make some real progress.

If we view social refugees as a humanitarian issue, then policy ceases to be Democratic or Republican, conservative or liberal. Instead, it is transformed into the defense of human rights. Social policies need to be considered in terms of the ontological
harm they either cause or prevent to the basic rights of human citizens. Within this framework, we can identify the most fundamental of these rights as the right to a home.

As the German/Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt argues in her 1958 book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

*The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social structure into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world.*[^87]
Appendix A: Reflections on Ethnography

The preceding analysis focused its ethnographic lens on motel residents who organized themselves in the context of social forces that made their lives incredibly unstable. Like many ethnographers, I entered this setting from a position of considerable power. Furthermore, this study was not just any research, but my dissertation. That is symbolic because it represents the beginning of a career path that is criticized as being situated in an “ivory tower.” In this autoethnography, I will draw on my experience in the field and address the power and status issues between researchers and subjects. I hope that this product will enhance the discourse on cultural processes and examining them through participant observation research.

Several instances that made it clear that motel residents and I shared very different social positions. Consider the fact that I chose to wear a “field outfit” of a plain white t-shirt and shorts that to me, were damaged enough to forgo wearing in my usual daily activities. This decision highlights the differences in middle class resources vs. refugee fragility, as well as the preconceptions about the setting that were almost impossible for me to completely ignore. This is a clear example of how my preconceptions about the motel setting influenced my behavior.

Most of these preconceptions were based around concerns for my personal and material safety. Given some of the Boardwalk’s history that I chronicled in Chapter 2 (and some of the incidents analyzed throughout this dissertation) these concerns were not completely unjustified. I must acknowledge that my behavior was similar to that of the worried residents of Dutchland who I explored in Chapter 6, although to a lesser extent. However, unlike the residents of Dutchland, I attempted to push these judgments aside.
and allow those in the setting to speak for themselves. To their credit, residents of the motel were quick to point out when they felt my behavior was based on stereotypes instead of evidence. I confessed to Reggie that I was apprehensive initially about leaving my car in the parking lot and bringing a laptop to my room. He chastised me and shook his head, saying, “You’re stereotyping.” In moments like these, I felt like a scolded child because Reggie was indeed correct.

These “stereotypes” that I brought to the field reflect the assumptions of particular criminological theories which imply that physical/social disorder leads to crime because of lack of social control. However, as the analysis in Chapter 5 and 6 indicates, the results of this study suggest that these theoretical frameworks may be quite flawed when used to describe social settings. Why might they be flawed? Because these theories rely on visual cues to make inferences about behavior that is then labeled in ways that create imbalances in social status. These theories are largely based on the assumptions that physical disorder leads to criminal behavior because disorder is symbolic of a lack of social control, and that poverty and residential mobility create a similar lack of social control that invites criminal behavior.¹

I believe that “disorder” and “organization” may be incorrect in describing social settings if the goal is to make inferences about the behavior of people living there. The Boardwalk Motel clearly suffered from a lack of amenities and in many cases, structural integrity. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the motel community was impoverished and highly transient. However, I would not use the terms “disorder” or “disorganization” to refer to the setting because these terms frame what the researcher brings to the study, to the detriment of participant social organization. Nor would I want to imply that my
operationalization of these terms could speak to the experiences of those at the
Boardwalk. The physical conditions of the motel did have a significant impact on resident
behavior. However, I argue that physical conditions were important not because they led
to a breakdown of informal social control, but because the conditions affected the ability
residents’ health, ability to leave the motel, and their sense of self. By inductively
approaching the Boardwalk Motel, this study explores ecological conditions of the social
setting, but allows the subsequent behavioral effects to emerge through observations of
residents, instead of testing for anticipated outcomes.

The behavior that I observed revealed that informal social control was not absent
at the Boardwalk. Rather, informal social controls, social norms, social capital, and
collective efficacy were instrumental in day to day life. Chapter 5 articulated a wealth of
examples of how residents suppressed harmful behavior, constructed rules of social
interaction, shared resources to improve each other’s lives, and worked together in
solidarity to create a more hospitable living environment than what they would have
faced had they lived at the Boardwalk in complete social isolation. The analysis also
demonstrated how crime was either drug-related, or the response to violations of social
norms and social organization.

Criminologists Charis Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer write that neighborhood
cultures are rarely examined by social disorganization researchers. In light of my
ethnography and the landmark works before it, the lack of examination appears to be a
fundamental flaw in research of the ecology of social settings. Neighborhood cultures, or
the organization of individuals, reflect the ways in which people both experience and
shape their social space. I would argue that “social disorganization” is unnecessarily
prohibitive to understanding the true dynamics of a social setting as experienced by the setting’s members.

Scholars should seriously consider the possibility that the nomenclature of social disorganization closes the door on more nuanced analysis of social settings. Therefore, I advocate that social-spatial approaches to studying behavior should return to studying phenomena without a framework that constrains its interpretation. While critics might argue that this inductive approach sacrifices generalizability, I think the emphasis on generalizability and macro-level explanations of behavior is precisely why the social disorganization literature lacks important attention to cultural dynamics. Perhaps the attempts to continually disaggregate, narrow, and refine the variables found in social disorganization theory are evidence that there is a need to return to the streets and allow concepts emerge from the ground up, before we address their predictive ability. The best continued use of the disorganization framework may be to examine when, how, and why, its tenets fail to predict behavior and what this tell us about social processes and social ecology.

This discussion is in no way intended to suggest that inductive exploration in the form of participant observation is a flawless exercise in the generation of knowledge. To that effect, I would now like to return to my reflections on ethnography and the street level relationships between the researcher and participants that must be considered when carrying out and consuming ethnographic research.

When I decided to not become a full-time resident of the motel, this decision had profound implications for my fieldwork and findings. There were several instances when important events (such as Reg’s arrest and Roy’s eviction) transpired without my
presence. Had I been there to observe them, my data on these moments would have been more situated in the event itself, rather than residents’ recollection of how things unfolded. These recollections are important and useful, but my data would have been richer had I been able to observe the events for myself. Looking back, I do wish that I had spent more time in the field, because I kicked myself mentally every time I was not present for an event that appeared important.

The coming and going from the motel may also have undermined my relationships with some residents. After a stretch of time near the end of the semester, when I was particularly transient due to holiday travel, Reggie commented, “You’re never here!” I did not see any evidence that this aspect of my fieldwork created substantial rifts between me and residents. However, had I toughed it out by becoming a full-time resident, this closeness and solidarity to other residents would have led to a greater depth of my research into their lives and perhaps they would have opened up in ways not captured in this study.

This conscious choice on my part was an overt declaration of where my priorities lay throughout the study, and in hindsight, I wish that I had made a better attempt to suffer through the conditions that my participants endured every day. My experience should demonstrate that what I called “you gotta do you” does not apply only to those on the margins, and that the balance between personal comfort and care for others must be balanced by all.

It is also worth considering how the social status differences between me and my participants may have affected our relationships and this study. Whenever I came and went to the motel, it drove home the fact that I had somewhere to go to and that I viewed
the motel as somewhere to go from. From a migratory perspective, it underscored the
social values that I imposed on the motel as a setting. While residents told me that they
respected my choices (see Reg’s comment in Chapter one), I worried that my behavior
continually reminded residents of what they did not have or where they had been, and I
hope that this was not psychologically harmful to them.

The difference in social positions and their associated resources was emphasized
whenever residents requested loans from me. Sky called me the “richest” person she and
Reggie knew because I owned a vehicle. My social position represented a stability that
was severely lacking in the lives of motel residents and while they used each other for
loans, my stability represented dependability and hope when all else seemed lost. Given
the results of this dissertation, it should come as no surprise that residents were often in
need of financial resources and this aspect of fieldwork deserves further exploration.

Whenever residents asked for loans, I was forced to consider several issues. First,
what did it mean when residents asked for loans? Residents approached me for loans
when they felt they had no other options, and they were often apologetic in their requests.
Reggie often prompted a request with, “Brother, I hate to ask you.” This signified that
they were aware of the different social planes that we lived on, and conscious of the
connections we had made. While they needed my help, they did not want me to feel that
they simply viewed me as a source of money. This echoed my own concerns that
residents would feel that they were simply sources of data. We all had to balance this
issue of how this research benefited our positions as it progressed.

Requests for loans often came with justifications and residents were very clear
about what the money would be used for. This suggested that they feared I might reject
their loan request without this justification. Public discourse is rife with stereotypes and myths about how the poor spend their money and residents sought to confront these concerns.

When residents approached me for loans, those acts spoke to our different social positions. Therefore, I had to consider the effect of my response. Residents often expected this on the spot, probably because they had encountered many past situations where they were told, “I’ll get back to you” and were then ignored. I never rejected a loan request during my fieldwork. This partly due to the fact that requests were never made for amounts larger than $40. However, rejecting loans in principle would have created an even starker contrast in social position and called into question the power dynamics of the study. By studying residents’ lives, I was asking them to open themselves up to scrutiny and place their stories in my hands. This level of trust and vulnerability cannot be given monetary value, but it certainly helped me achieve my research goal. In that respect, giving loans was my way of helping residents achieve some of their goals as well.

Therefore, I never rejected loan requests and I did not hound residents about paying them back. My intention from the outset was to not offer a second loan until the first was paid back, but this issue never arose. Residents always paid me back, despite my repeated vocalization that it was unnecessary. I did not want residents to view me as some sort of loan-shark, so I told residents not to “worry about it” when they referenced their efforts to pay me back. This was an effort on my part to decrease social distance and treat our relationships as more communal than transactional.4

Despite these efforts, my membership role created considerable social distance between me and motel residents. This distance was enhanced by the fact that I do not
consider myself an active smoker or user of drugs other than alcohol. However, there were times when I engaged in particular behaviors because they made me feel closer to residents in that particular moment. These instances of solidarity were enjoyable for me because I felt that I was embracing the culture of the motel, instead of simply observing it. In these seductive moments, the pleasure that I gained from celebrating daily life allowed me to see how particular activities created the illusion of care-free living. I would like to explore these moments in greater detail.

I am not a habitual smoker of marijuana and the last time I actually inhaled a cannabis product before going to the motel was as a junior in college in 2004. Marijuana use was common at the motel and in my early days of seeking acceptance, I declined it whenever it was offered. However, when Anthony arrived in June, I allowed myself to be seduced by the experience of the moment.⁵

It was a late afternoon in June and I was hanging out with Reggie, Mike, and Jake. We sat at the bottom of the middle landing because it offered shade while allowing us to enjoy the fresh air. Anthony was looking to establish a customer base for his marijuana dealing, so he offered to let us all smoke for free. A turquoise pipe was passed around and I declined it on the first go-around. But after watching other residents take hits while we laughed and joked, I had an “oh, what the hell” moment where I reached out and asked for the pipe on the next round.

I knew that this action would generate buzz among residents and break some of the residual ice around my role as a researcher and possible police informant. It of course did, as Reggie put his fist to his mouth and yelled, “Oh!” Jake and Anthony then commented that I surely was not a cop and Reggie cracked a joke about “corrupting”
me.” Although this action helped allay the fears of residents as intended, I also participated because the community activity between us was enticing and enjoyable. Sharing in this behavior during that moment enhanced my appreciation of the solidarity created by motel residents as they coped with their living situation. I smoked marijuana on only a handful of other occasions when I was similarly seduced, but I largely avoided smoking again simply because I did not enjoy the smell.

Likewise, I do not consider smoking to be part of my public identity, but because cigarettes were an integral part of community at the Boardwalk, I smoked a fair share of them during my fieldwork. On these occasions, the act of smoking again enhanced my feelings of solidarity and community in the moment. Most of the time, I did not inhale the smoke deeply, but took light drags and blew the smoke out quickly. If they picked up on this behavior, residents never mentioned it and I did not get the sense that it affected our relationships in a negative way.

Motel residents were similar to Spradley’s urban nomads in their view of alcohol as a “symbol of social solidarity and friendship and where group drinking and collective drunkenness is an acceptable aspect of the culture.” While many of them drank to the point of drunkenness, I often stopped imbibing when I felt a buzz. In these instances, my enjoyment of the moment was tempered by my dread of a hangover. That is not to say that I never got drunk with motel residents, but I viewed alcohol as a social activity that did not require getting drunk. I discuss alcohol as a coping mechanism in Chapter 4, and perhaps if I had been a full-time resident, drinking to get drunk would have been a more significant part of my experience. On occasions, when I happened to be leaving the field
later that day, residents actively monitored the amount that I drank and Reggie told me several times that my career was not worth “fucking up” by driving drunk.

If anything, sharing in activities with motel residents decreased the social distance between us. Accepting and receiving gifts also decreased social distance and when residents gave me gifts, it allowed them to contribute meaningfully to my life. This shattered the myth that the only benefit of our relationships was giving residents the chance to tell their stories. Gifts from residents came in many forms and ranged from cigarettes and beer on a daily basis, to prepared food during cookouts, and a t-shirt for Christmas. I graciously accepted gifts because their exchange symbolized that residents and I were engaged in relationships that went beyond the observation of their behavior for research purposes. Gift giving represented the mutual respect between me and the motel residents that allowed this study to flourish.  

While I hoped that my work would help improve residents’ lives in the future, the closing of the motel popped dashed those dreams. However, giving loans, offering other resources that I had at my disposal, accepting gifts, and partaking in community activities was a tangible way for me to not only assist residents, but to show them that I was vested in their lives and valued my relationships with them.

The phrase “vested in their lives” may raise some eyebrows, but there is almost no other way to put it. When a study is conducted at ground level using the voices of others, a level of trust and respect needs to be established in order for those voices to come through. This is rarely accomplished without a researcher becoming vested in the lives of participants.
Critiques of ethnography are based on the assumption that becoming involved with subjects means the researcher not only influences outcomes in significant ways, but loses the ability to present findings honestly. I would like to address these two concerns. There is no doubt that my actions had effects on the lives of my subjects. Residents were psychologically boosted by being able to call me a friend. When I visited Reggie and Sky in the summer of 2014 for Jake’s birthday, Reggie made it a point to tell others that I was going to be a professor and that he had “important friends.” The resources that I shared also had significant impacts on residents. Reggie, Jake, and Sky may not have been able to move without my help, and I do wonder what could have happened to Sam and Larry had I not given them loans.

That said, my involvement in the lives of residents did not do much to change their fragility overall. My presence could do nothing to help registered sex offenders overcome their labels that hindered them from finding jobs and housing. My resources could not help me get back in contact with residents who disappeared without a trace. My influence could not get Jake and Sky better paying jobs, or improve the safety of their new neighborhood. When Love and her son Ben were evicted from the motel, all I could do was drive them to DSS and give their cat a safe home. When the motel was shut down and residents scattered into the cold, I was powerless to change anything about their situation. This evidence demonstrates that those who believe that ethnographers can significantly affect their participants during their fieldwork do not fully understand the strength of the social forces that affect those on the margins of society.

The findings of this study are three dimensional because people are three dimensional. While I play close attention to the ways in which social forces impact the
lives of residents, I give equal attention to the ways that residents behaved. Residents surprised me with their care, humor, and insights, but they also acted in ways that shocked me, given my background and social position. All of those behaviors are presented here and while I make an effort to analyze and explain behavior in the context of cultural processes, it does not change the fact that the behavior occurred. Readers are free to make judgments about the residents of the Boardwalk Motel, but they should be aware that residents are presented in a comprehensive and unbiased manner.

These relationships between researcher and participant are important to consider because of what an ethnographer brings to a study. Sociologist David Wagner writes:

The ethnographer’s authority is almost scary. He or she always translates the lives of others from a vast number of spoken words and visual cues into an organization reality to be presented to others who have no personal experience of the subjects.\(^8\)

It would be disingenuous to imply that I was able to ignore the issues of differential resources and social position that arose throughout my fieldwork. I hope that this autoethnography has demonstrated how I confronted the ethnographer’s position in ways that respected my subjects, their role in the research process, and the findings of this dissertation.
Appendix B: Figures and Tables

Figure 1

The Boardwalk Motel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nolan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Veteran who drank often and carried a knife. Elizabeth told me he was taken to the hospital and died in winter 2013</td>
<td>Revolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Veteran who was confined to a wheelchair</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Placed by DSS and sold/used pills</td>
<td>Revolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vito</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, in a wheelchair because of a spider bite that damaged his nerves</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slash</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>On parole, lived with Vito</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Level 1 sex offender not on parole, Sky's partner and my gatekeeper</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reggie's partner, worked at KFC with Jake</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Friend of Sky's, history of attempted suicide</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Friends with Reggie and Sky, intense transient history</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Guatemalan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Worked at a local car dealership and sent money home</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, veteran and a chain smoker</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patch</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>early 60s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, on parole</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Deirdre's partner, smoked marijuana, received disability</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53?</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Biggie's partner, received retirement</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Recovering addict with many tattoos who worked construction</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Knew Reg and Sky, placed candles and plants in her windows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Natalie's partner, did maintenance and drove a cab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rudy's partner, worked the desk at one time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kelly's partner, worked maintenance at one time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Registered nurse, marijuana user</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Elisha's partner, received worker's comp from a leg injury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Avery's partner, became friendly with Deirdre and Biggie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Friends with Larry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusty</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Quite religious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Partner of Justin, arrested for stealing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nora's partner, drug user</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Placed by DSS with substantial mental health issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, wore bracelets to promote condom use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Anne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Spike's partner, avid fan of soda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lived with his diabetic wife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ex-stripper/escort, recovering addict, and Toby's partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dee's partner, recovering addict, had a young estranged daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasper</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Registered sex offender on parole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Was missing toes, offered to pay bills by phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

291
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Parole Status</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Moved in from his car and became a manager, sports fan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonny</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Parole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tat</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Parolee and registered sex offender who was quite upfront about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Placed by his father who was a mailman, inhaled aerosol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Older veteran who valued employment, recovering addict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Darryl's partner, wanted to open a restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Unemployed drug seller and marijuana user. Very friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinque</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Parolee and registered sex offender, employed with Waste Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Veteran on parole, also a registered sex offender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonny</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Veteran with extreme animosity towards sex offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, came from a shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darryl</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>RSO on parole, Digital's partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lived with a small cat named Missy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Love's Son, returned from jail for selling marijuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Ben's partner, lost her DSS apartment when Ben went to jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, marijuana seller and user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>On parole, tried to find a job at KFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Known as &quot;Mr. Clean&quot; because of his appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Rumored to have been removed because of a mental breakdown, checked in and posted pictures of the motel on Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>mid 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Arrived with Trim, eventually moved to the Park Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noonan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Parolee and union worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenny</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Lived with his partner and dog. Worked driving trucks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Registered sex offender on parole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Registered sex offender on parole, veteran and nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Veteran in a wheelchair who became friends with Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clive</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Elisha's brother, moved in with his parents, on probation for drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>RSO on parole, had work history as an electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gene</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Placed by DSS, arrived on a bike which he traded to Shawn for a microwave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 60s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Afternoon and evening manager, wore a wig and lived in a house next to the Park Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>late 40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Elizabeth’s daughter, Mike’s partner, battled drug addiction, desk worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Park Place resident who was friends with Reggie, Sky, and Jake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramòn</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Used to live in 5, worked at KFC, friends with Reggie, Sky, and Jake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Sam’s partner, worked at a girl’s residential facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Term Length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petey</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Revolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Long-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>early 50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2

Arthur Heineman’s Milestone Mo-tel

Figure 3

Aerial view of the Boardwalk Motel and Main Street
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City of Riverfort</th>
<th>Town of Dutchland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>95,856</td>
<td>81,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Ownership Rate (2006-2010)</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income (2006-2010)</td>
<td>$39,158</td>
<td>$68,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Poverty Line (2006-2010)</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census
Figure 4

Postcard of the Boardwalk Motel (date unknown)
Figure 5

The sustainable habitat
Key to Figure 5

A. Boardwalk Motel
B. Save More Inn
C. Church Food Pantry
D. Trailer Park
E. Park Place Motel
F. Paulson Motel
G. Home Cooking Buffet Restaurant
H. Sushi/Hibachi Restaurant
I. Chinese Buffet
J. Local Pizza Chain
K. Laundry Mat
L. Dollar Store
M. Tobacco Shop
N. Chinese Take Out
O. Big Sales
P. Giant Foods Supermarket
Q. CVS
R. Acme Drug Store
S. DVD/Movie Trade In Store
T. McDonald’s
U. Getty Gas
V. SSK Discount Department Store
W. Indian Restaurant
X. Japanese Restaurant
Figure 6

Aerial photo of the Boardwalk Motel property
Figure 7

Building design of the Boardwalk Motel

Source: Town of Dutchland Building Department
Figure 8
The shopping cart graveyard
Figure 9

Unknown hole in the floor
Figure 10

Dee and Toby’s room

“We think about this as a studio apartment.”
Figure 11

Dee and Toby’s room

“Plants are key. It helps to have plants and lots a candles, because it is a small room and you have two people smoking.”
Figure 12

Dee and Toby’s room

“The entertainment center and the cat stand is what makes the room I think. Makes the room look like a home.”
Figure 13

Dee and Toby’s Room

“I did this, up here, to make it look like it’s a window, even though it’s not. You know, if you’re in your kitchen, you usually have a kitchen window. Your space looks bigger if you just make it look like, it’s a kitchen fuckin’ window.”
Figure 14

Biggie’s Shop
Figure 15

Reggie and Sky’s room
Figure 16

Sky and Reggie’s room
Figure 17

The cycle of community, conflict, and fragility
Figure 18

Scene from a summer cookout
Figure 19

Scene from a summer cookout
Figure 20

A Thanksgiving cheeseplate
Figure 21

Reggie prepping a Thanksgiving chicken in his sink
Figure 22

The social refugee cycle of community, conflict, and fragility
Table 3
Dutchland police responses to the Boardwalk Motel 6/6/12-6/5/13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>Offense</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Arrest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/12/2012</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed Person</td>
<td>NC 29</td>
<td>PI was depressed and intentionally cut her leg with a knife. Was transported to medical center without further incident. Is bipolar and recently had a medication change. Stated she is addicted to crack cocaine and had a relapse which she thinks contributed.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/12/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Person in room 3 harassed comp in room 9, advised to stay away from each other, according to other residents it was a mutual yelling/shoving match outside the rooms.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/18/2012</td>
<td>get a complaint</td>
<td>Request Assistance</td>
<td>NC 15</td>
<td>____ is the manager and states that ____ was fired yesterday and moved out on the same date. ____ states ____ has not returned his</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
keys to the property and would like them back. Officer attempted to call_______ with no avail. Manager advised to give it longer than 24 hours for _______ to return keys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/19/2012</td>
<td>Domestic Call</td>
<td>Harrassment 2nd - Phy Contact</td>
<td>____ called PD because ____ pushed her down to the ground after an argument over cleaning up the room. Parties were calm and separated upon arrival. ____ had warrants, from RPD and RCS0, neither wanted to extradite. ____ did not want to press charges and left for night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/20/2012</td>
<td>Executing a Warrant</td>
<td>Request to Locate</td>
<td>Police looking for individual on parole warrant, employee stated resident had moved out on 6/8/12 and resident whereabouts unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/4/2012</td>
<td>Assist a Person</td>
<td>Caller said room lock had been changed and asked why. Riverfort County sheriff's says he should turn himself in. Manager says he is 2 weeks behind rent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/5/2012</td>
<td>Assist a Person</td>
<td>Outside Warrant - Misd WT OUT/MIS Def was taken into custody on a b/w out of Riverfort Sherriff department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/6/2012</td>
<td>Assist a Person</td>
<td>Request Assistance NC 15 CO, of United Tennants of Riverfort, says PI1 was illegally evicted from room and his belongings removed. Desk clerk (PI2) says he had not paid rent since he moved in on 6/2/12. Prior he was living in room __ and requested a move to room ____. PI2 says owner advised her not to let PI1 back in room. CO and PI1 were advised and that there is no criminal matter and it would have to be handled civilly. CO was not satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/9/2012</td>
<td>Landlord/Tenant Trouble</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caller says he has talked to court and they say he has a right to be in his room until he has been evicted and insists on seeing police.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/15/2012</td>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>Problem Oriented Policing</td>
<td>Police were called after _____ reported a male and female at motel and male pushed female. _____ was outside office when police arrived and stated that they were fighting over personal issues and they were friends. Said argument resulted in a pushing match which others separated. Other state argument went on for an hour and parties were intoxicated. The fight appears to have been mutually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2012</td>
<td>Traffic Stop</td>
<td>Towed Vehicle</td>
<td>NC 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AUO, tow by DOTTS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2012</td>
<td>Assist a Person</td>
<td>Harrassment 2nd - Phy Contact</td>
<td>PL 24026010V2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CO says ex got into verbal argument over $95 rent he paid. CO says ________ threw an ashtray at him and hit in thigh. CO does not wish to pursue harassment charges and wants his money back and will vacate room. Owner did give CO back cash and he moved out of room. ___ got her belongings out of room and CO threw out rest in dumpster and was advised not to come back and agreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2012</td>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>Outside Warrant - Misd</td>
<td>WT OUT/MIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Def was found to have open b/w for FTA out of ________ town court. Warrant confirmed and Def processed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/17/2012</td>
<td>Domestic Call</td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>CO got into verbal argument with boyfriend over him sleeping with someone else. No charges at this time, both advised to stay away from each other if can't get along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/17/2012</td>
<td>Check a subject</td>
<td></td>
<td>Officer looking for tents in lot, saw none, all appears okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/25/2012</td>
<td>Noise Complaint</td>
<td></td>
<td>Car out front with very loud music in area of room 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/1/2012</td>
<td>Animal Control</td>
<td>Animal Control</td>
<td>PR reported 2 kittens that she was belonged to room ___ and were sick. Kittens seemed healthy and some tenants claimed it was because they take care of them. 519 spoke to tenants on 8/8 and they said kittens were fine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/17/2012</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Depressed over death of a friend and wants to go to psych center. Sent to hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/21/2012</td>
<td>Noise Complaint</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loud music from car, no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/29/2012</td>
<td>EMS call</td>
<td>Male requested to be transported at the bus stop and sent to _________.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/4/2012</td>
<td>Get a Complaint</td>
<td>Complaint about possible burglary, nothing missing in room. CO noticed a towel by the window near AC and staff says towels are kept along all AC units. Tenant says she left and locked door and came back and room was still locked. No burglary.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/14/2012</td>
<td>Fire Alarm</td>
<td>Accidental pull box, backpack got caught on it, no smoke or fire.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2/2012</td>
<td>Person Attempting Suicide</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed Person NC 29 CO is PI's ex girlfriend, says she got text messages saying he was going to OD on sleeping pills to kill himself. PI told police he told her this but had not yet taken pills. Was transported to RMC for observation and said he didn't care if he</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Incident Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/9/2012</td>
<td>Assist a Person</td>
<td>Subject going to motel to retrieve property.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/30/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td>PI1 and PI2 got into argument that escalated into shoving match stemming from property dispute. PI2 had left scene prior to police arrival but was found at Giant Food and checked okay. PI1 was leaving motel when police left the scene.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/30/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td>Def was involved with domestic incident with ____. ____ has a no contact stay away order of protection against def. Def was also found in possession of glass pipe with residue and white powder which was determined to be fake. Def take into custody and transported for</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/2012</td>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>Problem Oriented Policing</td>
<td>PR called police regarding fight between husband (PI1) and PI2. PI2 says he was having birthday party in room and he and PI1 were arguing and PI1 punched him and knocked him down. PI2 says he had to put his finger in his eye to get him off. PI2 had a bloody nose but refused treatment. PI1 says that PI2 grabbed and shoved him first and that PI2 gouged his eye as they were on the ground. PI1 says he only punched PI2 when PI2 went to grab his girlfriend. Left eye was red and swollen and transported to EMS for treatment. __ claims she was hit by __ during scuffle. Both parties determined to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td>Other female from earlier call was in front of room taunting ____ was told to call if she had further problems.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td>Checking out for male in tan sweater. No physical fight, verbal between guests. Male came to room because he thought a party was going on. ____ told him she shut party down and he didn't appreciate this and started using derogatory language and was advised by officer to not return, all parties satisfied.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/5/2012</td>
<td>Person Annoying</td>
<td>Criminal Trespass 2 PL 1401501AM2 CO is manager of motel, says that tenant PI told him that unknown older h/m opened door at 2am but chain was on, PI thought</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/2012</td>
<td>Get a Complaint</td>
<td>h/m was another tenant. CO says today he found h/m in a room and asked him for key or papers and says he couldn’t provide but claimed owner’s wife let him stay there. CO says he told him to leave, which he did. H/m states he was going to mission and left with suitcase. CO says he might have stayed at motel or Park Place in the past but doesn’t know name. CO will call if h/m returns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>____ stated that she didn't like that another resident keeps saying &quot;hi&quot; and isn't comfortable with her surroundings. ____ was given info for other motels. PA warrant out, they decline extradition.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/18/2012</td>
<td>Get a Report</td>
<td>Individual states he was drinking last night and went to bed at 4am and woke up at 10am and it appears someone came in and moved things around. He had a DSS appointment at 9am and needed an incident to give to DSS explaining why he was late.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/22/2012</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed Person</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR is friends with P2, she called police stating she was staying with OT1 and OT2 and felt she was being held against her will. Officer spoke to all parties and __ stated she was fine and there voluntarily. __ did make comment about wanting to harm herself and had thoughts of slicing her wrist due to being depressed because she was pregnant. Voluntarily transported to Riverfort Med.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Incident Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/25/2012</td>
<td>Person With a Weapon</td>
<td>Subject taken into custody on listed charges and transported for processing, due to beligerance pictures and prints need to be taken.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/30/2012</td>
<td>Get a Complaint</td>
<td>Called sounded intoxicated and had slurred speech, not even at the motel and may be at the Paulson. Said he was at the motel and two individuals asked him for money.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3/2013</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td>Called concerned because she has not seen boyfriend since an incident earlier at Price Chopper. Asked police to find him, lives at motel but was not there and not found.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13/2013</td>
<td>Noise Complaint</td>
<td>Room _ is the problem, loud TV.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/15/2013</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td>Car seen outside motel where ___ lives. Officer followed vehicle to Giant Food and spoke with ___ who have</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/19/2013</td>
<td>Police Wanted</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>P1 and P2 got into verbal disagreement about living arrangements. P1 decided to leave for the night and stay at her apartment in Riverfort. P2 was advised to stay at her apartment and not to contact ___. Order not violated this time. ___ has been staying at apartment off and on and said may come back tonight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7/2013</td>
<td>EMS Call</td>
<td>Female has breathing problems.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17/2013</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td>Complainant states that the maintenance man left a note saying to meet him in room __ and she thinks he will harm her and room is dark. __ at Park Place was told to stay away from</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/2013</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td></td>
<td>woman and agreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1/2013</td>
<td>Check a Subject</td>
<td></td>
<td>Checking on 2 people on Main Street near the motel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/7/2013</td>
<td>Domestic Call</td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>NC 03 P1 called to report P2 was suicidal. Officers separated parties and it was revealed they were having an argument and one was trying to get the other sent to the hospital to defuse situation. Nurse spoke to on phone and didn't think mental health histories warranted transport. Parties agreed to stop arguing and go to bed and did not want further police involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/9/2013</td>
<td>Get a Report</td>
<td>Damaged Property</td>
<td>NC 10 CO says he was driving on Main Street in front of motel and vehicle was damaged by a metal crowbar. Vehicle sustained minor scuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
marks to rear door. CO doesn't know if he threw it or struck it on roadway and passenger says they didn't see anyone in area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/14/2013</td>
<td>Get a Complaint</td>
<td>Animal Control NC 40</td>
<td>CO called because he had info that a dog he was sold to PI was being abused and neglected. PIs deny ever having dog. House at Park Place is inspected and dog was not there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/16/2013</td>
<td>Fight Argument</td>
<td>NC 03</td>
<td>Police received multiple calls from P2 stating she was being attacked. Upon arrival, ___ was outside attempting to help ___ home. ___ was highly intoxicated and unable to explain situation. ___ stated ___ was a friend who came over intoxicated to hang out. No problems except intox. ___ brought home by PD, ___ on parole for burglary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Person Contacted</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21/2013</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>Emotionally</td>
<td>PR called and said she was being harassed by neighbor because she followed her up the stairs. PI says doesn't know PR and has no problem but has been told to keep her distance. PR denies suicidal or homicidal ideation and does not want any medical help. PR has a warrant from Allentown, PA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/2013</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>Emotionally</td>
<td>PI is upset about breakup with boyfriend, wanted to be transported to speak to someone, said he didn't want to live anymore, police contacted CDPC and EMS transported PI to CDPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disturbed Person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 23

With no routine cleaning, residents moved into conditions like this
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

1 All names of participants and most locations in this study have been changed.


3 Ibid.


8 Christine Benedict, Resolution No. 353-a Requesting Riverfort County Remove Families and Individuals From Certain Motels on Route 5, Town of Dutchland (Dutchland: Riverfort County Legislature, 2007).

10 Mark Hugo Lopez and Gabriel Velasco, Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics Sets Record, Leads Nation (Washington, DC, 2011).

11 Rakesh Kochhar and D’Vera Cohn, Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy, Americans Move in with Their Relatives (Washington, DC, 2011).

12 Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, The State of the Nation’s Housing, Policy (Boston, 2011).


18 Ibid.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.


(New York: Scribner, 2012). Both Ehrenreich and McMillan mention living cheap motels because of the financial restraints they intentionally placed on themselves. However, neither discusses the culture of living there.


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 The motel had a policy of not allowing “kids,” although I found out that there was not entirely strict enforcement of this rule. For an excellent look at families and children living in shelters, see Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*.


43 Ibid.

44 Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

45 Lofland et al., *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*.

46 Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

47 Ibid.


50 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*.


52 Ibid.


55 Presser, *Been a Heavy Life: Stories of Violent Men*.


There is the possibility that framing the study to Biggie in terms of “social inequality” primed him to discuss particular topics, but after reflecting upon our interactions, I do not believe that was the case as he rarely discussed anything related to social stratification. As I proceeded to disclose my study to other participants, I framed the study as an examination of what motel life was really like, as told by those who lived there. Residents were drawn to this framework because it empowered them to educate me about their lives at the motel and I do not believe it presented a problematic frame of reference for observation.

Despite the reputation of the Boardwalk, I rarely felt that I was in any immediate physical danger. There are several reasons for this. First, I made it a point to trust my instincts and in some instances, I simply avoided certain people who I thought might be unstable and removed myself from situations that seemed volatile and involved people I had just met. Second, I often retreated to my room during the late night and early morning hours when it got dark, unless I was with someone I trusted. Third, once my research role became apparent and accepted by many long-term residents, they vouched for me and I had the feeling that they would not allow me to be put in danger, even if they themselves were involved in a physical altercation. The only times I feared for my safety involved Nolan, who carried a knife and became easily agitated. However, he was a fairly frail in stature and residents such as Reg told me not to worry about him. Regardless, while he was around I made a point to never turn my back to him. Finally, as I will show, random violence was simply not a characteristic of the Boardwalk.

When I began the study I did not park my car in the motel parking lot because I did not want to begin my stay being asked for rides. I also was initially concerned about anything happening to it because I was not sure what the environment was like. Eventually, when I disclosed this, Reg chastised me, telling me that I was stereotyping. Sam told assured me that nothing would happen to it, but added that I would be asked for a lot of rides.

Early on I felt that because of the limited resources available to many residents and my social position, I did not want to take from what they had. However, I eventually changed my opinion after experience with Larry. He gave me money to buy him some beers from the gas station and told me to get something for myself. When I came back with only his beers, he looked genuinely hurt. I realized then that when residents offered me food or other items, it was rude not to accept what they chose to share, considering what little they had.


Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*.


4 American Hotel & Lodging Association, “History of Lodging.”

5 Hayner, *Hotel Life*.

6 American Hotel & Lodging Association, “History of Lodging.”

7 Ibid.


9 American Hotel & Lodging Association, “History of Lodging.”


11 USA Today, “Old-Style Motels Fading out.”

12 Even chain hotels bring a fair amount of controversy as companies such as Motel 6 and Econolodge have been accused to denying rooms to African-Americans, or giving them specially designated rooms in poorer condition than those given to whites. This stems from the famous 1994 case, Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States. See, United States Court of Appeals Eleventh Circuit., 130 F3d 999 Jackson v. Motel Multipurpose Inc (1997); United States of America v. Ghanashyambhai M. Patel and Joyitshana G. Patel, d/b/a Econo-Lodge Motel Defendants, accessed April 23, 2014.


14 USA Today, “Old-Style Motels Fading out.”

15 Hayner, *Hotel Life*.


20 Lilly and Ball, “No-Tell Motel: The Management of Social Invisibility.”


22 Siegal, Outposts of the Forgotten: Socially Terminal People in Slum Hotels and Single Room Occupancy Tenements.

23 For studies on skid row populations, see Donald J. Bogue, Skid Row in American Cities (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Spradley, You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads; and references in Ronald J. Miller, The Demolition of Skid Row (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982).

24 Hayner, Hotel Life.


26 Ibid.; Siegal, Outposts of the Forgotten: Socially Terminal People in Slum Hotels and Single Room Occupancy Tenements.

27 Ibid.; Hayner, Hotel Life.

28 Eckert, The Unseen Elderly: A Study of Marginally Subsistent Hotel Dwellers.


31 Siegal, Outposts of the Forgotten: Socially Terminal People in Slum Hotels and Single Room Occupancy Tenements.

32 Town of Dutchland SDF Image Mate Online

33 Planning and Economic Development Department, Main Street Corridor Inventory Study (Dutchland, 2011).

34 Ibid.

35 This other motel was purchased in 1997 for $1.25 million. James Denn, “Hotelier Pays $1.25 Million to Acquire Dutchland Super 8,” Times Union, August 13, 1997. Nearly half of the motels in America are owned by Indian Americans, mostly Gujaratis. In fact, the first Gujarati motel owner ran what was actually called a “residential hotel” in the 1940s that catered to the poor. For an in-depth examination of this phenomenon, see, Pawan Dhingra, Life Behind the Lobby: Indian American Motel Owners and the American Dream (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).


43 “Motel Manager Held in Mate’s Stabbing,” *Times Union*, March 14, 1995.


48 Ibid.

49 Carol DeMare, “Across the Hall, a Sex Offender,” *Times Union* (Riverfort, July 3, 2007).

50 Ibid.

51 Jonathan Kozol documents similar controversy among welfare hotels in New York City, see Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*.

52 Benedict, *Resolution No. 353-a Requesting Albany County Remove Families and Individuals From Certain Motels on Route 5, Town of Colonie*.


54 Michael F. Conners II, *Review Department of Social Services Temporary Assistance Division Motel Placement* (Riverfort, 2008).


59 *License Required to House Registered Sex Offenders* (Dutchland: Town of Dutchland, 2009).
One other reason for the decline in the number of sex offenders was the fact that the Riverfort County residence restriction law was struck down in 2009, so offenders were then placed in the city of Riverfort.

During my time at the Boardwalk, the trailer park next to the motel was home to at least two registered sex offenders who had victims under the age of 16. No actions were taken against the trailer park. Both Reg and Sam were aware of these offenders and the young kids who got picked up and dropped off by a school bus each day, with Reg telling me, “That’s not kosher.”

According to Dee, “Yeah that’s where all the fuckin cats came from. It was a house for stray cats cause it was just open, open area. They stopped using it and it all caved in.” Noonan told me that the union he worked for put in a bid on the demolition project, but it went to another company.
Biggie told me that the first floor rooms were used for long-term residents. I never received any indication from any other residents or staff that this was the case, and from what I observed the assignment of rooms was simply based on what was open and relatively clean. The larger first-floor rooms provided more living space and this was enjoyed by many long-term residents and couples such as Reggie and Sky, Dee and Toby, and Biggie and Deirdre. I never observed any conflict between residents over occupying upstairs versus downstairs rooms, and even for long-term residents, other living conditions besides room size such as air conditioning/heat/general appearance often took precedent in choosing living spaces.

When I asked Elizabeth about this she advised me, “You just gotta shove it in there.”

I passed this on to new residents who on several occasions asked me how to turn things on. Usually this involved them complaining to Elizabeth and her shouting up at me to show them how to work things.

I got rid of the couch after a week because there were signs of mice living inside it (such as droppings on my table) and I did not want them taking over my room. In fairness to Jake, he told me before he left that he suspected as much. In this instance, I was guilty of contributing to the mess at the rear of the motel because I could not lift the couch into the dumpster. A few days later, Reg flagged down the garbage truck and called me over to help lift the couch into the dumpster so it could get removed. It was a messily disgusting task, as the couch had soaked up quite a bit of water from the rain and is dirty, smelly, wet, and heavy as we lift it into the dumpster. We also threw a soggy blanket into the dumpster and try to do the same with a carpet, but it was too waterlogged to lift.

Dee and Toby were afflicted by the same problem in room 10 and it prevented them from being able to use the shower. The reason they moved to room 10 from room 25 is that their ceiling tiles collapsed in their bathroom.

When I told Elizabeth about the problem and that I wanted a new room, she asked, “You don’t want that room no more?” I found this to be incredibly funny, given the severity of the situation.

Hayner, Hotel Life.

CHAPTER 3: PATHWAYS TO MOTEL LIFE


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.


6 See, Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.


8 Ibid.


14 For similar notions about scaling back expectations explored from a female ex-offender’s perspective, see Andrea M. Leverentz, *The Ex-Prisoner’s Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014).


16 Riley’s opinion was probably changed a few days later when he went to push open a window to cool off his room and the entire glass pane shattered on contact.

17 This statement came with a fair amount of foreshadowing because Biggie soon found himself embroiled in drama with Reggie.

18 When residents such as Reggie, Sky, and Sam stepped down from previous environments, they placed many belongings in storage units.

19 What happened to Vito’s sister remained unclear as he refused to elaborate about her.

20 Wingate-Lewinson, Hopps, and Reeves, “Liminal Living at an Extended Stay Hotel: Feeling ‘Stuck’ in a Housing Solution.”

21 For more on flopping and ways to analyze flop locations, see Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*.

22 It is interesting that Roy made this distinction. In a 2009 report on the criminalization of the homeless, a list of the 10 cities with the most punitive policies towards the homeless was presented and five of the cities were in the South, four of them in the state of Florida. See, The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and The National Coalition for the Homeless, *Homes Not Handcuffs: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities* (Washington, 2009).

23 I asked Fran to elaborate on these events but she would not go into more detail and I decided not to press the issue.

24 They bought the minivan for $500 but never registered or insured it and the front plates did not match the back ones. They got a flat tire on the highway and someone called the police to help them fix it. When the police arrived they noticed the unmatched plates and impounded the van and fined Sky $600.

25 This move was one of the few examples of residents moving for work, which harks back to the early lives of hobos who moved across the American frontier in search of work. See, Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*.
This finding is very similar to what Snow and Anderson found in their study of homeless street people. See, Snow and Anderson, *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*.

There was no evidence that Biggie was a registered sex offender, given these claims of early sexual victimization.

It is interesting to note that Darryl’s alleged victim was also eight years old.

The lack of further detail about drug use at the motel is due to my role as a researcher. Because I did not engage in drug use with residents besides drinking alcohol, they came to view me as fairly straight laced. As a result, I was not invited to observe/partake in harder drug use and I did not press the issue.

There were a fair number of residents who had military histories. Sam, Larry, Price, Dale, Darryl, Steve, Ramón, Dee, Jerry, Paul, and Robbie all had been in some form of military service.


Biggie claimed that he got a check from this program but did not go into any more detail about it.

Biggie and Deirdre’s relationship with the program began to deteriorate over time. I asked Deirdre what she thought about it and she said, “Cause they used to come when they felt like it, every time they took us somewhere, oh you gotta hurry up, you gotta hurry up, I only got a certain time with you guys, I gotta see other client. We got tired of that stuff, I mean after a while, you get sick of that garbage, can be a pain right in the butt. Instead of Biggie getting two hours with them a week, he was getting nothing. Sposed to spend with him two hours a week. Then when they bring his meds, they come out with half of the medicine or they didn’t bring it all out, so that didn’t help any either. So you can’t depend on people like that.” Once they purchased a car, they did not have to rely on the program as much and Deirdre felt relieved that they did not have to depend on anyone else.

CHAPTER 4: MANAGING STIGMA AND IDENTITY


2 Ibid.

3 Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*.


7 Presser, *Been a Heavy Life: Stories of Violent Men*.

8 Ibid.


11 This is part of a larger societal tendency to equate sexual offenders with sexual predators who victimize children, when in reality, child sexual predators are a small subset of all sexual offenders. See, James Quinn, Craig Forsyth, and Carla Mullen-Quinn, “Societal Reaction To Sex Offenders: A Review of the Origins and Results of the Myths Surrounding Their Crimes and Treatment Amenability,” *Deviant Behavior* 25, no. 3 (May 2004): 215–32, doi:10.1080/01639620490431147.


13 The newspaper article detailing this story listed the girl as 14, but Reggie claimed they got the age wrong.


15 Ibid.


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 This coping strategy echoes Terri Lewinson’s findings that residents in extended-stay hotels (albeit with more amenities than the Boardwalk) personalized their rooms to make them feel homey. For this rich exploration into the extended stay world, see, Lewinson, “Residents’ Coping Strategies in an Extended-Stay Hotel Home.”


23 This is similar to what Sykes found in the prison world, where men are not able to assert masculinity through sexual conquest with women, so physical aggression becomes the marker of the male role. See, Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*.


26 Lewinson, “Residents’ Coping Strategies in an Extended-Stay Hotel Home.”

27 Dee told me as well that she thought being on unemployment made her lazy.

28 Steve did similar work when he lived at the motel, getting cigarettes from Elizabeth in return.


30 Desmond, “Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor.”


CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, AND FRAGILITY

1 Tim O’Brien, “Town Seeks to Make It Harder to Build Motels on Main Street,” *Times Union*, July 08, 2013. This comment also completely disregards the possibility and reality that several motel residents worked third-shift jobs, so their after-work leisure time was during the day.

2 Sudhi Venkatesh frames the underground economy as a, “widespread set of activities, usually scattered and not well integrated, through which people earn money that is not reported to the government and that, in some cases, may entail criminal behavior.” The culture of the Boardwalk was not organized solely around earning money off the books, but because a substantial amount of social interaction involved buying and selling resources (including drugs), I feel this is an apt conceptualization. See, Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

3 We watched him walk down the street and he returned later with several cans of beer from the local drug store.

4 There were occasions when I was unable to give rides and I noticed that Jake had gotten quite adept at biking to the grocery store while carrying a trashbag full of cans. He was equally skilled at biking back with a twelve pack of beer.

5 Reg bought loose tobacco and tubes from the local tobacco store in order to sell his cigarettes. When Ed asked him about this process Reg offered to teach him if Ed purchased the materials, “You put the thirty dollars in my hand, I’ll get you three fricken things of tubes, the tobacco, and the machine and I’ll teach you to do it.” Reg claimed that he made almost $600 a month selling cigarettes to support this beer habit. This seemed to me like a bit of an exaggeration.

6 I was happy that Tat did not take offense to my rebuffing his offer for a tattoo. I enjoyed spending time with him and one of my favorite memories is when he walked over to me with his cell phone and asked, “You hang out with a lotta white people in your life right? What does this mean?” He had gotten a text
from a girl saying she was at her “buffs” and I surmised that it meant her best friend’s. He thanked me and walked away laughing.

7 Eric’s habits of selling stolen goods caught up to him when he stole a bicycle from a local drug dealer named Rav, and then sold it to Reg, who then sold it to someone else. When the previous owner found out about it, he confronted Reg and threatened to shoot him unless Reg came up with $400 or a bike equal to the one he lost. Reg was able to purchase a bike from a local shop for $189 and give it to Rav, avoiding any retaliation.

8 Ed once offered me Xanax for free and I turned him down. I told Reg about this later and he said, “Take ‘em, somebody here will buy them from ya. Money in the bank.”

9 One interesting situation occurred on Thanksgiving afternoon as I sat in Reg’s room with Clive. Clive was 19 and lived upstairs with his mother and father. On that afternoon, Clive came down to buy marijuana from Reg and ended up staying in the room to smoke. There was a knock on the door and when Reg opened the door, Clive’s father stood outside. Upon seeing Clive, he asked, “What are you doin’ here?” Clive sheepishly replied, “smoking.” His father nodded and then ended up buying marijuana himself.


12 Ibid.

13 Sam told me something similar, that he would knock on a resident’s door if he had not seen them for week or so to make sure they were not dead.


15 When Biggie first fired up the grill there were flames shooting out of the bottom and he, Randy, and Avery spent several minutes trying to figure out why. Seeing as Biggie lived directly below me, I worried about him having an accident with the grill, but he assured me that he would not “blow everyone up” because he had put so many grills together that he knew what he was doing.

16 Reggie mentioned that he saw Biggie eating tuna salad that had been sitting out in his room for days. Sam told me about one day when he observed Biggie grilling, “dripping sweat and shit, digging all in his nose. He had some rag and he cleaned the fuckin’ spatchula with it and it’s black as my fuckin’ shoe dirty. And he wiping the spatchula, he’s flippin’ burgers. Yo come get a plate? I said no I’m good brotha. Sweat dripping off his fat chest, it’s drippin’ all over the food. I said oh my god, oh. People just don’t think about what they doin’ man. Oh, I’m the grill master, just wiping sweat all over the, and he’s standin’ right over our food. Not our food, it’s his food, but I didn’t eat none of it. Then he wiping his face, digging in his nose, with the same rag that he cleaned that spatchula with. He done slung it over his shoulder like a real professional chef, like he watchin’ shit on TV. I said, I couldn’t believe he did that. This guy’s nasty. I couldn’t believe he did that shit Chris. I’m lookin at him like, I know he just didn’t do that.” I also observed this sort of behavior when I spent time inside Biggie’s room. The air inside often smelled like grease and flies buzzed around on a constant basis. On many occasions I saw food such as baked beans or pasta in sauce sitting out on tables for days.

17 In some ways, this new resident cannot be blamed for this transgression, as the transient nature of the motel made it quite difficult for residents to enter into caring relationships. Long-term residents acknowledged that they often did not even make the effort to remember names. Reg summed it up by saying, “People come and go so quick around here.”
This episode made my relationships with Biggie and Reggie somewhat awkward. Both were openly feuding with each other, but I did not want to appear as if I was taking sides when I spoke with each of them. When each would rant about the other, I would not affirm or deny their positions. Instead, I simply listened and recorded their words. Furthermore, Biggie began openly collecting empty bottles and cans in large trash cans outside of his room and often urged me to give any empties to him. I knew that Reggie was also on the lookout for empties and in a way, expected that I would give him some. I tried to address this by alternating my empty bottles and cans between Biggie and Reggie, without telling them that I was doing so.

Reggie became openly hostile to Darryl and anytime I mentioned Darryl, Reg would comment, “Oh, that fucking pedophile?” Darryl was relatively mature about the situation and gave Reg a card with ten dollars in it for his birthday.

This can be seen in other instances as well. After their “can wars”, Reggie invited Biggie to share in his Thanksgiving and also invited him to his birthday party. Jake and Gene got into a violent encounter one night when Gene would not leave a party when he was told to, but a few days later, they smoked marijuana together.


This is similar to Desmond’s findings which indicate that the urban poor cut disposable ties and then reengage them at varying degrees of strength. See, Desmond, “Disposable Ties and the Urban Poor.”

Marc was in fact from Guatemala and even if Reggie did harbor hatred for Latinos, he did not let it get in the way of socializing and engaging in community with Marc.

Goffman, Asylums.

Venkatesh, Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor.

Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community.


Kefalas, Carr, and Clampet-Lundquist, “To Snitch or Not to Snitch: The Crisis of Trust in the City of Brotherly Love.”


Whyte, Street Corner Society.

CHAPTER 6: INTERACTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Siegal, Outposts of the Forgotten: Socially Terminal People in Slum Hotels and Single Room Occupancy Tenements.

Ferrell, Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy.

Ibid.

Ibid.


O’Brien, “Boardwalk Motel Owners Gain by Housing the Poor.”

Ibid.

The public grossly overestimates recidivism rates for sexual offenders, putting it at 75% when research indicates it is likely around 14%. See, Fortney et al., “Myths and Facts about Sexual Offenders: Implications for Treatment and Public Policy.”

Quinn, Forsyth, and Mullen-Quinn, “Societal Reaction To Sex Offenders: A Review of the Origins and Results of the Myths Surrounding Their Crimes and Treatment Amenability.”

For an analysis of more intimate cat calling, see, Duneier, *Sidewalk*.


This explanation from the police that seeing us drinking in the parking lot could somehow harm someone passing by fits clearly with the notions of sanitization of social space. It also echoes Spradley’s work in that tramps find it hard to drink without violating social norms, see Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*.

Benedict, “Dutchland Motels – Corporate Welfare at Its Finest!”.

It is interesting that all of these observed examples involved women as the perpetrators. Of course, my fieldwork is limited in scope so it is possible and likely that men were involved in crimes within the local community. However, I did submit a FOIL request to the Dutchland Police for any arrests that occurred during my fieldwork involving an individual who listed their residence as the Boardwalk Motel, and was given only a single report that did not actually involve a crime or arrest. Therefore, I am unable to elaborate on this finding or the scope of crimes committed in the community by motel residents.

Ibid.


Dee and Toby occasionally did laundry in their tub to save money and the trip.

Roy used this phrase with almost every unknown woman that he interacted with. We passed by a bus stop on our walk back to the motel and he greeted the older black woman sitting inside with, “How are you Miss Lady?”

The owner of the Boardwalk also owned the Park Place and the Home Cooking Buffet restaurant. I often wondered if owning these locations together was a strategic decision, with the assumption that motel residents would visit the buffet because they were unable to cook in their rooms.

Biggie, Deirdre, Toby, Dee, Reggie, and Sky were the only residents who told me that they used this pantry. Pickups were every other Thursday and to enroll residents needed picture ID and proof of residence, in this case, a receipt from the motel.

Unlike some low-income communities, the Boardwalk Motel was not located in what many would call a “food desert,” or a location devoid of fresh and nutritious food. The Giant Foods located within walking distance had a substantial variety of fruits, vegetables, and nutritious items. Dee also visited the Veggie Mobile, which was a community garden vehicle that drove through the Riverfort area to sell fresh fruits and vegetables in elderly and low-income locations. However, the Veggie Mobile did not stop near the motel, so residents had to travel into downtown Riverfort or Pinewood to visit it.

Because of this, residents who received food stamps but lacked the means to prepare food were at a significant disadvantage when it came to eating in the sustainable habitat.
It also should be noted that for much of the working poor make just enough money to disqualify them from receiving food stamps. This was the case for Sky, who worked 40 hours a week at $7.85 an hour, which disqualified her for food stamps. Reg said they would gladly trade whatever income put her over in exchange for $200 of food stamps each month.

O’Brien, “Dutchland Motel Owners Gain by Housing the Poor.”

Jake told me that Rob would frequent this McDonald’s and try and panhandle. He was eventually kicked out and banned for this. Vito also panhandled on a daily basis along Main Street. He told me that on good days he came home with around thirty dollars.

Sam called me the next day and laughed while he told me that his boss was surprised to see me with him, because workers were not supposed to bring friends or family to work. Sam said his boss did not understand who I was and thought that maybe Sam was “slow” and I was there to assist him. Sam then showed him my business card and further explained my project to clarify our relationship.

When it became obvious to Sam that the Marriot was not giving him enough hours to live on, he got a job at a Wendy’s near downtown Riverfort.

Roy had been working at this restaurant for eight months before he was fired. Roy also said that the supervisor stole trash bags and at this moment, I stupidly exclaimed, “Who steals trash bags?” Reg, who was listening to the conversation laughed and said, “We do.” He shrugged and continued, “She takes ‘em from her job” (meaning Sky). This was an early moment where my own middle class judgments were lucky to not get me in trouble.


Biggie also collected scrap metal. However, his scrapping career was cut short in the winter when a building inspector came by the motel and told him that his room was unsanitary. The owner and Elizabeth then told Biggie that they would kick him out if he continued to scrap metal in his room.

Ibid.


Unfortunately, Jake did end up selling this collection after he moved out of the motel and into an apartment with Reg and Sky.


One of the oddest sights I ever saw was that of a woman crossing Main Street near the motel while pushing a shopping cart with two toddlers inside.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION


2 O’Brien, “Dutchland Approves Motel Limits, 6-0.”

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 O’Brien, “Town Will Seek to Shutter Boardwalk Motel - The Dutchland Blog.”
Ibid.


8 Ibid.


12 This turn of events made losing contact with Larry even more upsetting, as I was not able to find out what happened to him.


15 O’Brien, “Boardwalk Motel Owners Gain by Housing the Poor.”


17 Benedict, “Boardwalk Motels – Corporate Welfare at Its Finest!”.


19 O’Brien, “Dutchland Approves Motel Limits, 6-0.”

20 Ibid.


24 See, Kubrin and Weitzer, “New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory.”

25 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*.

26 This is in stark contrast to what residents encountered in New York City’s Martinique Hotel, where the owner showed up at residents’ doors with a gun. See, Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*.

27 Darryl felt that this was an intentional decision by local government to push sex offenders out of the area.

Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community.

Kozol, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.

It is likely that this relationship helped Reggie deal with the loss of his father.

Spradley, You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads.

Estimating the homeless population in the United States is difficult because it relies on capturing those in shelters or on the street. It is estimated that in January of 2013, 610,042 people were homeless on a given night, but this is likely underreporting of the problem. See, Meghan Henry, Dr. Alvaro Cortes, and Sean Morris, The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1 Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness (Washington, 2013).


Only one study has found a significant relationship between sex offender clustering and recidivistic sex crimes, and this only held true for crimes against adults. See, Kelly M. Socia, “Too Close for Comfort? Registered Sex Offender Spatial Clustering and Recidivistic Sex Crime Arrest Rates,” Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 25, no. 6 (December 2013): 531–56, doi:10.1177/1079063212469061.


Ibid.

In Kozol’s, Rachel and her Children, hotel resident Kim makes a similar call for action when she says, “You could do some good things in those empty rooms. Lectures. Movies. Every night you could have education going on. Doctors could come and talk, explain things women need to learn. Imagine all the decent things you could do with just a little common sense if you were not thinking of this situation as a penalty for failure. See, Kozol, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.


Ibid.

Hughes and Kadlec, “Sex Offender Community Notification and Community Stratification”; Levenson and Cotter, “The Impact of Sex Offender Residence Restrictions: 1,000 Feet from Danger or One Step from Absurd?”; Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel, “Social Disorganization and Residential Locations of Registered Sex Offenders: Is This a Collateral Consequence?”; Mustaine, Tewksbury, and Stengel, “Residential Location and Mobility of Registered Sex Offenders”; Zandbergen and Hart, “Reducing Housing Options for Convicted Sex Offenders: Investigating the Impact of Residency Restriction Laws Using GIS.”


The motel was ill-equipped to serve disabled veterans, as evidenced by the fact that when Jerry was placed at the motel in March of 2013, he was the first resident I had ever seen in a wheelchair. There were no elevators up to the second floor so Jerry was given a room on the first floor. However, even this was problematic because the concrete sidewalk of the motel had no wheelchair ramps. In order for Jerry to access his room, Larry had to assemble several planks of wood into a makeshift ramp from the parking lot onto the sidewalk. The timing could not have been better, as Vito (a non-veteran) arrived in a wheelchair a week later.


Employment data for veterans is often broken down into those who have served since September 2001 (known as Gulf War Era II veterans), and those who served prior to that date. Among Gulf War Era II veterans, the 2013 unemployment rate for males was 8.8% compared to 7.5% in the general population. Female Gulf War Era II veterans were unemployed at a rate of 9.6% compared to 6.8% in the general population. It should also be noted that in 2013, the unemployment rates for Gulf War Era II veterans with a disability was not statistically significantly different from that of their counterparts with no disability. See, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Situation of Veterans Summary* (Washington, 2014), http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm.

One landmine in HUD-VASH implementation that should be addressed is that it excludes veterans who are lifetime sex offender registrants. This stipulation should be removed because when used in conjunction with sex offender residence restrictions, it makes finding housing for veterans with sex offense histories nearly impossible. For a discussion of HUD-VASH best practices, see, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HUD-VASH Best Practices - Version 1.0: A Working Document* (Washington, 2012).
57 The Riverfort Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness Executive Committee, Riverfort County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (Riverfort, NY, 2005).

58 Ibid.


60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.


63 Ibid.


65 Ibid.

66 Fader, Falling Back: Incarceration and Transitions to Adulthood among Urban Youth.


68 Ibid.


71 Kozol, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.

72 Spradley, You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads.

73 Kozol, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.

74 Ferrell, Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy.


76 Ferrell, Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Kozol, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.


APPENDIX A: REFLECTIONS ON ETHNOGRAPHY


Ibid.


Katz, Seductions of Crime.

Spradley, You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads.

See note 61 of Chapter 1.