

DIRTY PAWS? IDENTITY, ADAPTATION AND EXCLUSION FOR UNITED STATES  
HOMELESS POPULATIONS AND THEIR PETS

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Anthropology.

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## DEDICATION

To Ron and Badger, in memory of my friend and our companion

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## ABSTRACT

Homeless populations in the United States face many obstacles, within this group up to 10% of them may have pets. While services exist for the population; homeless pet owners face difficult challenges in accessing shelter, food, medical care, public spaces and employment opportunities. This thesis explores the human-animal relationship within the context of homelessness. The state of being homeless carries with it stigma and marginalization within the larger society. Fieldwork and surveys conducted with three interacting communities: homeless populations, service providers and the general public provide new insight into the complicated relationship between homeless owner and pet as well as evaluates opportunities for improving delivery of and access to services for this uniquely vulnerable population.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For over 20 years of my life, I have encountered homelessness. I see people on the street where I work, I encounter them in my profession, and I have taken an active role in advocating for them through my work at a non-profit agency and my role as a member of Wichita's service community. In 2007, my personal and professional life intersected when I was the owner of a lonely dachshund and service provider for a gentleman who was homeless and had just lost his dog as it was put to sleep by local authorities for biting someone. With no second thoughts, I arranged for the two of them to become a new family together, keeping each other company and providing each other a new friendship. Seven years later, while attending the yearly Point In Time Count in 2014, I noticed the large display provided by the area humane society and wondered about the benefits, drawbacks and exceptionality of the relationship for homeless individuals having a companion animal. As a student of anthropology, I was drawn to and curious about this strange relationship between human, and pet, and further began to think about the reasons why a homeless individual would want this additional responsibility and possible obstacle to needed services.

This thesis examines the aspects of human and animal relations in homeless communities in Wichita, Kansas. Specifically, focus is on the ways in which pets in a homeless subculture can be functional, construct identity for the individual, and affects perceptions of homelessness as understood by the larger culture. The results of this study are used to evaluate the current policy of foster care that allows for temporary placement of animals during a homeless person's transition into housing.

Chronically homeless individuals live in the margins of society. They are the most visible sign of poverty in the United States and throughout the world. Overcoming homelessness, finding secure housing and employment is a goal of many of these individuals, who are affected by changing economic systems, decreasing affordable housing, gentrification, and stigmatization (Glasser 1999; Hopper 2003; Rosenthal 1991; Singer et al.1995; Susser 1996; Wasserman and Clair 2010; Calgary et al, 2010; Takahashi 1996; Snow and Anderson 1993). Chronic homelessness can have detrimental effects on the both the physical and mental health of people living in these conditions. Many factors can affect a person's success in finding stable living arrangements including access to healthcare, employment, suitable clothing, and skills for employment. The ability to successfully adapt to homelessness through the emotional, physical and social changes one must make when living on the street, can impact a person's ability to recover and transition back into mainstream society successfully. For the homeless person who owns a pet, this additional obstacle to services designed to assist homeless individuals can be the difference between success or failure, life or death. Separation from an important element in their life, possibly their last meaningful social bond—that of the human-animal relationship—can lead to further suffering and distress for members of this community in their struggle to get off of the streets. I argue that pet ownership for homeless individuals increases their likelihood for success in surviving life on the street, both physically and emotionally.

There are both lay perceptions of the importance of pets for this community and research concerning the benefits of pet ownership for homeless individuals (Irvine et al 2012; Irvine 2013; Rew 2000; Lem et al. 2013; Slatter et al 2012; Singer et al 1995; Newton 2013; Brandes 2009; Shipman 2011). Homeless pet owners often deny services that exist in the area to assist homeless pet owners in the transitional process of securing emergency or temporary shelter and ultimately

permanent housing. This study focuses on the ways in which pets in a homeless community can be functional for constructing identity and personhood and explores how pet ownership affects perceptions of homelessness as understood by the larger culture.

Many disciplines explore homelessness and pet ownership, including its benefits and drawbacks for homeless individuals. This literature is primarily centered on the morality and redemptive qualities of this relationship as well as the positive impact of pet ownership on mental and physical health (Irvine, et al 2012; Irvine 2013; Singer, et al 1996; Slatter, et al 2012; Lem, et al 2013; Rew 2000). This study contributes to the emerging scholarship on human and animal relationships and their importance in identity construction and construction of self as a responsible and good person for a marginalized population who are often perceived by the larger culture as neither of these things. As a practical matter, with regard to these relationships, less is actually known about their functions in terms of how they might be beneficial for a homeless person's survival. When living in a dangerous and hostile environment, animals can be functional in different ways including increasing donations (Irvine, et al 2012); protection (Finkelstein 2005) or other adaptive functions of the relationship such as warmth (Shipman 2011; Rew et al 2000).

To date, little research has been done to explore the ways service providers perceive homeless pet owners. This study goes beyond current research, which focuses primarily on the perspective of the homeless population with pets and takes into consideration the perceptions and concerns of homeless service providers as well as the treatment of homeless pet owners by the general public. Service providers are tasked with housing, feeding, clothing, and providing medical and mental health and care to the most vulnerable members of US society. Limited funding for staff, who are often paid at or below the federal poverty level, and strict policies

under which they operate daily can constrain and inhibit their ability to assist homeless individuals with pets. Service providers are not immune to stereotyping and judgment in their perceptions of who is deserving of services and reasons for poverty and homelessness (Kane et al 2010; Snow and Anderson 1993; Irvine 2013). The extra care needed for pet owners, such as seen with homeless individuals transitioning into shelter and housing, can be challenging for this group of individuals.

An institution's burden of caring for a homeless person's pet, including ensuring pets have adequate veterinarian care, food, and water, proper socialization, exercised and hygienic, can be perplexing problems to overcome in a shelter setting. Similar situations arise when elderly pet owners in need of assistance with daily needs are moved into care facilities. This study provides additional data about service provider's concerns when serving this population as well as their perceptions and treatment of the homeless community. Additionally, evaluation of the current program designed to help homeless pet owners in Wichita—foster care for 30 days—and options from the homeless community and pet owners will be explored.

Lastly, information gathered from the general public provides current valuable insights into the shifting perceptions of homelessness in general and homeless populations with pets in particular. This area of study has not yet been addressed fully in the literature. There is information on how homeless pet owners perceive themselves to be treated and viewed by both service providers and the general public. In the United States, pet ownership has increased 300% since the 1970s, indicating the increasing importance of animal relationships within the society. In 2012, 62% of United States households included a pet (Humane Society 2014). In 2007, 41 billion dollars were spent by pet owners in the United States on their animals (Shipman 2011). Increasing media attention as well as laws to protect animal rights to reconfigure them as

independent beings with caretakers, similar to children, contribute to the important placement of animals within US culture and the growing interest of the general public in animal welfare since the 1950s (Irvine 2003).

## Definitions

There are many definitions of “homeless” in the United States and around the globe including both formal definitions set out by agencies to categorize priorities for whom assistance should be provided, as well as the definitions of common parlance. Homelessness is a state of being and can happen for a variety of reasons including economic instability, domestic violence, natural disasters, or gentrification of urban areas when inexpensive housing is destroyed (Glasser 1999; Wasserman and Clair 2010; Hopper 2003; Susser 1996; Takahashi 1996). Natural disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina or Sandy, can leave people without housing for periods of time as reconstruction takes place (Newton 2013). People who consider themselves “travelers” or who choose to live in unconventional ways may also be labeled as homeless (Glasser 1999; Hopper 2003; Finkelstein 2005; Anderson and Snow 2001). The definition of homelessness is an area of much debate within the literature and for clarity’s sake, special consideration to definitions of homelessness for the purposes of this paper is given below

The informants for this study include two types of literal homelessness, primary and secondary. The most practical distinction for primary homelessness in this study will be that used by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2014, which includes:

1. Homeless Sheltered: A person who currently resides in an emergency shelter, transitional housing for homeless persons who originally came from the street or emergency shelter.

2. Unsheltered Homeless: A person who resides in a place not meant for human habitation such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, bridges or on the street.
3. Chronically Homeless: Those people who have a disabling condition, which impairs their ability to get or keep a job and impairs their ability to remain sheltered. Individuals in this category must have been homeless for a year or more or have had at least 4 episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

HUD definitions do not encompass a great number of homeless individuals. Cultural definitions of homelessness have been described in terms of primary homelessness for those individuals who are unsheltered or in the above categories. Secondary homelessness includes people who move often between friends and relatives (couch surfing) or move frequently between temporary shelters. Tertiary homelessness includes displacement from home for a temporary period and utilization of boarding houses or other temporary shelter (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2006; Newton 2013). Primary and secondary homeless were chosen for this study because trending recognition and acceptance of the importance of pets for some groups within the tertiary homeless.

People experiencing and leaving domestic violence situations can be included within the definition of tertiary homelessness, although people within this group may later experience primary or secondary homelessness. They are often seen as experiencing homelessness for reasons beyond their control. Studies of women experiencing domestic violence have shown that they will remain in a violent household if there is a pet in the home for fear of violence towards the pet if they are unable to leave without it. Provisions for these individuals have already been made locally through the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Pets in Crisis program to assist them in transition out of domestic violence situations. The federal government has made provisions for natural disaster victims to have their pets accompany them when finding

temporary shelter after natural disasters through the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006 (PETS Act). People experiencing chronic, literal homelessness and their pets remain largely unsupported and marginalized, which one could argue is indicative of the general public's perception of chronic literal homelessness. Further, pet ownership can be indicative of socioeconomic status within the social stratification system of the US. These factors can contribute to the individual's ability to successfully adapt and emotionally cope with life on the street.

Human-animal relations contribute to the well-being of the homeless individual living on the street, which can be a lonely and isolating experience (Lem et al 2013; Irvine 2013; Newton 2013; Rew 2000; Slatter et al 2012). Pet owners, in general, typically consider their pets to be members of their family, friends, and givers of unconditional love. They can be conduits for social interaction, as well as contribute to physical health and activity (Slatter et al 2012). Interaction with animals is connected with lowering of blood pressure and increased levels in production of the hormone oxytocin, which is associated with human bonding, empathy, and intimacy (Shipman 2011).

The term "pet" is the most familiar term for animals living in relation to humans; however, the term "animal companion" since the early 2000s has been increasingly used to reflect the importance of the bond between person and animal (Irvine 2013; Slatter 2012; Shipman 2011). In this framework, animals are classified as members of the family also referred to as "inter-species family" (Newton 2013). For the purposes of this study, and to clearly differentiate "companion animal from "service animal," I will be using the term "pet." This distinction is necessary as "service animals" are those animals that are trained to assist people with medical conditions, including blindness, deafness, seizure, and psychiatric disorders. Under

the American's with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA), these animals can include psychiatric service dogs as well as emotional support animals. It should be noted that there is not presently any legitimate means to certify an animal as a "service animal." Agencies and on-line programs that allege to "certify" the animal for a fee do not do specific testing for this certification. These programs can be costly, as I observed with one of my homeless pet owners trying to come up with the fee for certification through an on-line agency. Despite this, individuals who want to keep their pet with them continue to pursue certification even though this process is meaningless and can cause additional problems for both the owner and the shelter should the animal not be properly trained as a service animal. Under the ADA, animals trained to be service animals are allowed in shelter environments, into housing that would normally not allow them and other areas where animals are not generally allowed. Owing to the adaptive nature of humans, the distinction of service animals and companion animals for homeless populations has become an area of concern in such regions as California where pets are regularly registered to be service animals so homeless pet owners can obtain housing and keep their animals with them. This confusion has resulted in the State of California taking a closer look at the definition of service animals under the ADA and may result in further restrictions on the category (Irvine 2013).

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS

This project was completed using a mixed method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed method approach uses qualitative instruments such as observations and open-ended questions, which can result in rich ethnographic data for analysis and provide additional areas of study as well as guide further elements of the project. However, gathering qualitative material can be both time consuming and result in researcher bias depending upon how questions are asked or which individuals are selected for interview. The use of qualitative material alone also would have resulted in a much lower sample size, decreasing generalizability and limiting perspective. By incorporating quantitative surveys with close-ended questions developed from ethnographic data gleaned in the first phases, larger sample sizes were obtained (Creswell 2014).

Information was gathered from the three groups was done to check external validity of the data obtained from the other groups. Information was obtained from several populations, including homeless pet owners, service providers and the general public. If only one group was included, this also could result in bias or inaccurate information as much of the information was related to how people think they are perceived by other groups. For example, if service providers were only incorporated into the information, valuable information from the homeless pet owners might be missed. It would be possible to miss how homeless pet owners perceived treatment from providers; how effective they believed the established program of foster care for pets during transition into housing operated and reason why distrust of this service or fear of separation from their pet might influence their decisions to refuse services. Further, if only service providers and pet owners information was obtained, valuable information about how the

general public treated or perceived homeless pet owners and how this information shaped the homeless pet owners identity, perception of self and perceptions of service providers and available programs would be unclear. As homeless pet owners live in the cultural milieu of day-to-day interactions with both service providers and the general public, information from all three groups was needed in order to fully understand and evaluate the information from the homeless pet owners.

Mixed method approaches were developed in the 1980s in an attempt to overcome bias, which is present in both qualitative and quantitative project design. Triangulation and mixed methods benefit a study of this type of research in which questions of interacting communities are present as the method can provide a more complete understanding of the problems and questions at hand (Creswell 2014; Snow and Anderson 1993). There is no perfect method for research, but using information collected from these three groups can help in reducing bias and allow for greater understanding of how perceptions, decisions, and actions are culturally formed. A mixed method approach is beneficial in overcoming methodological flaws as well. For example, while a homeless pet owner may perceive they are being treated differently or discriminated against because of their companion animal, this may not be the case with all service providers or with all members of the general public. Conversely, other homeless pet owners may see their pet as contributing to increased donations from the general public. This again may not be the only way in which a homeless owner of a pet could be treated by service providers or the general public.

Mixed method approaches, specifically those designed for transformation of particular policies—such as the evaluation and use of the established foster care program or denial of shelter or other services for pet owners who will not leave their pets—lend themselves to a study

of this sort. One of the outcomes of this project could be the formation of potential programs to assist marginalized groups within the United States (Creswell 2014) such as the homeless pet owners. There is an established foster care program designed to assist homeless pet owners during transition into permanent housing but the use of this program is often refused. Gathering data from several groups as well as increasing sample sizes through surveys collection allow for generalizability.

Another potential outcome of this research is the evaluation of the usefulness of the foster care program and potential modifications that come from homeless pet owners. These can possibly be incorporated to adjust the program and as result, homeless pet owners may be more agreeable to accessing it. Homeless pet owners who reintegrate into the domiciled public may benefit from the results of this study as new ways of dealing with pets in transition were posited through the research. Transformation theories and methods take into account and receive information from the population about which the study is being done. Questions and concerns posed by homeless pet owners as well as service providers were incorporated into surveys for quantitative data analysis later in the project.

An exploratory sequential mixed method approach was used with the homeless population who had pets. This methodological approach used qualitative interviews and observations that were reviewed for themes and information was coded (See Appendix). Data collected during the interviews was used to create surveys in which closed-ended questions were asked. The semi-structured interviews and observations were taken from 10 homeless pet owners in the Wichita area. Included in the sample were five females and five males. Of the pet owners, three had cats and seven had dogs. This sample included individuals who had both dogs and cats

at different times when they were homeless and one individual had a pet rat during his and his wife's time living on the street.

Qualitative data was collected from self-identified homeless or formerly homeless individuals in the Wichita area who currently or previously owned pets. For contextualization and perspective, interviews were also done with individuals who work for agencies that provide services such as shelter, medical care, or other basic necessities and as members of the domiciled Wichita community. These interviews were digitally recorded and/or videotaped when possible. Recorded interviews and field notes were transcribed and reviewed. Common themes found in the interviews were coded, analyzed, and incorporated into surveys (Creswell 2014). Surveys for homeless pet owners were distributed and collected during the 2015 Point In Time Count held in January.

An explanatory sequential method was used to gather data from the general public. Surveys for the general public in Wichita were distributed through convenience sampling, with both open ended and close-ended questions. These were used first due to the potential variance of perceptions within the population due to probable influences from other cultural spheres such as religious practices, media consumption, education, profession, pet ownership and type of pet owned. Because of these variables, it was expected that answers to closed-ended questions would differ. A person's choice in which media outlet they watch, read, or listen to and the presentation of the issue of homelessness likely influences their perceptions of homelessness. This sample population was analyzed based on two variables—pet owner or not—and can inform the selection of a more specific populations with which to conduct qualitative interviews for a deeper understanding of the information. Specifically for the purpose of this study, I was looking for variance between individuals with and without pets about perceptions. Qualitative interviews and

participant observation fieldwork done with the general public during the surveys and throughout the study provided more depth and insight into the general public's perception of homeless pet owners.

The guiding research questions were: 1) How do pets construct identity for a homeless person? 2) How are pets adaptive for homeless individuals? 3) How do pets influence perceptions of homeless individuals? These questions were investigated through the following activities:

- 1) **documentation of the narratives of homeless pet owners.** This involved the collecting of life histories, experiences as a homeless pet owner, perception of self and treatment by others as a homeless pet owner.
- 2) **documentation of functional uses of pets for the homeless individual.** This involved collecting data on how pet owners use their pets for positive identity construction, emotional well-being and physically, for example as protectors, body warmth, pack animals, or a means of obtaining increased donations during panhandling.
- 3) **documentation of perceptions and attitudes of the general public towards homeless individuals with pets.** This involved the collecting of data through use of quantitative surveys developed by ethnographic data collected during qualitative interview with homeless pet owners and their interpretation of this population's treatment of them. This data was converged with information drawn from the general public's own perceptions of homeless pet owners.

## Reflections on Methods

As this research entailed working with three interacting communities, a significant amount of time was needed. The majority of hours I spent with informants were among those who identified themselves as homeless pet owners. While I could have remained a passive observer, my involvement with this group of informants included assisting them with transportation and applications to programs for which they might be eligible. These applications

were for medical care through low-income clinics, food stamps, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security Disability benefits, Veteran's HUD Vouchers, accessing veterinary care for their animals as well as providing food for their pets and themselves. By one month into the research, I kept with me a car trunk full of non-perishable grocery items, dog food, and treats. I found myself frantically searching through my closet for old clothes, shoes, gloves, scarves, and long johns to carry and give away as needed when the weather grew colder. I ransacked my husband's closet for outgrown jeans, coats, boots, and warm shirts for my male informants who did not have the ability to access resources to replenish supplies of clothing as winter was quickly approaching.

In typical field research, I would expect the researcher to not be as involved with assisting in access to services or items necessary for survival, such as clothes, food, and shelter. For example, within the city of Wichita there are a significant number of food banks sponsored by churches or the Kansas Food Bank. Unfortunately, my informants found it difficult to access these resources because of lack of care for their pet while they went in for groceries, medical care, and appointments for services or work activity when the opportunity arose. Informants who had income to purchase food, which was a significant number, faced the same challenge when going into a store to buy groceries or supplies. The needs of the population lent itself to many hours of participant observation fieldwork and time with the individuals and their pets. In all, I spent over 100 hours with the homeless informants who had pets. From these hours, I obtained 12 hours of formal interviews with the 10 homeless pet owners.

## Finding Informants

Informants who were homeless pet owners were found through four primary sources, including referrals from area agencies that work with homeless individuals and Project Care, a veterinary clinic sponsored by volunteers in the area, which provide necessary shots for pets of low-income households. I also received referrals through individuals already working with me as an informant and doing outreach on the street. Most difficult in recruitment of informants was gaining access to the community and establishing a trust relationship. Other authors have also noted difficulty with accessing this community often attributing this to lack of access to shelter services and other programs that many of the homeless utilize. Irvine (2013) turned to local Veterinarian Outreach Services and accompanied veterinarians who did outreach and care for homeless pet owners in Miami and Los Angeles. Irvine's study was narrowly focused on the role of the companion animal in the life of the homeless individual and he did not retrieve extensive life histories of the individual. Information on the reasons why homeless pet owners may be more distrustful of the general public, researchers, and service providers was useful.

Half of my informants for the qualitative interviews were recruited during the Project Care clinic. These informants self-identified themselves as having pets or having had pets while they experienced homelessness. Self-identification as "homeless" can be a delicate and problematic matter as I encountered quite a few people who would avoid this label entirely by indicating they were not homeless or had found unique new labels for their experience such as "surviving." During the Project Care clinic, for example, I spoke with one lady who I had seen many times while out recruiting informants on the street. She had her lovely schnauzer with her at all times. While at the Project Care clinic, she informed me that "No, I am not homeless, you should not have a pet while you are homeless. It is too hard to take care of them, too hard to

keep them warm.” Later in my fieldwork when I encountered her again at the Point In Time Count she readily agreed to participate, indicating this time that she was actually homeless and taking care of the pet while having this experience. Significantly for identification of homelessness in the United States is the stigma attached to this label and identity. One of my primary informants, Gerald, when we first met advised me that he preferred not to use this term but instead prefers the idea of “surviving” explains, “... the term homeless, it’s bad. It implies that you are a loser or something.”

## Surveys

Surveys were developed for individuals who met the definition of homeless and were counted during the yearly Point In Time Count held January 29, 2015. The Point In Time Count was an opportunity to distribute the surveys, as it was an event required by HUD to document the numbers of homeless individuals within a locality and the nation. During the count in Wichita, Kansas, homeless individuals are brought to a central location where they can easily access and engage with service providers in the area. With a large number of identified homeless individuals in one location, completion of surveys was more likely. Questions used in the surveys were derived from the interviews and participant observation fieldwork conducted with homeless pet owners. During the Point In Time Count, 70 members of the homeless community completed the surveys.

### Surveys- Homeless pet owners

Surveys consisted of 35 questions that addressed perceived benefits to the human, benefits to the pet and experience of pet ownership as a homeless individual. Additionally,

questions of age, gender, length of homelessness and sources of income were asked for demographic information. Questions were grouped into current pet ownership, past experiences of pet ownership and experiences of homelessness while having a pet. Questions about the perceived benefits of pet ownerships to humans, perceived benefits to the pet of having a homeless owner as well as needed services for homeless pet owners were included. Due to the expected high volume of homeless individuals attending the event, student volunteers from the Wichita State Department of Anthropology were recruited to assist with administering surveys.

### General Public

The general public was the most difficult to engage in this research. Requests to have surveys completed through an on-line system went unanswered and after several attempts at conducting surveys through this method, it was abandoned. As the weather warmed in the spring, more people were in public spaces and surveys were administered on paper and in person. Despite this, I was often told that they were not interested in providing information on this subject or indicated that they were not supportive of the homeless population having pets, resulting in low participation. It should be noted that this group's hesitation to participate was indicative in and of itself of their attitudes towards homelessness in general and homeless individuals with pets in particular.

### Surveys- General Public

Questions for the general public were taken from the recurring themes of perceptions of others found in interviews with the 10 homeless informants who had pets. There were foundational questions of age and education, as well as questions about perceptions of

homelessness, why individuals were homeless, responses to homelessness, as well as responses to homeless individuals with pets or if they had an opportunity to encounter them. Surveys for the general public asked for demographic information regarding age, education, and whether or not they owned a pet. Specific to the ownership of pets for the homeless population were questions concerning their opinions about the reasons people were homeless, causes of poverty and homeless, and opinions concerning homeless individuals who have pets. I collected 37 completed surveys from individuals concerning homeless pet owners and perceptions.

### Service Providers

Service providers were more difficult to access for this research than the homeless population themselves. While many were supportive and agreed to formal interviews, scheduling became an issue and attempts on both of our parts often failed for us to formally meet. The timing of the research also inhibited service providers' ability to participate in formal interviews, which could take at least one hour. Priorities for service providers during this period included Wichita's grant proposals to HUD, which were due the last week of October and fundraising. Programs and fundraising for holidays, including Thanksgiving and Christmas, took quite a bit of their time. Once the holidays were over in January, efforts and spare time that the service providers might have had available were devoted to planning and preparation for the Point In Time Event. Regardless, I was able to spend a significant amount of time with service providers discussing this subject as a contact person for homeless pet owners through my employment and at specific meetings. Time spent with service providers specifically set aside for this project was 25 hours.

I was able to conduct one formal interview and discussed the project with many of the service providers (See Appendix). This sample included members of the Wichita police department's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), executive director, and manager of the local day center, three emergency shelter directors, veterinarians, and volunteers for Project Care, and members of the Wichita-Sedgwick County Continuum of Care Team (WSCCT). This project was presented and discussed at three different meetings of the WSCCT and information from service providers was given in these discussions. I met with the Kansas Humane Society for information on the foster care program for pets. I also discussed the concepts of "service animal" and "certified companion animal" with the executive director of the Kansas Commission on Disabilities for further insight into the growing trend and acceptance that companion animals can be "certified" to allow them into a shelter environment.

#### Limits on Data

Within every research model, there are circumstances beyond the control of the researcher and unexpected events or processes can influence the effectiveness of the method and ultimately impact the results and analysis of data. Administration of the survey during the Point In Time Count was chaotic. Homeless participants at the event were pressed for time to visit all of the booths that were present. Many individuals wanted to take the survey; however in order to qualify for raffle items such as free bikes, backpacks, boots or gift cards for local convenience stores, many were unable or rushed through the surveys when they did take them. Additionally, while the surveys were easily understood by some members of the group, others had difficulty with reading. I noted student volunteers who assisted in administering surveys gave different

instructions on how to complete the survey when respondents did not have time or could not read the instructions for themselves.

Because of these two methodological flaws in the surveys administered at the Point In Time Count, adjustments were made to the interpretation of the survey form. The form was designed to capture a range of answers from “agree” to “strongly agree” and “do not agree.” A bank of questions was designed in this fashion as they captured perceptions and feelings about how they perceived themselves to be treated by the general public and service providers as well as how they felt having experienced homelessness and having a pet or knowing someone with a pet which may not simply be a “yes” or “no” answer. Although there were errors in administration of the surveys, I was able to obtain results if they agreed or disagreed with the statement though a range of endorsement of the feeling or perception was not determinable.

### Participant Observation and Ethical Considerations

The method of participant observation within this research was difficult. There is a unique tension among the three groups in relation to their status, perceptions of self and others as well as the appropriateness of the human animal relationship amongst and within each group. The involvement of the participant method cannot easily be broken down into one defining activity of participation. Additionally, when dealing with a marginalized population and coming from one of the other subgroups, it can be difficult to navigate the ethical and moral obligations when dealing with the “other” within in one’s own society. When one considers the stigma and marginalization of groups such as the homeless and the ways in which social cues such as dress, pet ownership or body language identify oneself to others, the question must be asked is it still possible to truly participate and experience this state of being?

### Service Providers

As mentioned previously, I have a background working with homeless individuals. While this category of people is not the only group with whom I work as a service provider, a significant number of my housed clients slide into and out of homelessness on a regular basis. As a service provider who is a legal advocate, a primary goal for me is to make government programs accessible and understandable for this group of people. In my past, I have spent entire days at homeless centers providing homeless individuals with requested guidance on understanding programs, benefits and helping them to communicate with attorneys in my firm when the need arose.

Service providers must straddle the fence between the homeless community and society at large. There is an adjustment when one takes a job in this professional field that one makes. My adjustment is far removed so not as easily accessible, but certainly it is often brought to mind when I hire a new employee, train and watch them to see how they adapt within the environment of being a service provider. They have misunderstandings with our homeless clients, experience fear or belief that they know what is best for the person during this period of adjustment and acculturation. Going back into the larger society poses its own challenges for service providers as we encounter misperceptions about homelessness, judgment, stereotypes about the people with whom we interact and are charged with assisting. These stigmas and stereotypes often extend to the service provider as I and others have experienced.

### Homeless Owners of Pets

Participating with homeless pet owners included helping them with food assistance, clothing, and pet care and during their interactions with the larger society. While I may not have

had every experience of homelessness, the question arises—would that even be possible? If I camped under a bridge, would I be treated the same by a caseworker or the police as one of my homeless informants? I would say no, I am a recognizable figure within the community of service providers. However, the experiences of homelessness do not simply encompass the physical aspects of where one sleeps. The impact of perceptions and subsequent treatment of homelessness and particularly for this research, homeless pet owners were the focus. As a service provider, would it have been easier for me to discourage pet ownership so I would not have to deal with them? Social processes such as difficulty in accessing services, pet theft, confiscation by authorities of the pet or criticisms by the general public do exactly this thing. Homeless pet owners have do have agency but with a lack of economic capital they use social capital to their advantage.

For a powerless group such as with homelessness, social connections are key to their agency and I was drawn into participation by my informants themselves. When animals were picked up by authorities or needed veterinarian assistance, there was fear of what would happen to their pet. As a participant in this community, there was an expectation that I would assist with helping homeless informants keep their pets when interacting with the larger community. I was social capital when one tried to buy a pet but no one would sell to him. He asked that I go with him to give him more credibility, which I did. As a result, he was able to purchase the dog. More significantly was when I had to help pick up pets from animal control. I felt urgency I during these encounters. Along with the owner, I panicked that they would not get their pet back because of their status as a homeless individual.

As a participant with homeless pet owners who want to keep their pets, this is my participation and I see it as my obligation as an anthropologist working with a powerless group. To ground

this, are experiences I had when pets were left with me or when another owner surrendered his pet to the humane society. I allowed pets left with me to return into the homeless community on the urging of the people who were involved with them. This was done in the face of pressure to take them to the humane society by other service providers and members of the general public. I left a pet surrendered to the humane society there even though I had my own personal attachment to it, because that was the decision of the owner. Had I not complied with my homeless informant's decisions about the outcomes of their pets or animals they were involved with, I would have been damaging their agency and undermining the method of participation with this group. This poses difficult ethical challenges with the method of participation within all three groups.

### General Public

One could easily assume that my presence in US society is participatory in and of itself. However, one might also note that years ago, as a service provider, I gave my dog to a homeless person. Where is my position in the general public and how is a method of participation utilized with such a varying group? One can find members that support homeless pet owners and others that believe if a person is homeless they should not have a pet. This is tricky. My participation with this group, while not addressed within the scope of this paper, included decorating dogs for Woofstock, spending a day at the event talking to dog owners, administering surveys in the community and getting daily updates on different dog's antics. Pets are joyous additions and add meaning to people's lives no matter their financial status. Research done with the general public and their perceptions of pet ownership could be classified simply as observation; however as a current pet owner this would be a difficult argument to make.

This leads to the ethical considerations of future research with the general public and their perceptions and treatment of homeless pet owners. It would be more comfortable for me to take this research only in the direction of those who support pet owners. The more difficult and valuable information may come from those who do not. What then is the researcher's role and should participation be incorporated with these groups? Does the researcher participate in criticizing an already marginalized group for having a pet? Should they steal a homeless person's best friend and only companion? I give a resounding no, we as anthropologists and researchers should never participate in unethical treatment of others and perpetuate systems of structural violence.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The state of homelessness for individuals across the globe has been studied in some depth by the discipline of anthropology. Relevant to this study is research that has been done on human and animal relationships, service providers, public perceptions of homelessness and specifically the body of knowledge pertaining to homelessness and pet ownership. Because this was a study that encompassed several bodies of research, different issues within the literature help provide a foundation for understanding the unique state of homelessness and pet ownership from a more holistic perspective.

#### Homelessness in the United States

Causes of homelessness are multi-faceted and typically several reasons are cited for the increasing number of homeless in the United States and throughout the world. Homelessness was thought to be a temporary problem in the 1980s as US policy moved towards the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill and struggled to recover from a period of economic recession (Desjarlais 1995; Glasser 1990; Hopper 2003;; Susser 1996; Takahashi 1996). Changing labor markets from factory production to the service industry in the US and globalization more broadly resulted in increased competition for low-wage jobs, as well as reduced middle-management positions found in manufacturing which led to a decline in income for many people within the US (Susser 1996). In addition to a changing economy during the 1980s and 1990s, gentrification of desirable urban areas for wealthier residents resulted in the demolition of low-income rental properties, such as boarding houses, low priced weekly motels,

and apartments (Glasser 1999; Hopper 2003; Takahashi 1996; Susser 1996). Political conservatism, starting in the 1980s, led to reductions in public benefits such as subsidized housing, food assistance, and financial supplements further jeopardizing the stability of lower economic households (Glasser 1999; Hopper 2003; Takahashi 1996; Susser 1996).

### Perceptions of Homelessness in the United States

Perceptions and services for homeless members of society are influenced by the media and politics in the United States. The media's reporting and representation of homelessness in the United States is a paradoxical mix of calls for assistance to help them to portraying them as deviants and threats to society (Min 1999; Dear and Gleeson 2013). Attitudes towards and perceptions of homeless individuals are influenced by one's own personal status, political views and religious beliefs as well as shifting representations in the media. The perceived causes of homelessness shift from mental illness, addiction, criminal activity, lack of personal responsibility and laziness to changes in the US economy. In the early 2000s shift in the causes of homelessness for US citizens were moving towards a combination of both personal and economic factors. Attitudes towards the homeless vary dependent on their age and gender. Age and gender were found to make a difference for the perception of homeless individuals one might possibly observe. Older men were more likely to be perceived as military veterans with emotional disorders. Younger men were more likely to be perceived as having substance abuse problems. Women were perceived as less likely to have substance abuse problems generally and less likely to be personally responsible for being homeless for reasons such as domestic abuse or mental illness (Kane et al; 2010).

Political movements and media rhetoric add to the construction of identity with literal homelessness being perceived as a burden and threat to society (Shier, et al 2010; Rosenheck 1994; Takahashi 1996; Dear and Gleeson 2013; Glasser 1999; Susser 1996; Wasserman and Clair 2011). Homeless populations are dehumanized and marginalized through many different social processes including stigmatization (Anderson and Snow 2001; Perry 2013 ); treatment of the homeless person while seeking housing and shelterization ( Donley et al 2012 ); urban space and distancing from homelessness ( Perry 2013 ); assumptions of addiction and deviant behavior as well as assumptions of individual responsibility for their situation through poor choices, character flaws or laziness as being primary reasons for the condition of being homeless in the United States( Kane 2010 ). While economic processes are the leading reason for homelessness in the US, few members of the population recognize this as a primary cause (Kane 2010). Identity is culturally constructed and homeless individuals are often perceived as less than human (Snow and Anderson 1993; Irvine 2012) and homeless populations often believe that they are not seen or noticed (Rew 2000).

Homeless populations are acutely aware of the stigmatizing effects of the identification of being homeless. Stigmatization and the expression of inequality for homeless people happens during everyday interaction with the general public and social patterning through such processes as the length of time they are expected to wait for services, insults, language and physical responses by others to them. Social actors have an ability to interpret the actions of others and respond to such. Homeless individuals manage, cope with and negotiate stigmatization in different ways including techniques such as verbally distancing from themselves from homeless labels and physically, by using different settings and props (Irvine 2013; Perry 2012 and Snow and Anderson 1993; Anderson and Snow 2001).

## Human Animal Relations

Over the last 20 years, scholarship on animal and human relations is increasingly prevalent as an object of study, particularly as rates of pet ownership and concern for animal welfare swells in the United States. Human and animal relationships are ever more recognized as an important aspect of personhood and human identity as well as human evolution. Shipman argues that the keeping of animals as pets should be included as one of the criteria in the distinction of being human, as humans are the only species to keep and maintain other animals for food, labor or solely as a companion. The archeological record shows that humans have interacted with dogs and began domestication of them at least 31,640 years ago in Goyet Cave in Belgium (Shipman 2011). The first evidence of dogs being brought into the house and treated as members of the human family dates to 12,000 years ago from a site in Israel in which an elderly woman was found buried with her hand on a puppy (Shipman 2011). While it has long been believed that the domestication of dogs was a selective advantage for humans in terms of hunting and protection, recent advances in technology, and an expanding archeological record have furthered the knowledge in the history and importance of domestic animals in relation to human adaptation and evolution (Shipman 2011).

Dogs in particular have played a role in social stratification throughout human history. (Sanders 1990; Gunter 1999; Greenebaum 2004; Cheang 2006; Tomba 2004). Beginning in the 1800s, dogs in Europe used for hunting were owned and showcased by the upper classes as a sign of their wealth. Dogs have been used as symbols of class and construction of identity and a way to distinguish oneself from other in various ways, including national identity and hierarchy. When considering specialized breeds of dogs and their pedigrees in both China and Britain, dogs play an important role in establishing social class (Sanders 1990; Cheang 2006). Pet ownership

is directly linked to a market economy. As pet owners raise the status of their pet to that of a family member or child, they view their pet as a reflection of themselves and construct self-image through the pet.

Business has responded and driven this increasing interest and awareness of animals in the US by providing more and more luxury items on which people can spend their money and be seen with their pet (Greenebaum 2004). In China's growing middle-class, dogs—which were once outlawed because of concerns for poverty and health—are now signs of affluence and success with the fees for specialized breeds and registration beyond the reach of China's lower socioeconomic classes (Tomba 2004). In the US, hard-to-get breeds or designer dogs are bought for hundreds or even thousands of dollars only to be neglected by owners or given to animal shelters when the caretaker reaches levels of frustration with the level of responsibility needed to maintain the animal (Irvine 2013).

While pets may be caught up in a “web of meaning” culturally in terms of status and extension of self (Sanders 1990) there is no denying that they play an important role in the lives of their owners. Irvine (2004) draws on his experience as an adoption counselor with a local humane society to discuss concepts of interaction with animals and the conception of self and personhood for humans. He describes the goals of the individuals coming into the shelter and the stages they go through in selecting an animal suitable to their personality through interaction. The primary goal of this process for the human is to establish a relationship with the animals. Relationship building with the animal included interaction with the animals involved talking to them, touching them, knowing their names, and collecting the animal's history. Irvine identifies increasing complexity in the interaction and notes differences in treatment of the animals by people who had animals throughout their life, who interacted with more and varied types of

animals to potential new adoptive owners primarily interacting with young puppies or kittens. Irvine posits that interaction, specifically symbolic interaction with animals is a means of constructing a subjective Other. In order for the Other to function in the construction of self and personhood, the Other must be similar to one's self incorporating a mind, beliefs, and needs. He argues the self-experiences consist of four things: 1) sense of agency; 2) sense of coherence; 3) affectivity and 4) history. He concludes with the argument that animals and the anthropomorphizing (or over-anthropomorphizing) of them contributes to humans self-awareness and construction of personhood through the subjective Other.

### Homeless Pet Owners

For the homeless population, animal relationships can provide a means of dealing with social isolation and stigmatization. The use of animals in construction of identity has been explored the use of redemption narratives by homeless individuals in relation to their animals (Irvine 2013; Lem et al 2013; Newton 2013; Rew 2000). Leslie Irvine has done the bulk of work in this area and found in his field work that animals provide 1) deliverance from suffering and distress; 2) encouragement of a sense of responsibility as a caretaker of the animal; 3) the animal is used in the construction of positive moral identity; 4) the construction of the animal by their owners as imagined innocents and silent watchers to regulate behavior such as recurring drug addiction; and 5) animals and their care as a reason for living. Irvine argues animals are a reason homeless individuals are motivated to change behavior. He found three redemptive narratives: 1) Animals as life changers, 2) Animals as lifesavers, and 5) Animals as the vehicle for redemption. Irvine argues that identity for these individuals is created through their interaction with animals by the redemption narratives and creation of the good self. The animals create and

are social ties for the individual and construct the individual as caring for the animal, which in turn creates their “good self.”

Pets can be useful for the homeless individual in dealing with stigmatization based on the reflections of others and become one of the coping techniques to deal with insults from others and facilitate social interaction (Irvine, et al 2012; Irvine 2013; Singer et al 1995). Pet can be used as props in the construction of the homeless individual’s construction and negotiation of their own identity through narratives on being good caretakers of their animals. Pets also encourage social interaction and become social facilitators with members of mainstream society (Irvine 2012; Rew 2000; Singer et al 1995).

Social isolation and the breakdown of familial ties is a common theme found in work done with homeless populations (Snow and Anderson 1993; Glasser 1999; Hopper 2003; Dsarjelas 1994; Dehoeven 1999). Pets and the subsequent relationship alleviate feelings of isolation, depression, addiction and feelings of loneliness (Rew 2000; Irvine 2013; Lem et al, 2013; Slatter et al 2012; Singer et al 1995). Homeless youth experience high levels of loneliness, social and emotional isolation. Loneliness is not conceptualized as a state of being alone but as “one’s awareness of being isolated from caring people” (Rew 2000; pg125). Rew conducted qualitative interviews with ten homeless or formerly homeless youth. Two themes for dealing with isolation and loneliness emerged in the course of the study: being with friends and having a pet. Rew documents the feelings for these youth and the adaptive strategies of pet ownership for youth including increased donations, feelings of unconditional acceptance and love from the pet, someone who understands them, and preference for the pet over other people due to believing the pet understood them better than would other human companions. Pets for this group also produced a sense of responsibility and routine for the youth. Rew included one physical benefit

of pet ownership, that of warmth provided by the pet in inclement weather. Rew's documentation of responsibility and routine is a practically starting point as within my sample group of informants these two factors of pet ownership were discussed repeatedly.

### Service Providers and Services

Useful critiques of the anthropology of homeless populations deal with the field of anthropology's analysis homelessness and the population provide insight into the study of homelessness as well as homeless pet owners. In particular, there are valid concerns with the representation of homeless or lower economic subpopulations as being the exoticized "other", constructed in terms of small scale societies, which has historically been the primary locus of anthropological study. To exoticize groups within Western culture fails to address the structures within the mainstream that lead to homelessness and this type of production of knowledge often fails to fully contextualize homelessness, the obstacles faced by homeless individuals and the people with whom they interact (Madden 2003; Snow and Anderson 1993; Dsarjalis 1994; Susser 1996).

Service providers determine who they believe to be worthy of services based on personal judgments made about homeless individuals. With the feminization of poverty in the 1980s and 1990s through cuts to aid programs that supported family units, women and children became the primary concern of service providers and distribution of assistance (Glasser 1999; Susser 1996). In the past, homelessness primarily affected single men but since the 1980s the numbers of women and families who are homeless have surged. Homeless men change behavior with service providers, as they are aware that service providers view them more negatively than other homeless people such as women and children (Snow and Anderson 1993; Irvine 2013).

People who are temporarily homeless due circumstances beyond their control, such as in the case of natural disasters, receive additional consideration and services from providers and the public. Lower socioeconomic groups are normally most affected by natural disasters such as hurricanes as these members of society may not have the financial means to evacuate or find temporary living arrangements during the rebuilding process. Pets become a concern for the individuals but also show the inequality of attitudes towards the chronically homeless. After Hurricane Katrina, in 2005 when large numbers of people failed to evacuate New Orleans, one of the reasons given was that they could not afford to take their pet with them. In response, provisions were made for the evacuation and financial support through the federal government's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) program for pets to be evacuated and cared for along with their owners in the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006. In the lead-up to Hurricane Sandy in 2008, announcements were made that people who needed to evacuate with pets should not stay behind with them because they could not afford to care for them (Newton 2013). Provisions have been made for victims of domestic violence when seeking shelter. Studies have shown that women and children in abusive relationships will often not leave the home due to fear for the pet and a need to leave it behind. Safe houses for this category of homeless women and families have incorporated programs to care for the pet to help in the transition from homelessness to housing (Singer, et al 1995; Irvine 2013).

Chronic or literally homeless individuals are often criticized for having pets due to the perception that homeless individuals do not have the level of responsibility, financial means, resources, or housing available to properly care for their animal (Irvine 2013; Finkelstein 2005). This was an issue for Irvine in particular, which led to his interest in the subject of pet ownership for homeless. When he first encountered a homeless man with a pet dog, his reaction was to first

try to buy the dog from the gentleman, and then when the gentleman would not take the money for the dog, he called Animal Control, as he was concerned about the welfare of the animal. When, they would not take action to remove the dog from the gentleman because it was healthy and they saw no signs of abuse, he continued to try to give the man food and water for the dog; however, the man was able to show that he had more than enough supplies for the dog.

Homeless pet owners are highly attached to their pets (Kidd 1994; Rew 2000; Singer 1995) and will refuse shelter if their pet cannot accompany them (Irvine 2013; Singer 1995; Rew 2000; Lem et al 2012). Though animal companions provide feelings of unconditional love, friendship, stabilize routine, homeless pet owners have less access to affordable housing, healthcare, social services and employment opportunities (Irvine 2013; Lem et al, 2012; Rew 2000; Singer 1995). Homeless individuals with pets who are able to find temporary employment may discontinue working when care arrangements made for their animal during work hours falls through (Lem et al 2012).

Of great concern for service providers is engagement with homeless individuals to provide supportive services, which the person may need for survival or transition into housing. However, individuals seeking service through their interactions are aware of the climate of the agency towards homeless individuals as well as the individual worker's willingness to assist them (Snow, et al 2001; Thomson et al 1998). Homeless youth for example, are more likely to engage and seek out service that they perceive to be 1) empathetic; 2) respectful; 3) pet friendly and 4) supportive (Thomson et al 1998). Service providers, as with the general public often lack insight and understanding into the lives of homeless individuals and the challenges they face on a daily basis. Social workers, despite their training and education, perceive motivation and attitude as primary to one's ability to leave the street. Even with continued education, service providers

often fail to recognize the structural, systemic, and cultural factors relevant in homelessness (Lindsey 1998).

Volunteers, who want to help homeless populations, are often unaware of the things that can be done to assist or do things that are meaningless. For example, during the yearly Point In Time count many people believe that by participating in the collection of data and quantification of homeless in the Long Beach, Ca. area they are in some way helping to solve the problem of homelessness. However, as Jocoy points out, little is done during this count to direct homeless people to important resources and services that may be available (Jocoy 2013). Despite her critique of the homeless count in Long Beach, Ca the use of volunteers from the general public may have a positive outcome for both groups involved as interaction with stereotyped or marginalized groups may lead to increased social bonds and less prejudice towards them.

## CHAPTER 4

### REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

Why people become homeless in the United States is a recurring question throughout the literature. Why people think the homeless are in the situation they experience tends to focus on out of the ordinary circumstances, which they believe could never happen to them. These circumstances include severe mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction, or beliefs that the homeless lack work ethics, have made poor decisions or simply do not trying hard enough to take care of themselves. During my fieldwork a primary question, as one of my hypotheses was that pet ownership affected the general public's perceived reason for homelessness was "How did you become homeless? What were the events that lead to this state of being for you?" Answers to these questions focused on three main themes: 1) Job Loss, 2) Disability, and 3) Lack of Social Support.

#### Job Loss

My informant Randy moved from Utah to Kansas in 2000 in order to obtain better wages as a meat cutter in Dodge City, Kansas. Having grown up with an abusive stepfather, he left home after graduating from high school. A family member told him that as a meat cutter he could make at least \$2 more per hour in Dodge City where many of the meat packing plants are located. Upon arriving in Dodge City, he found that the wages were not higher and after working in a meat packing plant for a couple of years, he was laid off due to cutbacks and modernization within the facility. On his discharge from this employment, he took a position in the construction industry working in the oil fields of Kansas. When his vehicle broke down and

he was unable to get it fixed, he lost the job, as he could not get to work. Randy scraped enough money together to buy a bus ticket to Wichita, where he heard there were additional services and more jobs. On his arrival with Trixie in tow, he took a job recycling computers, waking at 5:30 every morning to catch the city bus and working late in the evenings. His roommates at the time were in and out of jobs themselves and unable to help significantly with the rent and utilities.

Eventually, tired of paying all of the bills and not able to receive assistance from his roommates, they were evicted. As the economy of Wichita started to worsen in 2006, he lost his job recycling computers and became reliant on unemployment and subsequently homeless. A series of encounters with the legal system after becoming homeless, including an episode of self-defense while staying under a bridge with his partner, contributed to his continued state of homelessness. This event led to criminal charges and convictions, which make it difficult for him to find steady employment. Day labor can be an uncertain and often unreliable source of income as individuals and employers prey on the homeless as a cheap source of labor who are often unable to seek redress for unpaid wages. Randy experienced opportunities that often fell short of the wages promised for a full day's labor.

An additional impediment after becoming homeless is care of Trixie while he is working, as he often cannot take her with him to job sites. Having a partner and social connections can alleviate this issue of care for Trixie while he is working:

I can't take her with me when I work, so I can't always work. But, when I have my girl and now that I have Carrie, she can watch her while I'm at work. I can go out and make some money with Carrie to watch her now and take care of her. That helps, I can maybe save up for a place, there's a place with no pet deposit and I think I can afford it. A friend has some work that I can do with him. I want to work and there are guys that come to day center to pick you up for work. If I have someone to watch Trixie that day I can go, I sometimes go out of town a ways to work. But some times they've picked me up and I went about 30 miles out, I sat in the truck all day because they didn't have work for me, then they didn't pay me so I got nothing. I got back so late that I missed going to the diner for dinner and I told him, it wasn't my fault he had nothing for me. He said he

wasn't going to pay me for sitting in the truck all day. That wasn't my choice, I couldn't get back and I missed dinner and everything. That's all I get to eat. That doesn't always happen, I guess people are fair. (October, 2014)

John and Annie were over the road truckers and had experienced homelessness over a period of a decade. When John received tickets that he could not afford to pay, the company he worked for withheld the money for the tickets to pay them and to keep his CDL license valid. In paying for the lease for the truck, insurance and then the additional tickets, they had to give up their trailer in which they were living and called their home. Annie, disabled from mental health impairments and breathing difficulties moved into the truck with John, bringing her three small dogs: Beast, Hermie and Duke. The trucking company went bankrupt and let John go for financial reasons. When it came time for him to renew his license, he found that the company had not paid his tickets and his license had been suspended, making it impossible for him to return to work as a truck driver. With fines that had accumulated to over \$1000.00, Annie, John, Beast, Hermie and Duke found themselves literally homeless again. Living in a car and traveling behind a road construction crew they managed until the car broke down in town. During their period of transience, they encountered different reactions to their ownership and keeping of pets was rarely accepted and in fact, led to confrontations within the communities where they traveled. While living in their car, they would run into a store to pick up a meal having to leave the dogs in the car. As Annie explained:

I couldn't leave the car running while we went into Wal-Mart. All we were doing was running in to pick up some chicken so we'd have something to eat. I can't leave it running, we can't run the air conditioner because that takes gas and gas costs us money. We can't afford to leave it running so we ran inside and left the dogs out there. It was going to be quick; all we were doing was picking up some chicken. Somebody called the cops on us and when we got out there this lady cop was by the car, asking us about the dogs and if they were okay. She told me I could take them to the shelter, but I won't do that. I don't trust them, I worked at one and they kill the dogs. So we left [there] because they don't want us to have them. (November, 2014)

While in Wichita, they were staying in a hotel at the expense of the road construction company until their car broke down and they could not follow the company to the next location. When applying for unemployment, John was denied as the construction company indicated he was still employed with them, just not going to work so he was ineligible. By the time I met them, couch surfing at the mercy of strangers, John's depression at not being able to work or get a valid ID to work as a result of losing his driver's license had taken hold of him to the point of being unable to advocate for himself or seek care.

#### Disability

The second reason I found for homelessness was due to disabling conditions and low benefit amounts received. Payments received from Social Security and the Veteran's Administration were the primary benefits individuals received and varied in amounts from \$730.00 per month to \$1100.00 per month. These benefits are awarded based on a finding by the agency administering it that the person is unable to work because of severe physical or mental impairments. Four of my ten informants were receiving benefits based on disabling conditions and of the 70 surveys conducted with homeless participants at the Point In Time Count 47 were receiving either a Veteran's or Social Security disability benefit.

While these informants would likely qualify for housing assistance, access to or applying for these benefits was a difficult or time-consuming prospect. This is especially relevant with a pet as care for the pet was needed while they attended appointments, tried to obtain verification of benefits or due to increased housing deposits for pets that were not paid by housing programs. Applying for housing assistance for disabled individuals was further frustrated by difficulties

with obtaining verification of benefits due to the person not having a mailing address. Further they would need to access and have skills to utilize computer applications. The internet and limited access to phone services they had, as well as finding care for the pet while they were inside area agencies accessing internet or phone resources, created barriers to doing applications on their own. Although all of my informants had cell phones which were issued to them through the Federal Government, a program designed to assist low-income families and individuals in better communication to look for employment or access services, these phones had limited minutes per month. Often to speak with agencies or employers, their hold time or need to make multiple phone calls to inquire about services often potentially used all of their minutes without results.

I attempted to access a program for housing for which I knew several of my homeless pet owners would qualify. During a meeting earlier in the week, I received the announcement that the program was still funded and currently taking applications. Funds for the program were limited and as a result restrictions were placed on the qualifications. This program was available to persons who met one of the following criteria: 1) over age 60 or 2) disabled or 3) family with 2 or more children. The program could pay outstanding debts for utilities so that new utility services could be established, rental deposits and up to five months of rent and utilities as the individual or family or individual transitioned into permanent housing. In order to qualify, a person must have proof of income to show that after the five months they could continue to pay their bills on their own and the likelihood that they would remain housed was great. While pet deposits were not funded, two of my informants who were eligible based on disability and having a stable continual income in the form of public benefits had located housing that did not include a pet deposit.

Curious to see what my informants would encounter, I called the first agency that I knew had oversight on this funding. I was advised that the program did not exist presently that they were aware of, however, I could try a second number and double check that information. Upon calling the second number and being put on hold multiple times, I was again told that they did not think this was an operational program any longer but I could try a third number and was assured this was the correct number to call to find out if the program was still operational as they had administered this program in the past. On calling the third number, having been on the phone for approximately one hour, the receptionist advised me this program was no longer in place but I could talk to another contact she had. Frustrated, I identified myself and asked to speak with the program administrator in the office, whom I knew and had made the announcement about the program's continued existence earlier in the week.

As she and I discussed the difficulties I had in locating her and the program, I do not believe she knew that homeless individuals and families would have so much difficulty in locating her or applying for the program. However, when I asked how to instruct my informants to apply for this program, she advised me that they would have to apply through their internet application which they would have need to access at either the public library or homeless day center. As none of them had the ability to leave their pets, I asked if there was another process for them and she indicated that there was not. Despite their eligibility for this program and finding housing that did not require a pet deposit, none were able to access this program or apply on their own without assistance and advocacy or without a caretaker for their pet while they went into the library or day center to access computers and internet services. Further complications arose for the three that did try to make arrangements for the application as they were not able to hold on the phone long enough or travel by city bus to timely verify their income through the

Social Security Administration as they did not have a caretaker for their pet while they went into these agencies.

These types of frustrations, lack of communication and lengthy wait times were also observed with my homeless pet owner, Gerald, who was receiving disability through the VA. Gerald applied for a HUD-VASH voucher, which could help him with deposits, rent for up to six months and utilities. He first applied for this program when I was made aware that it was re-funded in November 2014. After calling the contact provided, an appointment with her was scheduled. He spoke with his psychiatrist about taking his dog into housing with him and she was supportive, offering to write a letter to have his pet deposit waived. Gerald had been told five months previously that he possibly had lung cancer and was patiently waiting for a follow up appointment for diagnosis. The acquisition of his dog, Buddy, made him interested in life again and according to his VA psychiatrist had helped to improve some of his psychiatric symptoms as well as become more assertive in following up for testing and treatment of the possible lung cancer. Although he had in September 2014 renewed his Veteran's identification, was receiving a VA pension based on his disabilities and regularly received medical care at the VA, he was required to have a copy of his military discharge paperwork (DD-214). This had been lost when he traded one vehicle he was living in for another more reliable vehicle. An outside agency in December helped him to get a new copy of this form for the VA's purposes. At his second appointment, his wait to be seen was over an hour, even though the appointment had been previously scheduled. Calls made to check on the status of his voucher were not returned and he sought a voucher through an alternate agency on my suggestion. At a later scheduled appointment with VA housing, he was advised 30 minutes after checking in with the receptionist, that the representative he was to meet with was not in the office that day.

On discussion with Gerald about these events and the current initiatives to help homeless veterans with housing he told me:

Why would they think I want anything to do with the VA? They don't call me back they don't see me when they're supposed to. I drive all the way out there and spend my time and money to get there and no one calls me back. They never call me back. This last time, I drove all the way out there and I'm supposed to be with my sick brother [he was currently in hospice receiving end of life treatment]. It's a long ways out there, it's like you, you plan a trip all the way to South Dakota [we had recently been discussing a trip of mine], you've got so much gas and if you run out you can't go the rest of the way. Gas costs money and I have to plan my trips for the month, so if I go out there then there's another trip I can't make that I need to. (March, 2015)

Living on a fixed limited income, such as disability payments are one of the primary reasons people give for homelessness. Although they may be eligible for programs to help them with housing, utilities or food assistance, accessing these programs can be difficult to access and further complicated when considering the care of the pets during appointment times.

### Lack of Social Support

From all of my informant's history there is undercurrent of social relationships that have disintegrated or are not viable options as a means of support. All of my informants came from backgrounds in which they identified abuse, alcoholism, mental illness or financial instability. While some of my informants maintained that they kept in contact with or visited family, in these situations they made clear that their family members were not financially stable enough nor did they have the resources to assist them but only occasionally. In my fieldwork, several of my informants were allowed to stay at the same house by a gentleman who is known to take in Wichita's homeless for a limited period of time over the winter months. Specifically, the homeowner told me it was because he just could not let people "freeze to death" and three of the homeless informants I worked with couch surfed with him during my fieldwork. Two of them I

met at his residence and a third couch surfer, Rene had a cat; however, she was excluded from my fieldwork due to continuing severe psychological and addiction problems, which inhibited her ability to meaningfully answer my questions.

It should be noted that this can be a dangerous situation for both the individual allowing the person to stay in their home as well as dangerous for the homeless individual coming into the home for needed shelter. As one informant told me though, “having a place to stay was worth the risk.” Other occupants at the house made it clear to me that there was nothing sexual or illicit about his tendency to bring home homeless individuals in the community and let them stay with him. He also indicated that he felt like this was good for him as his disabilities often made it difficult for him to socialize and his inclination was to isolate, which made him worse psychologically.

I also discovered while doing fieldwork, several of my informants were related to each other. In particular was Angela and Dawn, both of whom had cats. Dawn was currently homeless due to a domestic violence situation and had taken her cat with her. Angela was her grandmother and she also had a cat. Angela had been homeless off and on for approximately 20 years. Dawn was with Angela and her husband, waiting for her mother to come from Missouri to Wichita to pick her up. Dawn had already surrendered her six-year old child to her mother and her mother was only willing to take in Dawn after the domestic violence event. Dawn had traveled from Tulsa, Oklahoma where she had a dog to Wichita, Kansas. She was unable to transport the dog with her on the bus and surrendered him to the humane society in Oklahoma when she traveled to Kansas to meet up with her grandmother at which time she took in her cat.

At one point, my informant Randy was offered a place to stay by a long-term acquaintance and couple who also had been homeless with pets in the past. I assisted him in

gathering his belongings, which they had stashed in different locations throughout the city and took him there after the low-income vet clinic. Assistance had been offered by the couple as they had seen the rescue agency's request for assistance on Facebook for his dog's surgery. Post-surgery, the dog had multiple stitches, a collar of shame to keep her from scratching her wounds and needed to rest. For her recovery and to have a place to stay, Randy accepted. The small house was without furniture and on one occasion, when I arrived, without utilities. On one particular day, it was their 6 year old's birthday and as his mother said "I can't get enough together to have the lights on for his birthday, but I've scraped enough together to get him a cake. We're going to celebrate something!"

After a month of visiting him there, transporting him downtown to do laundry at the day center and a last trip downtown, during which his dog was picked up by animal control and his girlfriend suffered stress fractures in her back and was hospitalized, he was kicked out of his friend's place for failure to help with their bills. A week later, when I took him to pick up his stuff, which included all of his clothing, identification, and valuable items, he found they had discarded it all or sold it. Later I found out they had been evicted and were homeless again as well, with both of their dogs.

While this is an unfortunate event for all of the parties involved, it speaks to the delicate balance of homelessness and the precarious situation in which my informants often found themselves in regard to family relationships which had dissolved or with social connections on the margins of homelessness themselves. With limited ability to access resources through area agencies, homeless pet owners were often at the mercy of others and couch surfing carried with it intense emotions and drastic outcomes which could result in being tossed out on the street.

Annie and John, unable to access benefits, services or shelter due found themselves in just this situation. After a period of working with Annie and John for three months, on a cold January morning before dawn, Annie called me to inform me that she, John and the dogs would have to leave where they were staying. While all of the details of what had transpired were unclear to me and they did not want to discuss it in any detail, I picked the couple up along with their three dogs. They brought with them only the things that they could reasonably carry and pack on her wheelchair. She asked that I take care of two of their dogs for a little while until they could find another place to stay. She indicated that she could not be without all of them and kept her dog Beast, who had been with her for nine years and would alert her husband when she was having a seizure. They asked that I drop them off in front of the local soup kitchen so they could get something to eat and possibly find a shelter where they could stay. They left with me their two items of value, a car jack and Garth Brook CD set asking that I sell it for whatever I could as they would have difficulty carrying these two items with them.

With sleeping bags, dog food and warm clothes in tow they set off down the street, never to be seen again. A week later, unable to reach them and having had no communication with them, I heard from my other informant who had also been couch surfing at this residence. He had not heard from them either and needed to reach them as he had their mail and had loaned them what little money he had. I explained I had not heard from them either and I could not continue to keep the dogs. Two weeks later they called to tell me that they had left Wichita as they had found a ride out of town and were heading south to possibly find work and be with people they knew. They had been squatting at an abandoned building in Wichita for the better part of a week, when she was arrested and taken to jail. On her release they left Wichita with their last dog in tow. She wanted me to know that whatever I needed to do with the dogs was

okay, that she wasn't a bad person and that she really did not want to give them up but felt like she could no longer take care of all three of them.

Annie and John had family, including an adult daughter who were not in a position to take them in and house them during this period of unemployment because of her own financial issues and family responsibilities. During the time I worked with them, various friends and family members would send them \$20 when they could; however, in January she had advised me that no one could send her any more money to help at the place she was staying.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

Several themes emerged from the interviews including themes concerning trust when homeless individuals interacted with other members of the community, pet ownership and the construction of identity, how owning pets relieved feelings of loneliness and the physical benefits of having a pet on the street. These themes illustrate not only how the communities interact but also show the ways in which the human-animal relationship impact this interaction and construction of identity for the homeless pet owner. Further, themes selected show the functional uses of the pet in identity construction and physical adaptation.

#### Issues of Trust

A common theme found among many homeless pet owners is that of people in the larger community stealing their animals from them, many trying to “rescue” them, buy them or confiscation and euthanization by the police. Informant’s described criticism by the general public or having other people tease or torture of their animals when they have to leave them outside while they are in a business to conduct necessary activities. Being a homeless owner of a pet can be a hazardous label for many of these individuals due to the perceived and real risk of loss of the pet.

When I explained what my research entailed one participant Randy, became defensive and his first assumption about me was that I was going to take his dog, Trixie, away from him. He recently had been contacted and pursued by a local animal rescue group who wanted to take Trixie from him in order to get her medical care. She was in need of veterinary care, having a

large tumor in her mammary gland. Randy was extremely concerned after he had experienced Trixie's mother's death from breast cancer and was unable to pay for treatment. This promise of care for his closest and most loyal companion was tempting for him, having just lost one of her puppies to unknown causes and again not being able to access care. The puppy had just died a week before I met him after getting sick and was unable to eat or drink. Trixie's promised care came with the price of turning her over to the rescue group where she would no longer be with her caretaker of eleven years. Randy found out later that the rescue group had used his and Trixie's picture and Trixie's medical care needs as a fund raising tactic after he refused to give her up and declined their offer.

This is not a unique experience. I heard stories of animals protecting their owners only to be euthanized by the police or of people who had stolen animals from homeless individuals in order to rescue them from their life on the street. Part of this was due to the owner's inability to financially obtain necessary care and licensing while it was also attributed to ongoing harassment by the police and general public. Aaron specifically had this story to tell:

While I was out, under the bridge, I had Chester. There was the cop that was always bothering me, he didn't like me. You know they don't like you, they don't want you there. Anyway, this lady came up to me and was like 'Oh, is that your dog?' She was trying to talk to me and then her husband came up and he kicked me. I was trying to sleep and he starts in on I'm homeless and no good, this and that. They always know you're homeless. He kicks me and Chester is trying to protect me, he's just a little dog. Chester gets upset and barks, bites him. Then the lady starts screaming 'your dog bit my husband' and they leave and come back with this police officer. And I know, I know he doesn't like me and I can't get Chester's shots or anything like that, so the police officer gives me a ticket and takes Chester away. They put him to sleep. Then, on top of the ticket they send me a bill for \$80 for putting him to sleep. It's just wrong how they treat you, they always know when you're homeless. (October, 2014)

Irvine discusses in his work (2010, 2003) his difficulty in accessing the homeless community who are owners of pets. This partially can be attributed to their inability to access services. For

example, I found owners of pets do not access shelter services as the owners know they cannot take their pet with them into shelter, which makes them more difficult to find and engage.

Homeless pet owners often do not seek medical care or utilize services such as the day shelter as they lack resources for care of their animals during times of separation. However, the combination of negative treatment of the individual, fear of loss and fear for the animal's safety contribute to the lack of trust this population has for the general public and service providers.

Of further concern is the issue of unsocialized animals and animals that have behavioral issues. Perceptions among service providers and in fact, the first comment I received when contacting the Wichita-Sedgwick County Continuum of Care Team to present and receive support for this project was "What do we do with all these unsocialized animals?"

Unsocialized animals in particular are at risk of being taken from their owners, which causes distress and further distrust of society in general for the homeless individual who sees the animal as their only friend and companion in a lonely and forbidding environment.

One gentleman, Roger had such an unsocialized dog, Bella, who bit me. Roger had moved to Wichita from a rural area to be closer to services such as food, housing and medical care only to find that because of his dog's temperament, he was unable to easily access these services. He was in need of psychiatric services, food assistance and housing—all of which he was eligible for due to his source of income from Social Security. He could not access these programs because of fear of leaving his pet or leaving her with someone while he attended appointments. Both Roger and I made efforts to acclimate her to me as he realized her aggression was a hindrance to him accessing services and he asked me to help. During our second meeting, when trying to make friends with her through use of a bag of beef jerky, she bit me—drawing blood. Roger explained that an outreach worker on Broadway had also tried to

make friends with her but had used less caution than I had. Bella had bitten the worker on the face when she had bent down to pet her. Roger worried about having Bella taken away, avoided public spaces and paid high amounts to rent a room at a weekly motel so he would have a place for her stay when he needed to do necessary business. But, as she continued to urinate in the room and tear up the mattress, he soon feared that he would no longer be allowed to stay there. In order to assist Roger in getting back on his required psychiatric medications, the dog had to be muzzled and I assisted with him doing this and took them to the clinic to wait with her while he was inside.

Roger was uncomfortable with separation from Bella and when housing for which he was eligible was offered to him, he refused as she would need to go into foster care during the transition. He was very concerned about her behavior, which had changed on their arrival in Wichita, as she was not familiar with a larger urban area according to him. Part of his refusal was because of the fact he feared she would be euthanized due to her behavioral issues and because without Bella he was afraid to sleep specifying his reliance on her for companionship and emotional support. As Roger told me at the beginning of our work together “she is all I have left” and he could not bear the thought of losing her.

In addition to fear of losing their animals, homeless individuals are often criticized for having their pets by service providers and the general public. They describe what they think others feel about their owning a pet while living on the street as irresponsible, cruel or inhumane to the animal or they feel they are otherwise identified as a “bad person” (see also Irvine 2013; Snow and Anderson 1993). Their animals are often stolen, confiscated or taken by people who believe they are doing the best thing for both the person and the animal by relieving the person of the “burden” of having to care for the animal and to help the animal escape what they perceive to

be cruel circumstances. One service provider when discussing my research asked me “They do realize they are abusing the animal, don’t they?” When further questioned in what way he perceived the animal to be abused, he indicated “By not keeping them safe, indoors or they’re in a carrier all the time without attention.” While my perspective may differ from this service provider based on my fieldwork and a recurrent theme of homeless individuals feeling sorry for animals who were kept caged all the time, these kinds of preconceptions can impact how one is able to engage with and interact with homeless pet owners. Angela illustrates vividly how these types of interactions with service providers and the general public impacted her decisions regarding her pets:

I’ve had people come up to me and go “You’re homeless, why do you have a pet? You shouldn’t be allowed to have a pet while you’re homeless. Get a place, get a job, get off the street. Do something for yourself. “And, it’s like if I could- I would. It’s not like I want to be here. I’m here because I have to be, no one will rent to me. When I first came to Wichita I had never been to Kansas before so for me being here in Kansas, I spent a year and half outside. Through the heat, through the winter and people tend to tell you “Well you can’t take care of the animal, just give him to me and I’ll give him a good home or give him to the humane society. Somebody better than you can take care of him. You need to provide him with a home. (October 2014)

During her 20 years on the street, Angela has had two dogs and presently is caring for a cat, Cuddles, which adopted her and her husband while they were staying on the street and moving between boarding houses. In her periods of homelessness, one dog was stolen and after staying a period of time in a motel with another dog, she elected to surrender him to the humane society as she believed someone else could take care of her dog better than she could.

Losing as Randy did or giving up an animal can be a traumatic experience for someone with whom all social connections have been lost as in the case with homelessness. For Angela after giving up her second dog to the humane society when she evicted, she was convinced this was the more responsible thing to do, but she experienced severe grief at the loss of her dog.

It's like having your heart ripped out of you. Something is there and it loves you, it's a reason for living. Then it's gone and your heart is gone, just ripped out of you and all that is left is an empty place. There's nothing there anymore. I miss him, I still miss him every day. I thought it would be better for him. I was told it would be better for him and I'm sure he was adopted, they found him a good home but I still miss him. He loved me. (October, 2014)

Snow and Anderson (1993) contend that criticism and distrust of service providers can be part of positive identity formation and can be understood in the context of homelessness through a form of distancing from the homeless label. In particular they discuss "institutional distancing" which is a role distancing technique that involved "the derogation of the caretaker agencies that attended to the needed of the homeless" (Snow and Anderson 1993; pg. 217-218). Arguably distancing oneself from institutional settings of homelessness through constructing service providers in a derogatory fashion can be a way to assert a more individualized and responsible self. In the case of homeless pet owners, I argue that distrust of agencies and the interactions between homeless pet owners and the general public needs to be viewed within the reality of that social relationship. There are negative consequences of pet ownership including theft, euthanization and criticism for this group in particular.

### Making the Invisible Seen

The homeless community within Wichita is a complicated set of social relations, which includes relationships within the homeless community and relationships with different service providers. I found pet owners in particular were noticeable and recognizable because of the pet. Although homelessness is a visible sign of poverty, the feelings of invisibility that come with the state of homelessness is addressed and documented and these feelings of invisibility were also expressed by my informants (See also Hopper 1993; Lem 2013; Rew 2000). When I first began

this research, I was directed to one gentleman in particular by several people who had noticed him and knew that he had a dog. I first met his dog Trixie and his girlfriend, who gave me his phone number to contact him. Later in the day, while speaking with people in front of the local soup kitchen, I was again directed to him and his dog Trixie. Over the weekend, I received correspondence from a colleague who knew I was working on this project, describing the gentleman's dog. Interestingly after I had been working with him for a month, another colleague of mine, while walking in the park, ran into him after he had lost her and was calling for her. He was yet again directed me to me as a homeless owner of a pet.

Randy describes the recognition he has in relation to Trixie. His girlfriend also indicates that she is known and recognized when with the white liver spotted spaniel; however, both relate that when she is not with them—she might be with a friend of theirs for a while, sleeping or when she was at the vets—people who they believe should know them such as case workers, other members of the homeless community or social workers were unable to recognize or place who they are without the dog. Trixie became a distinct identifier for the couple, without her—they were unrecognizable—other people on the street do not know them, other members of the service community with whom they interact do not recognize them either but with her—they became visible to others.

This is significant in terms of identity for the homeless individual. For a group of people who see themselves as “invisible” or “treated as if they do not exist” having the distinction of an animal with them brings them to the forefront of other's peoples mind and makes the invisible seen. During my fieldwork I had an opportunity to speak with a caseworker from an area agency who did street outreach to the homeless and assisted them with accessing services by verifying their homeless status or referring them for housing, food assistance, medical care or legal

services. I indicated to this caseworker, with whom I knew Randy interacted regularly, that I was also working him. The team member did not know who I was talking about and was puzzled that he could not figure out to whom I was referring. I, in turn was puzzled as he had recently intervened on Randy's behalf with the police department, when he was asked to leave the bridge under which he, his girlfriend and Trixie were camping. They had been asked to leave prior to a public event in the downtown area and were threatened with tickets and removal of all of their possessions to the trash. Randy, not wanting to lose all of his belongings, meager as they might be, was relieved when the caseworker was able to convince the police officer to give them a day to move their belongings and vacate the bridge under which they were staying.

Particularly interesting in this was the caseworker's reliance on his knowledge and interaction with Randy in pleading his case with the police officer but failure to know him without the dog being described. The caseworker had offered to take the dog from Randy for a period of time to help him get into housing and would return her when he was back on his feet and stable, so to speak. The caseworker had offered to take her personally for a period of up to seven months to give Randy plenty of time for adjustment to housing and to find a steady source of employment. Randy refused this offer of assistance. When I described Randy to the caseworker, he did not know who I was speaking about, yet when I described Trixie to him, he was then able to easily recognize and could identify my informant.

In a similar situation was my informant Roger, who had been staying on the street with his dog Bella. Roger and Bella came to Wichita from a rural area of Kansas in hopes of receiving better services including housing and medical care. When describing Roger, he was unrecognizable, not only to other service providers who might interact with him as he did utilize a limited amount of services when he was able to afford to stay in a motel that allowed pets. He

could leave her safely in the room while he went to wash or get clothes, get a meal at the local soup kitchen or go to a church for services such as a food bank or money. His income came from Social Security and, based on my conversations with him, he indicated that he had schizophrenia and bi-polar affective disorder. This man, while certainly fearful in the larger urban area of Wichita, had tried to apply for services and had interacted with other homeless individuals on the street who had referred him to services such as the local outreach team, mental health clinics, day center, and the soup kitchen. Despite his interactions, no one knew who he was unless Bella was described to them.

The above speaks to a larger issue I found in my fieldwork. Despite my indication that this was an anthropological study—a study of humans—the emphasis and interest for many of the service providers and general public when questioned was not about the homeless human but was instead focused on the homeless pet.

### Pet Ownership and Identity

During my fieldwork, pets were used to negotiate a positive self-identity for their owners through the creation of, in Irvine's term a "moral self" (Irvine 2013). The two primary themes of identification that homeless pet owners described were labels of irresponsibility and cruelty to the animal. Informants and participants were able to negotiate these negative labels and stigmas associated with homelessness, through their relationship with the pet. They were able to tell me what they thought the term "homelessness" meant for most people and what they themselves often believed including meanings associated with the label such as loser, irresponsible, lazy, drunk, addict, prostitute, criminal and dirty. All of my informant's indicated that when they

encountered people from the general public, they felt that they were being judged negatively, unduly criticized, harassed by others or looked down upon.

Within the context of pet ownership, all of my informants were criticized or accused of not properly taking care of their pet by others at one time or another. They all indicated that with the general public there was a mixed response to having a pet with them; however, more often indicated that if there was an interest in them or their well-being it was associated with the well-being of the pet. Randy indicated that on many occasions he would be stopped by authorities and people in the area who would always say “you better be taking care of that dog. You got food and water for it?” He took this as an accusation that he was not caring for her, even though each time he was stopped by the same person he would show him the water bottle, food bag, treats and supplies such as flea and tick shampoo he carried with him. Randy estimated that Trixie’s backpack and supplies alone weighed approximately 25 lbs. and with his three packs, he regularly carried 125 lbs. on his back all day long.

For him, Trixie is a responsibility and his friend. He has had her since she was a puppy and had both of her parents. The care he took of those two dogs, who lived to be 15 and 19 years old respectively and Trixie, who is currently 11, provides him with a sense of pride and accomplishment both in how well he takes care of her and her training. For him, being a responsible pet owner and caretaker is significantly intertwined with his identity.

Trixie also provides for him a sense of routine, which is also significant in Rew’s findings for homeless youth. Randy describes long meandering days, needing to move constantly from one place in town to another due to anti-camping laws designed to inhibit the homeless from squatting in parks, under bridges and on abandoned property. These days can drag with nothing for him to do except hang out in front of the day center, walk to a local agency

for lunch and walk to the soup kitchen for dinner before everyone else gets there as he is not allowed to eat with the others. Trixie keeps him in a routine, which he feels, is normalizing and gives him something to do and be as a “good pet owner.”

I have to take care of her. I have to make sure she has food, she has water and gets to play. When I’m bored, there she is. I can throw the ball for her and she’s happy. She knows when I’m sad too. She comes up to me and snuggles up and loves me until I start to feel better. But she’s like that for everyone out here, everyone out here takes care of her and when we’re in front of the day center and we need something to do, we know we can throw the ball and she’ll go get it. And everyone gives her their food, she gets everyone’s food. Ice cream, sandwiches, whatever they have they give it to her. She’s kind of fat. She’d be fatter but I get her a lot of exercise. (October, 2015)

Randy has been told that he is cruel by people of the general public and animal rescue groups for keeping her outside. As he explains after one of his interaction with a local rescue group:

They say ‘you can’t take care of her, you can’t give her the home or vet services she needs’ then they offer to help but they don’t do it. They say ‘we’ll rescue her’ but she doesn’t need rescuing she doesn’t need a home, she has one with me. I take care of her. Then they ask if I need food for her, ‘is she hungry?’ and they give me food, even after I tell them I don’t need food for her, I have food. She needs a vet but she doesn’t need rescued from me. This is what they think is cruel, that’s exactly what they think, that I’m cruel ‘cuz I have her outside or I can’t get her to the vet or that I’m not feeding her. (December, 2014).

Pets and the constant companionship and time spent with them is also used as a way to negotiate negative criticism into construction of positive self-identity for homeless individuals. For example, Annie told me that she had often been told that she was a “bad person” and a bad person for having her dogs or leaving them in the car. She negotiated this “bad” label as follows:

People tell me I’m bad, that I’m bad for being homeless or I’m bad for having the dogs or I’m bad for leaving them in the car when I have to. I’m not bad, I need them, Beast helps me, he knows when I’m sick or about to have a seizure. He’s woken John up in the night and he’s saved my life waking John up when I was having a seizure. You know what I tell them? They’re little dogs, I can feed them for \$5 a month—they hardly eat anything—I tell them they’re bad. They’re bad people for leaving their dogs in the cages and home alone all day. That’s abuse, they’re the bad people. I rescued Duke and Hermie from a home where I was staying, they beat him and threw him (Duke) against

the wall and broke his back. They didn't care about him, they're the bad people. I'm with my babies all the time. They are my babies. (November, 2014)

In addition to personal identity, I argue that pet owners see themselves as having a constructed social identity within which social process of group pressure, acceptable social behavior, and norms can be found. My informant Randy and I were talking one day and during this conversation the subject of another homeless pet owner he and I had both encountered came up. Once I realized who they were, Randy informed me that he had offered to work with Bella in an effort to help both and Roger when they met outside of the day center. According to Randy, he was worried about both of them as Roger was "unsociable and would not take assistance from anyone." He had further concerns about Bella as she was "high strung" and because of her "aggressive nature." Roger and Bella were very difficult to approach according to Randy but "the problem was not Bella, it was Roger" as he did not want to talk to anybody.

Another informant, Gerald also offered to help the two of them. While Gerald was homeless, he did have the benefit of a camper in a back alley as well as a vehicle where Roger and Bella could possibly stay. Disturbed that she had bitten me and that I was traveling to meet him at his hotel one evening after dark, Gerald inserted himself into the situation demanding that he be allowed to come along and "see if he could help the guy and work with the dog" as he had trained other dogs in the past. With a call to Roger and his approval, Gerald was allowed to come with me as I went to visit and check on the two of them. Bella loved Gerald immediately and they easily got along (Gerald did not even have beef jerky). As a result, arrangements were made for Roger and Bella (muzzled for safety) to go to the much needed psychiatric appointment with Gerald and his dog along to watch Bella while this occurred. Upon our arrival that morning, Roger panicked at having someone watch Bella other than me, he feared for her safety and the

safety of the other dog. Gerald and Buddy went home while I sat outside the clinic and waited for Roger, an approximate 3 hour wait.

Both Randy and Gerald were highly concerned about Bella, the little white dog with a temper and asked me about her often, “is she getting better,” “does she do better now with other people,” as well as having the concern over both Roger and Bella’s ability to adapt within the local homeless community. Both Gerald and Randy were very concerned that Bella had bitten both me and an outreach worker, fearing what would happen had she bitten the wrong person and taken from Roger. Of further concern for both of them would be the ways in which Roger and Bella’s unsociable and unwillingness to interact, adapt and behave properly would impact them and their identity as homeless pet owners. Their efforts to assist Roger with Bella’s behavior directly impacted their own identification and concerns over being associated with a homeless owner of a pet who they felt was not good influence on the dog’s behavior.

#### Alleviating Feelings of Loneliness

Although not a primary question within my research, it cannot be ignored the strong feelings of unconditional love and friendship homeless pet owners described as a result of the relationship. Living at the margins of society and finding that most interactions with the general public can be harmful to one’s perception of self, riddled with judgement and criticism for the state of being homeless is a difficulty all of my informant’s encountered. Pets are source of feelings of unconditional love, acceptance and non-judgment. When interviewing informants about their relationship with their pet, this was a primary theme they discussed and on surveys, all respondents indicated that pets made them feel loved, accepted and did not let them down or judge them when other people did. Angela explained to me her relationships and feelings

towards her pet after living years on and off the street as well as the differences in how people treated her with an animal:

The dogs made me feel really happy really loved. It's a friendship you don't have when you're out here. That a lot of people, when you're homeless, they look down on you but with the dog he was never judgmental. They never were judgmental towards me, they actually helped me through my depression. They were my one source of comfort and joy. They were very special dogs to me and I miss them. When I first became homeless in Seattle I was 17 years old, people looked down their nose at you, they treat you differently, kind of like, it's kind of like they see—okay an adult that has a dog—then they have their own house their own place to stay and they see you every day on the streets, see you there begging for change so you can get something to eat, otherwise they stick their nose up in the air like they don't see you there. They treat you badly, and um, it's not very nice. (September, 2014)

When I asked about differences in treatment when she had a pet on the street, she indicated there were differences in treatment. While some people would assist her because of the animal others became quite critical,

When I had an animal, they treated me like a little more respect, they're like "Oh yes, she's homeless but she's taking care of an animal so they'll then go ahead and give you change to get dog food. If you have a pet any kind of a pet whether it's a cat or a dog, they'll try to help you out more, they're a little more um, forgiving if you will. They're more able or willing to help you out with change to get your animal taken care of. (September, 2014)

Animal companionship for the homeless individual carries with it the very real possibility of criticism or other negative consequences. Despite this, the feelings of loneliness and being outside of society can be mitigated through an animal companion which provides for the person a sense of acceptance and understanding as well as result in social interaction with other people that may not happen normally in their state of being (see also Irvine 2013).

## Physical Adaptation

On the street my informants advised me animals help with physical adaptation and survival with inclement weather such as cold and snow and an alarm for protection in uncertain circumstances. I found two primary themes of physical adaptation for the homeless pet owners: 1) Increased warmth in the winter months and 2) personal protection.

Gerald, who lives in a car or in a camper—depending on what he has at any given time—appreciates his dog Buddy's increased body temperature. A dog's body temperature at 102 degrees is several degrees higher than the human body temperature of 98.6 and can provide needed warmth during the winter months (see also Rew 2000; Finkelstein 2005). This increased heat production in an enclosed environment such as a car, camper or sleeping bag can make a difference of several degrees. Gerald, in preparation for the coming months had tried several heating techniques such as candles and terra cotta pots as well as space heaters supplied with electricity from a nearby home to heat his camper in the coming winter months. He had to pay the neighbor he ran an extension cord from for electric each month and in an effort to reduce his expenses was trying other methods. Gerald was able to obtain Buddy in October as the months were starting to get cooler. He remarked to me one day about how hot the camper became once Buddy was in there sleeping with him and indicated he did not need to use the heater or use the neighbor's electricity nearly as much.

With Buddy in there with me, it's hot now. He crawls in under the covers and with all his moving around, my camper is at least 1-2 degrees warmer which makes all the difference. I told you the story about a three-dog night, right? (November, 2014)

Similarly, Randy also explained the benefit of Trixie's increased warmth when sleeping under the bridge in a snowstorm:

It was last year or so when we got the really big snows. She and I and my girlfriend had a low temp sleeping bag and under the bridge here, we all just crawled in. She went down to our feet and curled up- nice and warm. We pulled the sleeping bag up over our head and when we woke up in the morning we were covered with about 5 inches of snow but we were warm, we were fine. (January, 2015)

Personal protection was another acknowledged feature and benefit of having an animal on the street which I was told about by all of my informants. Gerald in particular, had been looking for a dog for several weeks when I met him. His primary reason for wanting the dog, aside from friendship, was the security of having a dog with him while staying in a camper and needing to walk the streets of Wichita in the middle of the night to access the restroom or take care of other needs. Gerald, at 62 years old, had difficulty with his hips and knees and at times needed a cane to ambulate. A recent event in the downtown area in which a homeless gentleman had been severely beaten prompted Gerald to act and take in the boxer. According to Gerald after he brought Buddy home, he felt safer and was less anxious at night as Buddy would warn him should someone approach his camper while he was sleeping. Lack of sleep impacted all of my informant's however, they did indicate that they were better able to sleep as a result of the pet as they were more easily able to relax (though not completely) as they relied on the animal to alert them when possible danger was approaching.

Randy as well indicated that he would not feel safe sleeping outside on the street without Trixie. He also felt more confident leaving his girlfriend on her own when he left Trixie with her. Carrie explained that when Randy was gone, Trixie became quite protective of her:

I really don't feel safe on my own, but Randy has to do things and when he leaves, he leaves Trixie with me. She barks when people come up to me, then she doesn't do that as much with Randy around. It's not always great though... (to Randy) remember that girl last week? The one who was trying to give me a dollar? She started barking at her and I couldn't get her to stop, I'm like "don't do that! She's trying to give me a dollar! And, she wouldn't listen. It was embarrassing. (October, 2014)

Protection is a primary reasons dogs are kept on the street. Of the 23 respondents with pets who completed surveys at the Point In Time Count, all of the 16 dog owners indicated that their pets provided protection. This should not be surprising as dogs are often used for protection whether the person is homeless or domiciled as their barking can provide a warning system for intruders.

More surprising to me, having cats myself, were the descriptions of cats on the street acting as protectors and warning systems for people while sleeping or in unsecure locations when squatting or couch surfing where people coming and going could not always be trusted. Dawn, Angela and Lori all described paying attention to their cat's alert systems while they were sleeping. Dawn describes this as follows:

When she curls up and sleeps with me, she's right under my chin. I had dogs when I was in Tulsa and they slept with me too. But she curls right up under my chin and if someone comes and I need to be careful she puts her claws in me, stiffens or hisses and that wakes me up. So I know that I need to wake up and be careful. (September, 2014)

These alert systems can make a difference in surviving on the street according to my informants and particularly for my female informants who indicated they believed there were higher rates of rape and abuse of women on the streets (see also Glasser 1999).

### Service Providers

You know Teresa, you just told me one unique story about the people you are working with and it matters. I understand it. I hear hundreds of unique stories of homelessness every month, every time a family or person comes in here, I hear a unique story. (December, 2014)

The service providers I spoke with during my fieldwork came from many different agencies that served the homeless throughout the Wichita area. I found a separation between their willingness to help the homeless pet owners and the perceptions of the homeless pet owners and the agency

staff. Service providers varied in their answers on availability of services for homeless pet owners and access to shelter specifically. In speaking with service providers about the issue of homeless pet owners, the primary themes found for not be able to provide services while the individual kept the pet with them were 1) feelings and well-being of others without pets seeking services; 2) health concerns; 3) destruction to property; 4) safety of other shelter residents and 5) the homeless individual needs to focus on themselves to get out of their situation and not on an animal.

Shelter services I found are avoided by homeless pet owners for a variety of reasons including separation from their pet, feelings that their pet is not welcome, criticisms for having a pet or pressure to be “responsible” and surrender the pet to an area shelter or rescue group. Within my group of informants, I did not identify or have the opportunity to work with a family with children who may seek services at any of the shelters located in Wichita. Homelessness can be traumatic on children and have a lasting impact on the psychological health of the child. Further trauma occurs in this situation when the child is forced to give up a family pet due to homelessness according to shelter staff. Service providers for homeless families with children, I talked with had experiences of discovering dogs or cats locked in cars while the family went into shelter services. They also told stories of finding dogs chained down an alley and around the block from the shelter in order for the family to keep and continue to interact with the pet while they were sheltered. Shelter providers also had experiences when they allowed homeless pet owners into shelter with what they were told was a “certified” companion or service animal of having the animal bite another child or be destructive to property when the animal was not house trained or comfortable inside a building where it was staying. Dogs accustomed to being on the

street do not necessarily have specific training on where to urinate (outside) or can experience anxiety when separated from their owner and confined.

I was told by one service provider that she knew of no rule or regulation which would keep her from taking in a pet when an individual sought shelter at her agency. In fact, their shelter often has a cat in house. Occasionally the cat will leave with one of the residents and if this happens, they adopt a new cat for the shelter. According to this shelter director if she had her preference, she would send each resident away with a pet because she understands the importance of this relationship for a group of people who are without other meaningful relationships. Despite this position, her shelter does not allow pets in with those seeking shelter as she believes she must do what is best for the most people. She cannot screen everyone for allergies, fear of animals and has health concerns for the other members of the homeless population. She has also had an unfortunate experience when she did allow a resident to bring in a dog, which turned out to not be house broken and tore up furniture when separated from its owner. After the resident left, the room had to be re-carpeted and sterilized which resulted in additional expenses on an already limited budget.

The director of a family shelter in town has allowed in an animal as the residents provided proof that the animal was certified as a therapy animal. As this is a family shelter the dog had interaction with other children in the facility and bit one of them. On further investigation she found that the animal was not truly a service animal but only necessary for the comfort of its owner. Though the family had documentation, a letter from a doctor that the animal was necessary for the mental health of the individual, it was not intensively trained as one would expect with a service animal. These types of safety concerns are an issue when dealing with large numbers of people living in close proximity to others such as a shelter environment.

The added legal and health risk of animals which may not be properly socialized, not properly house trained or simply unpredictable in new and unfamiliar surroundings are a reality of shelter life for providers.

Despite the service provider's best intentions and desire to engage with homeless pet owners through offering foster care, their attempts may be taken the wrong way or not properly understood by homeless individuals as they are battling criticism, harassment and having their animals stolen or confiscated by the general public or other agencies. Amongst the providers I spoke with I was often advised that the local humane society would provide foster care for the animals for thirty days as the individual transitioned into shelter or other housing services that would not allow them. However, when discussing this option with my informants, all found this to be an unviable solution. Reasons given for not accessing the established foster care services offered by the service providers included distrust of animal shelters, fear or separation from their pet, e.g. not able to sleep, pet saved their life, pet helped them through depression, pet provided routine or that once into foster care, the animal would be adopted by somebody else and not returned to them.

Regardless of the option of the foster program provided by the humane society, service providers acknowledged that in their experience most homeless pet owners would refuse services such as shelter, day services or medical care to stay with their pet. Some providers found unique ways to navigate for different individuals, for example finding foster care which allowed the person to visit their animal at will or by providing tents for the person to camp more safely with their dog in an appropriate area. While foster care for the pets is a possibility, there are still limits according to one shelter director and these limits concern her:

Even with the foster care though, I only have 30 days. 30 days, that's it, nothing more. I can't always do that. With the way things are going right now, even with the pressure by

HUD to get these families into housing within 30 days, I can't do it. We're filled to capacity, there's no place for them to go and at the end of 30 days with foster care that's it. Most of our stays end up to be longer because there's no place that these people can go. (December, 2014)

Faced with an uncertain future for their pets at the humane society or concerns over separation from their animals, homeless individuals and families will refuse shelter or have tried to keep them while going into services.

### Survey Results

Of 70 respondents to the surveys administered at the Point In Time count, 23 indicated that they had experienced homelessness with a pet. Two of the respondents had both dogs and cats while homeless, three indicated they had only had cats while being homeless, one respondent currently had a guinea pig while she was homeless and another indicated they had had several types of pets while homeless including dogs, cats, bird and rodent (pet rat) during episodes of homelessness. The majority of pets owned during periods of homelessness were dogs, with one dog being specifically identified as a service animal. Of the homeless pet owners surveyed, 16 had dogs during a period of homelessness.

Survey respondents were asked about the benefits to humans which included, protection, contribution to owner's emotional well-being and stability as well as were a source of responsibility and established a routine for the pet owner. Also incorporated into the benefits to human section were perceptions on contributions from other people, obstacles to temporary and permanent shelter as well as difficulty with accessing services and seeing the pet as a burden for the homeless individual. Nineteen of the individuals surveyed indicated their pets were not an additional burden for them while they were homeless. These individuals indicated that the

benefits of pet ownership were protection, companionship, emotional well-being, feelings of love, stability, routinization and provided a sense of responsibility.

Information from the surveys about themes of responsibility, routine, feelings of unconditional love and acceptance and trust show that a majority of respondents endorsed these themes (See Appendix for survey distributed at Point In Time Event).

<u>Table 1 Benefits to Homeless Pet Owners (N=23)</u>	<u>Agree</u>
	Number of Respondents
My pet loves me unconditionally	23
My pet protects me	18
My pet makes me feel happy when sad	23
I am a responsible pet owner	23
My pet never lets me down when people do	23
My pet is the only one who understands me	23

For this same group of informants, they all indicated that there were benefits to the pet having a homeless owner including constant companionship from its owner, never being caged or confined and getting to spend a lot of time outside. None of the respondents indicated that a concern for the pet was not getting enough to eat or was neglected by its owner. Of the sample group of homeless individuals with pets, ten indicated problems with not being able to get their pets out of bad weather. Themes about the benefits to pet of having a homeless owner were also endorsed at a significant rate (See Appendix for surveys conducted with general public).

<u>Table 2 Benefits to Pets of Homeless Owners (N=23)</u>	<u>Agree</u>
	Number of Respondents
Pet is always with its owner	23
Pet is never caged or confined	23
Pet gets to be outdoors	23

### General Public

Included in the survey were questions concerning their awareness of homelessness and their awareness of homeless pet owners including if they had noticed any homeless individuals who had pets. Responses to this question were interesting as members of the general public would often look to me for clarification on this question, think about it, or respond verbally that “perhaps they had seen a homeless individual with a pet, but they were not sure if they were homeless or not” so they were not sure how to answer the question.

General public respondents were also asked about their actions when encountering a homeless individual as well as how they were likely to react when faced with a homeless individual and their pet. Twenty-one of the respondents indicated that they were more likely to look the other way or walk in a different direction when encountering a person they believed to be homeless. When asked about their possible actions if they encountered a homeless person with a pet, 23 of the respondents were more likely to offer to buy the animal from the person or give them pet food for the animal as opposed to giving them money or doing nothing. Despite the endorsement of negative treatment by a homeless pet owner, only a small number reported that were more likely to report the individual to animal control as they were concerned about the welfare of the animal in the situation.

The survey included open-ended questions about what people thought about homeless pet owners and the overarching theme, which was identified as the homeless person’s ability to financially afford to properly take care of the animal. Specific to my informants, many of whom felt others saw them as cruel or irresponsible as a pet owner, these themes were at a lower rate

than that of the economic ability of the person to care for the pet in terms of proper food, veterinarian care, shots, licensing and shelter for the animal.

Based on information regarding decreased addiction issues and need to care for a pet, I hypothesized that pet ownership would affect the perception of reasons for homelessness within the general public. I found that pet ownership did not affect the general public’s perception as significant numbers attributed the state of homelessness to addiction as well as mental illness and personal choices. Few respondents attributed reasons for homeless I found of circumstances beyond the person’s control, such job loss, disability or economics, such as lack of affordable housing.

Table 3 Perceived Reasons for Homelessness (N=37)

	Number of Respondents
Drug or Alcohol Addiction	21
Mental Illness	6
Personal choices	8
Circumstances beyond control of individual	1
Lack of Affordable Housing	1

Of the 30 respondents, 14 indicated they had noticed people they, upon reflection, noticed to be homeless. The majority of general public respondent’s endorsed negative responses on the treatment of animals by homeless owners.

Themes found with homeless pet owners and the criticisms they received from the general public were endorsed by this sample. Concerns about the animal being fed, mistreated or reasons attributed to the financial responsibility of pet ownership were endorsed at a significant rate.

Table 4 Perceived Treatment of Animal by Homeless Owner (N=37)

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	Number of Respondents
Animal is not fed properly	21
Animal is mistreated	13
Animal should have house	27
Animal does not receive proper veterinarian care	30

What these numbers show us that the criticisms described by homeless pet owners are reflective of the attitudes of the general public when interacting with the homeless community generally and specifically in regard to how homeless pet owner's identity is constructed by the larger population.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Homeless individuals are often treated by the general public as non-human, less than human, disregarded, held personally responsible and blamed for their state of being or labeled negatively as a danger to society (Glasser 1999; Goffman 1963; Hopper 1993; Irvine 2013; Snow and Anderson 1993; Snow and Mulchy 2001). I hypothesized that pet ownership for homeless individuals would 1) construct identity for homeless individuals; 2) have adaptive function for survival on the street; 3) influence the general public's perception of individuals and 4) that pet ownership influenced the perceived reasons for homelessness. Further, pet ownership can be indicative of socioeconomic status for the larger group within the social stratification system of the US (see also Irvine 2013; Newton 2014). These factors can contribute to the individual's ability to successfully adapt and emotionally cope with life on the street.

#### Construction of Identity

Preserving one's identity becomes a concern for stigmatized and marginalized populations and efforts to re-claim positive identity is done through what Snow and Anderson call "identity work." Identity works are ways in which homeless individuals construct and negotiate both their personal and social identity. In the case of homelessness, social identity is constructed by others through the use of negative criticism, such as was found with members of the general public when they say "you should be allowed to have a dog if you're homeless, get a job, get a place, and take care of yourself." Personal identity is negotiated through different activities including "the procurement and arrangement of physical settings and props; b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; c) selective association with

other individuals and groups and d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identity” (Snow and Anderson 1993; 214). For the homeless, lacking in the ability to materially construct and negotiate identity, the only thing often left to them is the verbal construction of identity. Pets and the care of pets can be an important aspect of construction of positive self-identity as a responsible and good person. The homeless person constructs a positive identity through their care of the animal such as sacrificing their own needs for the needs of the animal, constant companionship with the animal and what I found with the majority of my informants—rescuing the animal from an abusive situation.

In line with the work of Irvine (2013), all of my informants identified themselves as having been labeled at one time or another as “cruel” or “abusive” toward their pet by others for having them with them as they were homeless. Reasons for being identified as cruel or abusive include 1) having the pet outside; 2) not having a safe place for the pet to be; 3) not keeping the pet warm; 4) need to keep the pet locked in a car if no one to care for the pet was available. Informants identified criticism by others for being “irresponsible” by keeping a pet while they were homeless. Reasons for being identified as “irresponsible” include: 1) Assumptions that the pet is not fed or watered; 2) lack of veterinarian services; 3) not providing a safe place for the pet such as a home with a yard; 4) leaving the pet outside of a business or agency while the person went inside to conduct necessary business and 5) not licensing the pet with the city.

Snow and Anderson (1993) describe several strategies for the homeless individual in positive identity construction, including distancing from the social identity of homeless simply put. An example is when my informant indicates he is not homeless, but “survival-ing” or embracing the label both associational and ideological “yeah, I’m homeless” or “yeah, I’m a bum.” Leslie Irvine adds to the construction of identity for homeless pet owners the concept of

“redefining values” particularly in the case of the homeless pet owner as a good caretaker of the animal, sacrificing their own needs for the pets and spending all of their time instead of money on the pet who would otherwise be left alone throughout the day. By redefining the value associated with the human-pet relationship as properly cared for with them as opposed to when with a domiciled owner, homeless individuals are able to minimize the impact of criticism as well as negative stereotypes and labels assigned to their social identity. Irvine found that homeless pet owners were able to redefine the definition of a good pet owners, from one who could provide a house and yard as well as asserted that their relationship with the animal was better than that of the housed pet owner in that the animal was not left alone for long periods of time and had constant companionship thereby rejecting the social identity assigned to them of irresponsible or cruel. I agree based on my fieldwork, that through redefining the values ascribed to the role of pet owner beyond that of one who is able to financially afford a pet, for homeless pet owners, this becomes a “moral identity” and is integral in construction of self as a good person (Irvine 2013: 61). Pets for homeless individuals did serve to construct a positive self-identity for homeless individuals. Through the care of the pet the individual was able to construct a “moral self” and to see himself or herself as a responsible individual in society by being a good caretaker or warden of the animal. In the case of the homeless informants I worked with, they constructed the animal as having been rescued or saved from a member of the general public by the homeless owner at a significant rate. In one particular situation a gentlemen was specifically looking for a dog through Craig’s list, the humane society, or individuals he knew. This process of pet selection was detailed in his assessment of the animal’s personality, the history of the animal, what kind of living situation it had, as well as concerns about potential health problems the animal might have in the future (See also Irvine 2004). When a final

decision was made to take in the animal, it was based upon his assessment that the animal needed a better caretaker as he felt the current owner did not have the time or patience needed to care for him.

Contrary to public perceptions of homeless pet ownership, these animals were not simply strays which the person happened upon. A significant number, 23 of respondents from the general public indicated that they thought if animals were accompanying homeless individuals these were likely to be strays that the person had run across and therefore posited that the animal would be picked up by animal control and put to sleep otherwise. However, aside from the cats, which the homeless individual would often come into contact with as a stray or feral cat and left behind when they moved, the pets were often attained prior to the state of homelessness; after homelessness with a particular intent for protection and friendship or because the individual felt as though the animal needed rescuing in some fashion from the living experience the animal was in at the time of adoption. For example, two of Annie and John's dogs, I was told were abused by their previous owners who were housed where the couple was couch surfing in another city. Annie indicated that one of the dogs had a broken back caused by the previous domiciled owner and because of this she was careful with discipline and training so as not to hurt the dog. Gerald's dog Buddy, had first been rescued by an owner who adopted him from a home where he was constantly fighting with other dogs, the owner showing scarring on his back legs. Gerald, in turn, felt as though he was rescuing him from her where he spent his days confined in a kennel in a garage, only being let out in the evenings and not getting appropriate interaction.

The construction of a moral identity is constructed through the identity work of redefining values held by the general public in terms of what is needed to be good pet owners,

what is cruel to the pet, and narratives of rescuing animals from abusive situations. These include being caged, locked inside all day, or neglected while their owners leave them at home.

While a focus has been on construction of the personal identity of homeless pet owners and the ways in which this relationship is used to create a positive self-image, I also argue that there is a concern within the community of homeless pet owners about the construction of the social identity of the group. This is particularly relevant when also looking at the larger community and the service provider's narratives of bad experiences when bringing homeless pet owners into the shelter environment with their pet.

Late in my fieldwork, I had an opportunity to be embroiled in a battle between two of my informants. Annoyed at being yelled at and pulled into the fight over how to handle the living situation of two little dogs at the time, I missed the significance of the interaction between the two homeless pet owners and the opportunity I had when they let me be involved in their argument. Only later in reviewing my notes did I understand the importance of this interaction in the construction of personal identity as well as the construction and contestation of the social identity for homeless pet owners. Earlier mentioned is the response I received from two of my informant's when dealing with an unsocialized dog and his owner, to which I would like to add this important event in construction of social identity.

I had been working with the couple and their three dogs for several months when they left two of the dogs with me. A priority for them was first to get John's driver's license reinstated so that he could return to work. Once he had given me permission, I contacted my friend at Vocational Rehabilitation who thought he could help with the fines. We followed his instructions and a meeting was set for him as soon as possible, which was more than a month away. In the meantime, Annie had significant medical problems including the need for ongoing

medications and she indicated she had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past and had a new lump. She was very nervous on a cold December morning as I drove her for a mammogram to the county's low-income health program. She indicated that if she again had cancer she would refuse chemotherapy and treatment as she had seen it take a terrible toll on her mother and did not see the point in doing it herself. Two weeks later, when I met with them to go through John's information for Vocational Rehabilitation appointment and to go over Annie's application for Social Security disability benefits, she showed me the results of the mammogram—she had a significant mass and needed to schedule an appointment with the doctor immediately for more testing. The following week was when she called me early in the morning for assistance in moving out of the house where they had been couch surfing. I offered to pick them up and they left two of the dogs with me to try to find foster care for them.

After a week, having not had a return call from the contact for fostering animals, I explained to my other informant Randy that the two dogs in my care would have to be taken to the humane society as with my schedule I could not give them the proper attention and care that they needed. They were not house-trained so I had to keep them in the garage; they were not leash trained so I could not walk them and had to watch them carefully while they were outside; they were terrified of my monster sized cats, and my husband and I could not continue to adjust our schedule to let them out to go to the bathroom. Randy and his dog had been couch surfing with the same gentleman as Annie and John. Randy was adamant that I not surrender them to the humane society although he understood my predicament. To him, leaving the dogs with me was an irresponsible act on the part of John and Annie and he insisted that I leave the dogs with him to find them new homes, as he said:

Taking them to the humane society is a punishment. It's a punishment for the dogs because their owners were irresponsible. They left them. They [the dogs] shouldn't be

punished for that. It's them [Annie and John] that are irresponsible, not Hermie and Duke. Let me take care of them but don't punish them for what happened. (February 2015)

Though I did not have the same understanding of this act of taking them to the humane society as he did, it was important to him that I not take them there because of the way he viewed my surrender or them. First, this was seen as, my punishment for an irresponsible act on the part of John and Annie and second, an irresponsible act on my part for not being able to care for the dogs or being able to find them new homes on my own. Further, as he and I continued to talk over the next weeks while he was trying to find the dogs homes, I realized that he was concerned I would think of him the same way he thought of Annie and John—as irresponsible pet owners. He updated me regularly on his progress with them in house training, when they successfully learned to walk on a leash and ultimately when he was finally able to find them homes without houses on what he called “the homeless net.”

The fight ensued when two weeks after I left the dogs with Randy so that he could try to find them new homes, Annie called me after talking to him screaming at me that I needed to explain to him that she was not a “bad person” and she was not “irresponsible” because she had left them with me. Randy, at the same time was calling me after his conversation with her to remind me how he was “not like her, he was responsible for the dogs and taking good care of them.” It is interesting that Annie specifically called me, after she had left her dogs with me and then had to leave the area, to tell me that she was not a “bad” person and had not acted “irresponsibly” despite Randy’s views to the contrary—the point of contention. As Annie saw it, she left the dogs with a person who had the means and abilities to take care of them and had the resources and networks to find them suitable homes or foster care. That person ultimately turned out to be Randy.

Pets are an extension of self, they are chosen based on what is perceived to be their history and personality and they are considered to be and become a reflection of their owner (Greenbaum 2004; Gunter 1999; Sanders 1990). Concerns about the socialization of the pet, or perceived abandonment becomes issue of personal identity construction through distancing from a negative social identity as well as an act of redefining values. Much of the research done to date has focused on the construction of positive personal identity through the relationship of the owner and the pet, yet social identity of the homeless pet owner has not been fully explored. The identity of being “responsible” or a “good person” I would argue can be attributed to the pet as an extension of self. Custodians of a “good pet” can embrace this identity in associational or ideological ways (Snow and Anderson 1993).

Irvine also cautiously posits that pets, in particular dogs as they are most visible, are “props” in Anderson and Snow’s framework that can be used by the homeless individual for identity work and their interaction with the general public which can result in both positive and negative confrontations (Irvine 2013: 48-49). Pets can be social facilitators resulting in increased interaction with the general public as well with service providers and the general public. Homeless pet owners were noticed and more recognizable than other homeless individuals with whom these individuals interacted. This can be understood, I would argue as a form of “cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance” although this form of personal identity construction may be too superficial to fully appreciate the deep, meaningful relationship between homeless owner and pet. Interestingly during my limited fieldwork with the general public, I found that individuals would not as easily label an individual as homeless if they had a companion animal.

During a meeting of low-income veterinary staff, after speaking about the project and indicating why we were completing interviews that day I described which population I was looking for—specifically primary and secondary homeless individuals with pets. I was advised that the clinic did “not really have those (homeless) people that they knew of” and that their clinic was accessed more by individuals who were “low-income but they had homes.” I had attended a clinic several months earlier for observation and noticed many people using several techniques used by homeless individuals to distance themselves from the homeless identity, for example indicating they were “between addresses” or “staying with a friend” or “everything’s in the van right now as we’re in the process of moving.” When administering surveys with the general public, one of the questions asked was “Are you aware of any homeless individuals who have pets?” This question always resulted in pause for the general public and as one young lady indicated, after she described informant Roger and Bella to me,

You know, I saw this guy with a little white dog and I thought, he looks homeless. But, then I thought, he can’t be homeless, he’s got a dog. I mean, how can you be homeless with a dog? How would that work? I just assumed he was dirty or really poor or something. But, I didn’t really think of him being homeless because it just didn’t make sense. Now I guess I think he probably was homeless but how can you have a dog when you’re homeless? (March 2015)

Irvine, “cautiously” posits that pets are used as props in identity work for homeless individuals he worked with as they do not view their relationship with the animal as such and I found that homeless individuals had a deep emotional commitment to their pets. For Irvine and for my purposes, this serves as more of an analytical concept. Irvine speculates that the pet is a visible “badge” one can wear to positively construct identity, for example as a “responsible” animal caretaker or a “good person” for the value placed on their constant companionship and care of the animal. I would further argue that companion animals could be viewed as a prop, which

distances the homeless individual from the negative label of homelessness for the general public. The presence of a pet with a homeless individual influences the perception the general public's identification of a person as homeless done through other social cues such as dress, physical settings, body posturing or language.

A primary identified theme, which should not be overlooked within the relationship of the pet and owner included feelings of unconditional love, acceptance, non-judgmental friendship/relationship and trust. Interestingly all of my informants indicated that other people could not be trusted while their animal companion could be setting their animal relationships in stark relief to their human relationships. Regardless of the relationship, friend, family, service provider, general public or missionary—if they were human—once in a relationship with one, you would be “stabbed in the back,” “used,” or “taken advantage of.” For pet owners, the relationship with the pet was a trust relationship that could not be found with other humans.

For a marginalized population these types of sentiments towards other should not be surprising and is discussed in other research done with the population (See Finklestein 2005; Snow and Anderson 1993; Glasser 1999) . Singer and Hart (1995) conducted surveys at veterinarian clinics for homeless pet owners and found that they had significantly higher rates of attachment to pets than other groups arguing attempts at transitioning into shelter without inclusion of the pet would be refused and thus be unsuccessful. In my fieldwork, I found in this community that would likely be the case for the established program of foster care; however, trust of others and uncertainty as to what would happen to the pet out of their care was a significant issue for this population beyond their attachment. It is interesting to note that solutions from the community, which I will discuss in conclusion, gleaned through interview and surveys included programs which would separate the owner and pet for periods of time.

Potentially, other options may be successful if trust relationships can be established. Narrowly focusing on the relationship between the person and animal, as was done with Singer, Hart and Zasloff, I would argue does not fully explain the increased attachment to the pet. After conducting this study, I suggest that more questions should be asked about the relationship with the pet as compared to the homeless individual's relationship with other people and may be more appropriate in the context of homelessness and marginalization.

Additionally, I found in concert with Rew (2000) that the drawback of pet ownership living on the street included loss of jobs, restricted access to resources such as housing and medical care as well as concern for the pets care and well-being during times of incarceration and hospitalization. While it would be easy to focus on the benefits of pet ownership in this population there are certainly drawbacks to pet ownership for a homeless individual.

Drawbacks to pet ownership included loss of jobs when one was unable to find someone to watch the pet while they were working, euthanasia of the pets when individuals were arrested or hospitalized; significant grief with death of a pet; increased cost associated with housing; restricted access to resources and medical care or need to find care for pets during appointment time (See also Kidd, et al 1994; Rew 2000; Lem et al 2012; Irvine 2013).

### Social Stratification and Personhood

Homeless populations are acutely aware of the stigmatizing effects of the identification of being homeless. Stigmatization and the expression of inequality for homeless groups happens during everyday interaction with the general public and social patterning through such processes as the length of time they are expected to wait for services, insults, language, and physical responses by others to them (Perry 2013; Snow and Anderson 1993). While it would be easy to

narrowly document the stigmatization associated with pet ownership, contextually this would be inaccurate. I also observed these types of interactions with my homeless informants and the general public during times such as meeting for lunch, transporting them to veterinarian appointments, or similar activities. On several occasions I met with my informants to have lunch at local restaurants and—regardless of whether or not they had just had a shower and clean clothes—to their dismay as gentlemen, I was always handed the check for payments. Social actors have an ability to interpret the actions of others and respond to such. As argued previously, homeless individuals manage, cope with, and negotiate stigmatization in different ways including techniques such as verbally distancing from themselves from homeless labels and physically, by using different settings and props such as the public space of a restaurant (Anderson and Snow 2001; Perry 2012; Irvine 2013). Settings and props I observed for the informants I with whom I worked aside from their animal companions—were used to distance themselves from the label of being homeless, including meeting me at local restaurants when they were squatting or not using the word “homeless.” (See also Perry 2013; Snow and Anderson 1993).

Within the general public and service providers, I received many comments along the theme of homeless individuals and their pets, such as they “could not afford them” or “did not have the means necessary to feed and provide veterinarian care.” Several members of the general public were specifically concerned about the “type of food” the animals of homeless people would be eating, “if they eat, is it the right food? Maybe if there were something to get them the right food, better food than they can afford, that would be good. Maybe they’re not eating the right things.” Impacted by the pet industry, I would argue that concern for the animal is influenced within a capitalist economy and in a social environment where homeless

individuals are constructed with a negative social identity. Irvine conducted informal surveys based on whether or not the domiciled public were supportive of pet ownership for the homeless in order to determine why it was that those individuals who were not supportive of pets for homeless individuals thought homeless individuals should not have them. Irvine found that his group was split almost in half for those supporting and those not supportive of homeless individuals having pets with the primary response given as to why homeless individuals should not have pets given related to monetary concerns as I also found with my sample.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Independence and control of their own and their pet's future is important for these individuals. Well-intentioned service providers and the general public are often frustrated when offers of assistance through the established foster care program are refused; however narrowly focusing on the relationship of the owner and pet may not provide a complete understanding of their rejection of these services. Because of the significant impact pet ownership has on positive identity construction for homeless individuals and physical adaptation, services should be designed with an interest in preserving this relationship as this relationship has contributed to the emotional and physical survival of the person living on the street.

Service providers want to assist homeless pet owners without requiring them to relinquish their animal, but overwhelmed with the needs of the entire population, homeless pet owners are often lost in the chaos. One shelter provider confessed, they often forget to take their relationship with pet seriously when they are under pressure themselves, both financially and with serving others. Within the context of homelessness, consideration should be given to the reality of the cultural milieu in which the homeless pet owner exists. Important to note is that this includes both the service providers and general public. Social processes of stigmatization and marginalization impact the homeless pet owner's willingness to engage with and access the services they desire. Consideration of the function of the pet in a person's survival on the street is important. I predict that programs such as foster care will continue to be refused due to distrust of the general population, fear for the pet's well-being but more importantly that because the act of surrendering pet to another caretaker is in direct conflict with their construction of self as a responsible, good citizen. By appreciating, recognizing, and taking an interest in preserving this

very special relationship between human and animal, which is integral in the formation of positive self-identity and physical adaptation, service providers have a unique opportunity to engage with a difficult to reach population.

### Solutions from the Community

One of the surprising features of the pets of the homeless individuals I worked with was the way in which the pet, specifically dogs, were supported by the entire homeless community. Trixie, for example, though she was “Randy’s dog” was comfortable with many of the other homeless individuals in the places he frequented such as the day center or diner. Members of the community were always excited to see her, had treats they had saved especially for her from their own meals or toys they carried to play with her. After the fight under the bridge, when Randy was charged and convicted of assault he spent a year in the corrections system. During this separation, Trixie was cared for by several other members of the homeless community, including a man Randy knew who had died under a bridge the previous winter when the temperature dropped to dangerous lows. This interest on the part of the members of the community for care and security of homeless owners and their pets is repeatedly found in the narratives of other homeless non-pet owners. For example, at the Point in Time count a lady approached me and asked if she could take some of our dog treats and food as although she herself did not have a dog or a pet; however, she knew several people who did and she enjoyed the animals when she was on the street with them. She carried treats in her bag for the other’s animals so she would have something to give.

The pet foster care program that is currently in place through the humane society is often refused due to a variety of fears: fear of separation from the pet, fear they will not get the pet

back, or fear that the pet will not be cared for properly. While this program is offered, it is limited in the length of time a pet is allowed to stay—30 days—at the end of which if the owner is not in a position to take back their animal it is surrendered for adoption. The average time of transition from shelter into housing is presently greater than 30 days, which carries with it a risk for the pet to be adopted if the owner cannot be in housing or stable enough to take the pet back at the end of this time.

From my conversations with shelter staff, the humane society staff and other outreach agencies that utilize this program, there is no indication that homeless pet owners were asked or continue to contribute to its development or administration. Understandably, with limited resources there comes limited solutions to problems. This lack of meaningful input from the homeless community is frustrating for the pet owners. One informant in particular was frustrated when he was previously approached and asked for his input into a local program designed to help homeless pet owners as he saw his input made no difference in the established program:

They told me this was about me and Trixie. That the reason they came up with the program was to help people like me, the shelter director told me that and they asked me about it. There was a big write up in the paper about it but it was nothing about me or the things that I said. It was all about the shelter and her (the director). Nothing about me, I've never been able to stay at that shelter because I won't leave Trixie outside.  
(December, 2014)

Pet owners on the street have ideas and concepts that they believe are viable solutions and I argue it is important to listen to them seriously and include them in a meaningful way when programs are designed, as they have the experience of living with a pet on the street. Programs designed specifically to assist homeless pet owners should meet the continuing and changing needs of the pet owners so that programs will be utilized.

Among the homeless with pets in Wichita, the majority will refuse shelter or needed medical services due to fear of losing their pet. Limited veterinary and foster care programs exist through the local humane society; however, these programs are restricted in length of time the pet can remain in foster care and the scope of veterinary services available. Contributing factors to owner's distrust of services for their pet include: 1) Pressure by local animal rescue groups to surrender their pet; 2) Theft and abuse of pets by the general public and 3) Confiscation and euthanization of pets by local authorities.

When meeting with the local humane society, they were surprised to hear that many of my informants were not comfortable leaving their pets in the foster program or would not be comfortable surrendering the pet to them in a time of need. Additional efforts could be made to educate homeless pet owners about what happens to their pet while at the humane society or in foster care. It was also determined that the current program in place—foster care for the pet for thirty days—was a program that is rarely utilized. Homeless pet owners I spoke with were not included in the establishment of this program and most found it to be undesirable due to complete separation of the pet and lack of trust in other people and established programs to help the homeless

Suggestions from the community and the homeless pet owners include a shelter designed just for the animals attached to emergency shelter. Day care for pets, funding for stays at motels on very cold nights, veterinarian services set aside for homeless pets were also included. On a practical note, suggestions for addresses so that animals could be licensed or micro-chipped so they could be legally owned or found if stolen by others were also presented.

Shelters for the pet in conjunction with emergency or temporary shelters would allow the pets to stay outside of the shelter while the person went inside for shelter and safety at night.

This was suggested for both the overflow shelters which operate during the winter months or associated with the more permanent shelters. If the owner knew that the animal was safe in a shelter when they went inside and that they would be reunited in the morning, they were more agreeable to utilizing shelter services.

Day care for pets was an idea which was popular and suggested by many of my informants. I myself babysat dogs while informants went to into businesses and agencies to conduct necessary business. The humane society indicated that they may have the resources to establish a program of this nature but a primary concern for both humane society and informants was transportation of the pet to day care and then getting them back to their owner after a shift at work, doctor's appointment or other types of appointments.

While homeless pet owners I worked with did not expect special treatment or extra services to help them care for the pet, they were interested to know if special funds could be set aside for nights when the temperature fell below a certain level or when sleeping outside was potentially unsafe as with dangerous weather such as thunderstorms.

The low-income vet clinic is a highly praised program by all of my informants for their role in administering necessary shots for licensing the animal and to deal with minor illness such as ear infections or pests such as fleas. Unfortunately, homeless informants had difficulty accessing the program in that they needed to call and make appointment or they needed to find transportation to get there if they stayed in an outer region of the city. In addition to shots and minor ailments though, many homeless pet owners found at different times they needed emergency services when an animal was sick or injured but they could not pay fees. The veterinarian I worked with on this project did indicate this type of service could be a possibility

in the future. In the fall of 2014, the American Veterinary Medicine Association set up programs designed to compensate veterinarians who assisted low-income individuals and families.

Even though the owners I worked with were able pay for shots or were able to access through the free clinic for their animal's shots, the issue of an address for licensing came up with two of the dogs of my informants when they were picked up by animal control. Though proof of vaccinations was readily available in one instance, had I not been on the dog's paperwork as a contact her owner would not have been able to retrieve her due to his lack of proper identification. Additional fines were assessed as he was unable to license her in the city due to having no address. After her shots, he contacted animal control to see how to license her and was told that he could not without an address for him to use. Once she was picked up, without proper identification animal control would not allow him to go back into the holding area to identify her and would not have allowed him to claim her, even if he had the money for the fines. They would only allow me to do that. With a second dog which was picked up by animal control during my fieldwork, the owner was threatened with being charged with abandonment of an animal when he called to find out how much it would cost to pick him up and then indicated it would take him a few days to come up with the money. As he had not been able to license the dog and lacked paperwork on his shots, animal control required proof in the form of pictures that it was his dog which he was only able to get from me as I had taken them during fieldwork.

#### Future Research

This research on homelessness and pets, while not comprehensive due to time constraints, was able to provide information on the positive function of pets in identity formation for a stigmatized and marginalized group of people within the United States. Within the scope of this

research--which started with an interest in the homeless individual as pet owner and branched into several emerging questions of the treatment of this vulnerable group of people by others--the processes of stigmatization and marginalization highlighted forms of structural violence.

Information concerning the cohesiveness of the homeless pet community has emerged through this study.

To start, a common theme found within my interviews with homeless individuals was that of wage-theft. In an attempt to contextualize homelessness and pet ownership, many pets being older and having lived their entire life with the individual, I asked questions on how the individual became homeless and what sources of income they had at this time. Very few informants identified panhandling as a primary means of support. Of the informants who were working or obtained jobs during my fieldwork, all described some type of wage theft either from day labor companies who had hired them, individuals who picked them up in front of the day center or sought them out under a bridge to work for cash. If this is a phenomenon that occurs solely with homeless pet owners, as they often must take work from an individual who will allow them to bring their pet to the work site or if it is because they cannot take steady employment due to uncertain pet care with friends or family I do not know. Regardless, this type of structural violence further instills the feelings of distrust of the general public voiced by the homeless community and serves to prohibit them from being self-supportive.

Informants who experienced wage theft from an individual would indicate that nothing could be done about this, it had happened to them multiple times and it was better to take your chances and get \$20 for a full day's labor then nothing at all. Two informants who were able to obtain employment through established businesses that provided day labor on contract were shorted in their paychecks for items the company indicated they would reimburse for such as

travel, lodging and food. While I was aware of these practices through my work in the legal field and dealing specifically with homeless and low-income populations, I was only aware of it on an occasional basis through my profession. The rate at which this was described by the homeless pet owners, which is a rate higher than I would expect given my other interactions with homeless individuals was bit disturbing.<sup>1</sup> The astounding rate at which wage theft is reported among homeless pet owners does lead to the question of if this is more common with this group of people due to their inability to access services and assistance through area agencies which would help individuals experiencing wage loss to advocate for themselves. In one situation, my informant, having been shorted a week's wages due to lost time sheets informed the employer he had lunch with "his lawyer" (me) and told her about his shorted wages. He received his paycheck the next day.

In conclusion, this research highlights the complexities of homelessness and pet ownership for a stigmatized population as well as provides a greater understanding the multifaceted reasons why services are refused, which can have serious consequences. My informant, Angela, best tells the story:

A friend of mine had a cat and he was homeless. His cat died during the winter and he was afraid he couldn't take care of the cat...my friend he stayed outside and he had two wool blankets that he would wrap around him and the cat. He got up one morning and his cat was dead in his arms. I think it froze to death. After that, he went downhill really fast. He wound up just giving up. He loved that cat with his whole being, that was his pal, his only friend and he'd always make sure the cat had the same kind of food he did. But after he lost his favorite pal, his health declined, he was out last winter after his cat died under the bridge and they found him. At first, everyone thought 'oh, he's just another alcoholic and he got drunk and died' but they could find no alcohol on him. He just lost the will to live after that... when his buddy died it was like killing him. After that [cat dying] everyone said, 'he's better off now you can go into a shelter.' But he couldn't, he couldn't go in there because he told me 'the other guys pick on me, they pick

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<sup>1</sup> During my fieldwork, this came up so often with my homeless pet owners, I began to informally track this with other homeless individuals with whom I work. I was not told about any wage-theft incidents in the other group of homeless individuals during the same time period, which is interesting as it is a larger number of people.

on me for the way I act, the way I look, I'd rather stay outside' and I understand when you lose a pet you risk that you risk losing the will to live. (October, 2014)

The unique relationship of companion animal and homeless pet owners gives us but a glimpse into the daily lives and struggles of a community on the margins of US society. The important aspects of pet ownership about positive identity construction, perceptions of personhood and physical adaptation for a homeless individual should not be so easily overlooked by service providers' in their attempts to provide necessary services.

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## APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

#### Semi structured interview for homeless persons

##### Homeless Pet Owner Qualitative Interview Questionnaire

1. Where were you born and raised?
2. What type of community was this? Small town, large town, farming community?
3. Describe your family? Parents still married? Divorced? Brothers and Sisters? Extended family contact?
4. What was your family like?
5. Did you experience poverty during your childhood that you remember?
6. Were there any problems in your family life?
7. How far did you get in school?
8. Did you have pets or animals while growing up?  
What kinds of pets or animals?  
Exposure to pets or animals?
9. What is your current source of income or support?
10. How did you become homeless?
11. Is this your first time being homeless? How long have you been or were you homeless? How long have you been homeless at this time?

12. How do you think people treat you if they realize you are homeless?

13. Have you had times when you did not have a pet when you were homeless?

14. Do you think people treat you differently because of your pet?

If yes, how so?

15. Why do you have a pet?

16. How do you take care of your pet?

17. Describe your relationship with your pet:

18. Do you think your pet is helpful to you? How so?

19. Do you think there are drawbacks to having a pet?

20. Do you utilize the shelters in the Wichita area?

If yes, what do you do with your pet?

If no, why do you not utilize the shelters in this area?

21. Have you had any difficulties in obtaining services because of your pet?

22. If you are working, what do you do with your pet during your work hours?

22. If you have appointments for services such as food, medical, financial or housing assistance, what do you do with your pet during that time?

23. Is there anything else that you would like for me to know that I have not covered?

## Semi-structured Interview for Service Providers

### Service Provider Questionnaire

1. What do (or did) you do for a living? How long have you done this job?
2. What is your agency's role in providing services and outreach for homeless people?
3. Are you aware of homeless people in the Wichita area who have pets?
4. Do you think homeless people should have pets?
5. Do you think there are negative aspects to pet ownership for homeless people? If so, what are these?
6. Do you think there are positive aspects to pet ownership for homeless people? If so, what are these?
7. In your experience, what are some of the obstacles homeless people have to overcome in order to access services and employment?
8. Do you think there are more obstacles for a homeless pet owner? If so, what are they?
9. What are your concerns about homeless pet ownership?
10. How do you think the general public perceives homeless individuals?
11. How do you think the general public perceives homeless pet owners?
12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not covered?

## Semi-structured interview for general public

### General Public Interviews

1. Do you see people in Wichita that you think are homeless?

Have you noticed that any of the homeless people in Wichita have pets?

2. What do you think about them?

3. Do you own any pets?

4. If so, how many and what kind?

5. Do you think homeless people should have pets?

6. Why or why not?

7. How do you feel about homeless people having pets?

APPENDIX B  
SURVEYS DEVELOPED

Survey used for 2015 Point In Time Count

**Homelessness and Pet Ownership**

1. Age:  under 18  18-50  51+      2. Gender:  M  F

3. How long have you been homeless:  Less than 1 year  1-5 years  5+ years

7. Sources of Income (Check all CURRENT sources of income)

- Employment       Social Security       Veteran's Benefits       Charity  
 None       Other \_\_\_\_\_

I. Pet Ownership	
1. Do you have a pet now?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(if yes, what kind? <input type="checkbox"/> Dog <input type="checkbox"/> Cat <input type="checkbox"/> Bird <input type="checkbox"/> Reptile <input type="checkbox"/> Rodent <input type="checkbox"/> Other)	
2. Did you have a pet in the past?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(if yes, what kind? <input type="checkbox"/> Dog <input type="checkbox"/> Cat <input type="checkbox"/> Bird <input type="checkbox"/> Reptile <input type="checkbox"/> Rodent <input type="checkbox"/> Other)	
3. Did you experience homeless while you had that pet?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Please rate how strongly you feel about each topic using the range from 1-5.  
1 indicates you **strongly disagree** with the statement. 4 indicates you **strongly agree** with the statement.  
5 indicates that you **do not know** or that the question is **not applicable (N/A)**.

II. Benefits to Human	Disagree	Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable		
1. Pets provide protection.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Pets provide companionship.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Pets contribute to their owner's emotional well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Pets provide feelings of love.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Pets help to provide stability in someone's life.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Pets are a responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Pets help people have a routine.	1	2	3	4	5
8. People give more money when they see a pet.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Pets can make it hard to find temporary shelter.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Pets make it hard to find permanent shelter.	1	2	3	4	5
11. It is difficult to get services when you have a pet.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Pets are a burden.	1	2	3	4	5
III. Benefits to the Pet	Disagree	Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable		
<i>A pet belonging to a homeless individual:</i>					
1. is always with its owner.	1	2	3	4	5
2. is never caged or confined.	1	2	3	4	5

3. spends lots of time outside.	1	2	3	4	5
4. may not get enough to eat.	1	2	3	4	5
5. cannot get out of bad weather.	1	2	3	4	5
6. is neglected by its owner.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Do you think that people in the general-public treat homeless owners of pets differently than other homeless individuals? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, they treat them better <input type="checkbox"/> No, they treat them worse <input type="checkbox"/> There is not a difference	8. In your opinion, what services are needed for homeless owners of pets? <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Care <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Shelter that allows pets <input type="checkbox"/> Food <input type="checkbox"/> Pet-sitting services <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				

III. Pet Owners	Disagree	Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable		
1. My pet loves me unconditionally	1	2	3	4	5
2. My pet does not judge me.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My pet is a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
4. My pet protects me	1	2	3	4	5
5. My pet is my best friend.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My pet makes me feel happy when I am sad.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My pet is a responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My pet never lets me down when people do	1	2	3	4	5
9. My pet is always there for me	1	2	3	4	5
10. My pet is the only one who understands me	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Please answer YES or NO the following statements:</i>					
11. I have refused medical care as I could not leave my pet alone.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			
12. I have refused shelter because I could not bring my pet with me.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			
13. I have turned down work because I could not find someone to take care of my pet.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			
14. I avoid drinking/drug use or criminal activity to avoid separation from my pet.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			
15. I believe that people who are not homeless understand my relationship with my pet	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			

Survey used with general public

**Homelessness and Pet Ownership**

1. Age:  under 18  18-50  51+      2. Gender:  M  F

**I. Pet Ownership**

1. Do you have a pet?       Yes       No  
 (if yes, what kind?  Dog  Cat  Bird  Reptile  Rodent  Other)

2. Are you a pet owner?       Yes       No  
 (if yes, what kind?  Dog  Cat  Bird  Reptile  Rodent  Other)

How would you describe your relationship with your pet?  
 A friend and companion     My pet has a function \_\_\_\_\_       Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 All of the above

3. Are you aware of any homeless individuals in the City of Wichita?       Yes       No

4. Have you ever seen a homeless individual with a pet?       Yes       No

Please rate how strongly you feel about each topic using the range from 1-5.  
 1 indicates you **strongly disagree** with the statement. 4 indicates you **strongly agree** with the statement.  
 5 indicates that you **do not know** or that the question is **not applicable (N/A)**.

<b>II. Homelessness</b>	Disagree	Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
1. Homelessness is a big problem in our society	1 2 3 4		5
2. People are homeless because of circumstances beyond their control	1 2 3 4		5
3. People are homeless because of			
Drug or Alcohol Addiction	1 2 3 4		5
Mental Illness	1 2 3 4		5
Personal Choices	1 2 3 4		5
Lack of Affordable Housing	1 2 3 4		5
Disabilities	1 2 3 4		5
Can't get a job	1 2 3 4		5
4. If you see a person you believe is homeless what are you most likely to do?			
Give them money	1 2 3 4		5
Walk in another direction	1 2 3 4		5
Criticize them	1 2 3 4		5
Smile and say "Hi"	1 2 3 4		5
5. It is uncommon for a homeless person to have a pet	1 2 3 4		5

**III. Homelessness and Pets**

*A pet belonging to a homeless individual:*

	Disagree	Agree			Don't Know/ Not Applicable
1. is always with its owner.	1	2	3	4	5
2. is never caged or confined.	1	2	3	4	5
3. spends lots of time outside.	1	2	3	4	5
4. may not get enough to eat.	1	2	3	4	5
5. cannot get out of bad weather.	1	2	3	4	5
6. is neglected by its owner.	1	2	3	4	5
7. is mistreated by its owner	1	2	3	4	5
8. does not get proper veterinary care	1	2	3	4	5

What do you think about homeless people having pets? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think there are benefits, draw backs or both to pet ownership for homeless individuals? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you encounter a person you believe is homeless with a pet, what would you do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other thoughts?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

**Informed Consent Form (oral)**

My name is Teresa Click and I am a graduate student with Wichita State University's Anthropology Department. You are invited to participate in a study of homeless populations and pet ownership. This research will be used to complete a project I am doing which includes a paper and production of a film on homelessness and pet ownership. The potential benefits of this research includes expanding knowledge related to human and animal relationships as well as contributing to an understanding of homelessness, the function of these relationships as well as the perceptions of the general public toward homeless pet owners.

If you choose to participate I will ask you a series of questions regarding experience as a homeless individual who has a pet. You have been selected for this research as you have identified yourself as being homeless and as having a pet. I anticipate interviewing 10 subjects for this part of the project. The interview will last about one hour. I will be tape recording and videotaping this interview and asking your first name as well as the name and type of pet you own. You will not be identified in the final paper or film unless you would specifically like to be. All information recorded during this interview will be stored indefinitely in a secure location, and I will be the only individual with access to it. This will include your taped consent, recordings of the interview, written transcriptions of the tape, videos and written notes. Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

This is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate. Also, if at any time you would like to end the interview you may do so without consequence. You have the right to review, edit, or erase any recordings of this interview. If you do not want to be video or tape recorded, please let me know and I will use notes to record this interview. Choosing not to use the video or tape

recorder does not affect your participation in this research, and I will turn off the recorder after documenting your informed consent to participate.

There is no anticipated risk to you from taking part in this interview. If at any time during the interview I ask a question you do not feel comfortable answering, you may skip it. There is no compensation for participating in this interview. Your choice to end your participation in the study is completely voluntary and will in no way affect your future relationship with the researcher, the community of Wichita or with Wichita State University. If you choose to participate and later change your mind, I will withdraw you and any information you have given upon your notification.

**If you have any further questions about this project, you may contact me by phone at 316-210-6556 or through e-mail at [tclick30@yahoo.com](mailto:tclick30@yahoo.com) or the project's supervisor Dr. Sarah R Taylor at [Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu](mailto:Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Wichita State University Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.**

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Do you agree to be audio recorded during this interview?

Do you agree to be video recorded during this interview?

Do you have any questions about the research?

## General Public Informed Consent



**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study of homeless populations and companion animal ownership. This research will be used to complete a project I am doing which includes a paper and production of a film on homelessness and companion animal ownership.

**Participant Selection:** You have been selected for this research as you have identified yourself as being a resident of Wichita, Kansas. Approximately 10 participants will be invited to join this part of the study.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed and this interview will last approximately one hour. The interview might be tape recorded and videotaped. I will be asking your first name. You will not be identified in the final paper or film unless you would specifically like to be.

The questions asked during the interview will be along the lines of the following example questions:

*Are you aware of homeless people with pets?*

*In your experience, what are some of the obstacles homeless people have to overcome in order to access services and employment?*

*Do you think there are more obstacles for a homeless pet owner? If so, what are they?*

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it.

**Benefits:** The potential benefits of this research includes expanding knowledge related to human and animal relationships as well as contributing to an understanding of homelessness, the function of these relationships as well as the perceptions of the general public towards homeless companion animal owners.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study.

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: 316-210-6556 or [tlclick@wichita.edu](mailto:tlclick@wichita.edu) or Dr. Sarah R Taylor at 316-978-3195 or [Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu](mailto:Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu). If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

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Printed Name of Subject

---

Signature of Subject

---

Date

---

Witness Signature

---

Date

---

## Service Provider Informed Consent

Wichita State University  
Institutional Review Board Approval  
9/15/14 – 9/14/15



**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study of homeless populations and companion animal ownership. This research will be used to complete a project I am doing which includes a paper and production of a film on homelessness and companion animal ownership.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have identified yourself as being a provider of social services for homeless individuals. Approximately 10 participants will be invited to join this part of the study.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed and this interview will last approximately one hour. The interview might be tape recorded and videotaped. I will be asking your first name. You will not be identified in the final paper or film unless you would specifically like to be.

The questions asked during the interview will be along the lines of the following example questions:

*What do (or did) you do for a living? How long have you done this job?*

*In your experience, what are some of the obstacles homeless people have to overcome in order to access services and employment?*

*Do you think there are more obstacles for a homeless pet owner? If so, what are they?*

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it.

**Benefits:** The potential benefits of this research includes expanding knowledge related to human and animal relationships as well as contributing to an understanding of homelessness, the function of these relationships as well as the perceptions of the general public towards homeless companion animal owners.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study.

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: 316-210-6556 or [tlclick@wichita.edu](mailto:tlclick@wichita.edu) or Dr. Sarah R Taylor at 316-978-3195 or [Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu](mailto:Sarah.R.Taylor@wichita.edu). If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date