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THE TRANSIENT RESCUE MISSION: A Study in Cultural Adaptation

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THE TRANSIENT RESCUE MISSION
A Study in Cultural Adaptation

By
Patrick Francis McCarty

A THESIS
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Assistant Professor Elizabeth Grobsmith

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Men's Shelter of the People's City Mission Home, Incorporated is a community-based evangelical rescue mission located in the downtown area of Lincoln, Nebraska. Funded exclusively through community resources and supported by the evangelical Protestant churches of the city, the Men's Shelter is one of three services provided by the City Mission. The other programs of the Mission include a Family Shelter and local evangelical ministry. The Men's Shelter deals with emergency shelter, food, and employment needs of the transient male population of the city. The Family Shelter facility offers these same services for indigent, displaced or transient families of Lincoln. Evangelical services are also given through the City Mission religious program to the public at large as well as inmates at local city-county and state correctional facilities.

Preliminary research was begun at the Men's Shelter in October, 1975. These initial efforts indicated that staff and resident interaction was highly structured in regular, predictable patterned ways. The behavior exhibited by the two groups suggested that the Mission is operated under an evangelical philosophy but is simultaneously used for other purposes.

The purpose of the Home as stated in the corporate papers of the City Mission is "to maintain a home where evangelical services shall be conducted and where transient men, women and children and local indigents

may be given temporary sustenance and shelter" (1960:1). This definition of purpose as stated above and perceived by the Mission staff contradicted that of the transient mission residents. The Mission staff functions according to an evangelical religious approach to resolve the personal problems of the Mission residents. Secondary to this religious approach is the material assistance offered by the Mission--food, shelter, and clothing. The responsibility of implementing the religious program is handled by the administrative staff while the operating or "line" staff deals with the mundane, material needs of the resident transients. The line staff prepare meals, distribute clothing, arrange employment, maintain the physical facility and see to it that the mission rules are followed. The mission residents are careful to follow these rules--registering with the staff, seeking employment, paying for services if able to, abstaining from alcohol and drugs, keeping curfew, etc. It is implicit that the line staff also subscribes to the evangelical philosophy accordingly by conducting themselves properly while performing their duties.

Conversely, the Mission residents perceive the mission primarily in terms of material services. Those individuals experienced in residing at various rescue missions throughout the country have developed an understanding of what a rescue mission is and what is required of a transient to be assured of continued residence there. When the specified duties and obligations required of the resident are met, the anticipated food, clothing, lodging and employment will be awarded to them.

A disparity exists between the perceived role and function of the rescue mission as seen by the mission staff as opposed to that of the mission residents. This dissemblance in perceptions of the rescue mission

is best explained through the concept of the "equivalence structure" developed by Anthony F.C. Wallace (1961:35). Wallace explains the equivalence structure as the ability of individuals and groups to mutually predict the cognitive frameworks of each other without necessarily sharing these perceptions. His concepts, the "organization of diversity" and "replication of uniformity" further clarify his theory (1961:22-24).

The rescue mission staff and its residents have sufficient differences in their perceptions of the mission to have what Wallace calls the organization of diversity. This is especially evident in the disparate impressions of the mission's primary role and function. However, staff and residents share sufficient cognitive attitudes about the mission that they can effectively interact with one another without serious conflict--the replication of uniformity. This is accomplished by the residents' adherence to the mission rules in exchange for material reward. Attendance at the evening chapel service is especially important in this respect. The mission staff may or may not share in the knowledge that the principal interest of the transient lies not in salvation but in immediate sustenance, lodging, clothing or employment. Coincidentally, the transient need not share in the knowledge that attendance at evening chapel services is optional in order to receive these services. Nonetheless, the equivalence structure is maintained through shared, predictable behaviors on the part of both groups toward one another as well as within each group.

Methodology

Ethnographic information related to the social structure of the rescue mission is needed in order to determine how the organization of

transient residents and mission staff is defined. This is best accomplished through a comparison of the organizational ideal of the rescue mission with that observed through informal interview and participant-observation during daily mission operation.

Information regarding the administrative perception of the function and role of the rescue mission was obtained from written documents--program service sheets from community funding agencies, corporate papers of the mission and constitutional bylaws and other published material of the international gospel mission organization. Research was conducted over a fourteen-month period between October of 1975 and January of 1977. The author conducted interviews and was participant-observer in a variety of staff and resident activities during the research period.

Significance of the Research

The transient male has been studied in varying degrees in psychological, sociological and anthropological research. Nels Anderson's books on the hobo (1923, 1940) are definitive and classical works on the subject of the male transient or "tramp." The data contained in these texts were collected during the Depression era but offer some relevant ethnographic information about the contemporary transient. More recently, research published by Theodore Caplow (1973), Howard Bahr (1973) and Samuel Wallace (1965) addressed the political-sociological aspects of transiency. They emphasize life on "Skid Row," quantifying the disaffiliation and powerlessness encountered by the tramp in complex, industrialized Western society.

The literary and lyrical image of the tramp also originates from the Depression era. Numerous fictional accounts of the nomadic way of life have been written by well-known authors such as Orwell (1933) and London (1909). Songs of the period reflect similar imagery, romantically depicting transiency and the "fraternal brotherhood of tramps." Although these lyrical ballads and fictional accounts are not without some ethnographic foundation, they are nonetheless dated perceptions and largely inaccurate when compared to descriptions offered by transients today. Older, experienced tramps seasoned during the Depression denounce the prevalent motives and methods employed by their younger counterparts.

No adequate ethnographic account thus far exists dealing specifically with the rescue mission transient. Some anthropological research has been done by James P. Spradley (1968a, 1970, 1971, 1972). Spradley provides some insights into the subculture of the mission using the ethnoscientific approach (1968b) but has never concentrated intensively on this subject.

Scattered references to rescue missions and mission transients can be found in the literature mentioned above. This is useful material but inadequate to define and analyze the phenomena of the rescue mission and the mission tramp in urban society today. This study is a detailed account of a single rescue mission--The Men's Shelter of the People's City Mission of Lincoln, Nebraska.

The thesis is organized to provide the reader with background information relating to the history and function of People's City Mission. The traditional evangelical philosophy of the rescue mission is given and the physical setting and daily routine of the Men's Shelter is detailed. The mission program is also outlined to define the type of problems dealt with and the methods used by the rescue mission to solve them.

Other major portions of the thesis discuss the resident mission transient and the manner in which he utilizes the mission. Local alternatives to the rescue mission available to the tramps are also provided. The final chapters offer a theoretical perspective of the mission social network.

CHAPTER 2

Traditional Philosophy of a Rescue Mission

A rescue or "gospel" mission is a type of Christian religious institution established in a needy district of a city. Missions deal primarily with the socially-disadvantaged, the unemployed, the detached, alcoholics and drug addicts. Rescue missions operate with the assumption that those individuals who solicit their services are souls which require salvation through evangelical means. The fundamental approach to furnishing the necessities for temporal and spiritual survival have been described as "the three S's"--soap, soup and salvation:

"Soap" stood for cleanliness and sanitation--recognition that man should be clean. "Soup" was a recognition that the hungry should be fed, the naked should be clothed and the sick should be cared for. "Salvation" was the end and object of it all. (Paul n.d.:33).

The religious approach to salvation is the primary means utilized in rescue mission work, while the material services--food, shelter, clothing, medical care--are secondary means to salvation (Seath 1974:1). The evangelical approach states that in order to experience a "real" recovery from the problems of life, the mission resident must have a spiritual rebirth through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

Rescue missions offer a variety of services for their clientele. These include: radio and television ministries, jail ministries, gospel and Sunday school services. Medical and dental clinics, drug dependency clinics and rehabilitative programs are also offered. Child and day care, family care, food and clothing are all part of the various mission programs.

These missions limit their services in some way but most offer their patrons the basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing. The traditional mission program dictates that attendance at daily chapel services is a mandatory prerequisite before the transient can obtain food or lodging for a given day. Furthermore, as a variation of the traditional program, the rescue mission may offer several free nights of lodging per month if a Sunday chapel service is attended.

To enforce this traditional policy, the rescue mission staff will deny entrance or exit from the facility until the conclusion of the daily religious service. And, evening meals are delayed until the service is finished. Tramps who have experienced enforcement of this mandatory policy refer to it as "getting an earbanging."

Other requirements of the transient sometimes involve taking a bath or shower, changing clothes daily, or wearing nightshirts before retiring for the night. Such requirements are useful criteria employed by the transient to evaluate and select missions at which to stay. As part of this selective process, the tramp is concerned with maximizing his comfort while minimizing personal restrictions. He must contend with an opposition between these restrictions and personal freedom because of his need for mobility. Therefore, the transient selects the missions which will cater to his wants and needs best while at the same time provide him with the most personal freedom.

A Brief History of People's City Mission

Because of its flexibility, a great deal can be said of the continued success of the People's City Mission over its seventy year history. The People's City Mission Home, Incorporated was founded by the evangelical Protestant churches of the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1907. The original purpose of the Mission was to maintain a facility in the city where public evangelical services could be conducted and where transient men, women and children could be given emergency food and shelter.

For the first two years of its existence, the City Mission was headquartered in a rented building two blocks south of its present location. In 1909, the Lincoln churches purchased the building where the Mission is presently located, 124 South Ninth Street. When purchased, these new quarters were a recently vacated house of prostitution known as "Lydia's Place." Appropriately, the building and clientele were converted and the mission operation continued in its new location. The Home attempted to assist transients who had settled in the Haymarket area of Lincoln, close to local rail lines, produce markets and the heart of the city. There were also numerous German and Russian-Crimean immigrants who were settling in the neighboring Salt Creek "bottoms" of Lincoln early in the 1900's. The mission facility served these local families as a church, Sunday school, community center and school for learning English.

During the first sixty-five years of its existence, the People's City Mission housed single transient males as well as transient and displaced families at the present Ninth Street location. By that time, it was determined that the volume of transient families exceeded the allotted space available. In 1972, the Home purchased government surplus housing

near the city limits and established a separate Family Shelter. This new facility functions exclusively to provide temporary housing, food and clothing for destitute and transient families in Lincoln. Free furniture is also distributed as a means of promoting eventual independent living for these families. The Shelter maintains its own staff but is affiliated with People's City Mission Home, Incorporated.

Temporary housing and food and clothing has been available to male transients at the Men's Shelter on Ninth Street for the past sixty-eight years. Here the tramp can obtain the basic living necessities, have the opportunity to earn wages through local employment and also receive religious salvation if he so desires.

The Physical Setting of People's City Mission

Staff and residents of the Men's Shelter of People's City Mission are quartered separately. Each have separate eating facilities, recreational and sleeping areas. Presumably, social distinctions are established and boundaries maintained by this arrangement. Prestige is acquired by residents who become line staff members. As a benefit of this new status, these men enjoy a private sleeping room and access to the staff areas not granted to residents. By this separation, staff and residents can easily be distinguished from each other.

The street level of the mission contains the clerical offices and adjoining chapel room in the west half of the building. The registrar's sleeping room is also located in this area. The remaining half of the main floor consists of the separate staff and resident dining rooms and kitchen and resident day room. A small staff room adjoins the kitchen.

Chapel and clerical offices are modestly furnished with carpeted floors and Christian wall hangings (i.e., religious pictures and posters). These areas and staff dining and smoking areas are air-conditioned, resident areas are not. Residents are permitted in the chapel and office areas during business hours but hesitate to utilize them. Access to the mission registration is available through this area but more often transients pass through an outer resident smoking area. Infrequently, residents enter the office-chapel area to speak with the mission director or chaplain. New arrivals unfamiliar with the mission will enter through this area. Social distance is affected by the mere presence of an administrative area at the mission causing residents to avoid it.

A further distinction can be drawn between treatment of residents and staff based on their dining areas and meals served to them. Although the staff group dining at any given meal is less than ten individuals, the dining area afforded them is disproportionately large. The separate resident dining area is roughly three quarters the size of the staff room but customarily must accomodate twenty to thirty-five individuals. Separate meals are also prepared for the two groups on a staggered time schedule. Quality, quantity and selection of food is superior for staff members. Differential treatment based on status distinctions is evident at mealtime.

Access is limited to the residents' dining area until meals are served. This permits the cook and his assistant to prepare and serve the meals beforehand. It also allows the registrar to secure payment for meals before they are served. Residents are also restricted from several other areas of the mission: the day room clothes closet, basement locker, shower and clothing storage areas, the mission registration office, the

upstairs dormitory and clothes closets and staff sleeping rooms. In all cases, staff members explain that security is maintained by locking these areas. Transients are suspect to thievery (as a means of supporting their drinking habits or to obtain ready cash). For this reason, these areas are off limits unless staff are present.

The transient day room is a recreational area for the resident and a sleeping area during all hours of the day and night. The day room contains fixed wooden benches, a magazine table and television set, vending machine, pay telephone and display rack containing evangelical religious literature. Walls in this area are decorated with religious messages. The literature and wall messages suggest the importance of religious conversion and salvation in a subtle manner. The registration and employment office adjoins the day room. A Dutch door permits residents to converse with the registrar while his office is opened.

In overall appearance, the transient day room resembles a bus or railroad terminal with a similar social atmosphere. Conversation is minimal and residents respect the privacy of others in the room. Socializing is primarily confined to friendly greetings or glances as most men in the area are preoccupied with sleeping, watching television or reading newspapers or other available reading materials.

The basement area of the mission includes a clothing storage room, lavatory, and transient locker room and shower. A separate laundry facility and several private staff sleeping rooms are also located in the basement area. The shower room is used by transients immediately before the evening meal. This is a time of day when residents are returning from day labor jobs and new arrivals are coming into the mission from nearby freight yards. During these hours, the locker area is open and

accessible to anyone. Transients store possessions in these lockers at their own risk.

The second floor of the mission is divided in half with the director's living quarters and study separated from the transient dormitory, clothing storage closets and shower room, and two private staff sleeping rooms adjoining the dormitory. A transient must shower daily before he is allowed to retire. His foot apparel is fumigated nightly and stored separately from his clothing. Both clothing and shoes are locked up for the night. Divested of these possessions, transients are given nightshirts and are assigned to a bunk. Coupled with this nightly regimentation, the bunk arrangement of the dormitory could be compared to an army barracks.

To maintain order, a dormitory attendant is quartered in a private room adjoining the dormitory. He makes certain that showers are taken, clothes and valuables are locked and that order is maintained among the residents through the night. However, without street clothing, it is unlikely that any of the transients would leave the mission before morning.

To avoid disturbing the men in the dormitory after curfew, the registrar directs all incoming transients to sleep on the day room benches--late arrivals, inebriated residents or residents returning from evening employment. The day room may also be used as auxiliary bed space if the dormitory is filled to capacity.

A narrow passage separates the Mission building from an adjacent building. This open space is the resident smoking area. Due to fire regulations, smoking is prohibited inside the mission building. The greatest amount of social interaction among transients occurs in the smoking area. Numerous pint wine bottles frequently litter this space. Drinking intoxicants is also prohibited and tramps are careful not to get caught

consuming alcohol on the premises. Different groups of these men often share wine along the sidewalk outside the Mission during the course of the day. Police patrols in this area discourage this practice but fail to prohibit public drinking by transients in the immediate area.

People's City Mission is located in an area of the city that is advantageous from the transient's standpoint. The mission facility is within blocks of the local freight yards, bus depot, and main thoroughfare of the city. Most often, tramps arrive at the Mission directly off Burlington Northern freight trains that arrive throughout the day. Directions to the Mission can be obtained from railroad crews, switch tower personnel, or other tramps who have arrived on the same train or who are about to depart on the next available "freight" out of the city.

The central location of the Mission allows the tramp to freely roam the downtown area, make use of local bars and pawn shops, or check into job situations at nearby temporary employment services. For those tramps who can afford or choose to travel by bus, two terminals are available within walking distance of the Mission.

Police report that they often pick up tramps who have been hitchhiking in the area and bring them to the Mission. State, county and city police are all headquartered in Lincoln and frequently direct the tramp to the City Mission. Furthermore, several arterial streets give the tramp access to the main Interstate highway which is within one block of the Mission. The location of the Mission offers no obstacles to mobility, permitting the transient to use the mission facility and be in close proximity to a number of different modes of transportation.

To summarize, the physical setting of the rescue mission demonstrates a well-controlled and well-defined set of social boundary and status

mechanisms. The separate facilities maintained reaffirm the status distinctions between staff and residents, inhibit theft and reassure privacy for the staff. These boundaries are sustained to enhance the social position of staff members, as an inducement for residents to become staff members and to assure the authority of the staff. Differential treatment is evident in accessibility to certain areas of the facility, in the types of food served to the staff and residents and in the privilege of private sleeping rooms for staff members. Transients are relegated to an inferior status enforced by isolation from staff areas and daily regimentation of meals, hygiene, sleeping and employment. In the absence of locks, invisible social boundary mechanisms further enforce segregation.

Daily Mission Regimen

The resident transient is soon made aware of the rules and regulations he must abide by if he wishes to reside at the mission for any length of time. These are simple and explicit requirements and are generally adhered to. The transient is keenly aware that the mission is an important cultural resource to him both in terms of acquiring basic living necessities and to accumulate vital information essential to his travel plans. He is therefore careful not to jeopardize this key asset.

Mission rules establish a regular and familiar pattern for residents and help to maintain order for staff and residents alike. Mundane schedules regulate the times for meals, curfew, clothing distribution and chapel service. Timing is also an essential part of the mission

employment program. Transients hoping to amass wages make certain that they are available when job assignments are determined.

As mentioned above, staff and resident meals are served separately on a staggered schedule. Residents register for meals one half hour before serving time. The day room acts as a staging area prior to meals as the transient dining area is locked until the designated meal time. Payment for meals is dependent on personal resources. Transients returned from day labor jobs customarily remit the required fee. Social interaction during meals is minimal as most residents are strangers to one another. Conversation is reserved for before or after mealtime in the smoking area.

Total daily living expenses at the City Mission are two dollars and ninety cents--one dollar for sleeping, sixty cents for lunch and eighty cents for the evening meal. The breakfast meal is fifty cents.

The transients' meal menu schedule is also regulated. Residents can expect to be served similar breakfast and lunch foods daily, while the evening meal offers the only per diem variety. Breakfasts consist of black coffee, hot cereal and an occasional sweet roll. The lunch meal includes a cold vending machine sandwich, beverage and soup. Daily evening meals offer variation and greater quantity of food. The main course changes daily for seven days. On any given day of the week, a tramp can expect to be served the same evening menu he had been served on any previous week. Established residents pass on information regarding meals to new arrivals as a pretext to further social interaction. Meals are one of several important criteria used by transients to decide on residence at any particular mission.

Registration at the mission is used to determine bunk arrangements, to accumulate lists for employment and to check for payment of meals served. Transients provide name, destination, occupation, age and marital status before obtaining food or lodging for the night. For those transients who have registered at the mission in the past, their registration cards are pulled from the mission file and updated. Careful records are a legal requirement of the United Way for funding purposes. File information is also useful to local police who frequently examine current mission lists in search of fugitives. In the event of a fire, mission records would help to identify transients registered in a certain bunk.

The mission work program is designed to provide an income for the transient and to assure the mission some remuneration to cover operating costs. If he registers as indigent, the tramp is allowed free room and board provided he is actively searching for employment. It is felt by the mission that an employment program operating out of the mission itself will offer more of an incentive for the resident to work. All able residents are required to register their names with the registrar daily to be considered for temporary employment. Men place their names and are given priority based on time of registration. When the mission receives a call for employment or in-person requests from employers, the registrar calls out residents names based on registration priority. Primacy is assured if the transient registers immediately after the six-twenty a.m. breakfast and clothing distribution. However, if the resident works, his name goes to the bottom of the list to give others a fair chance for a job.

Because of this rotational policy, it is most advantageous for the resident to avoid reporting employment to the registrar. This is difficult

to conceal especially if the resident has been placed by the mission. Customarily, these jobs are of short duration and low pay. Reporting work denies the aggressive tramp job priority. It is better for him to catch an employer outside the mission before he registers his potential job with the registrar. The experienced transient knows this and will carefully select jobs that are of longer duration or will search out his own employment.

The mission chapel service and evening curfew are the last events in the daily mission schedule for the transient. Chapel services are offered at seven forty-five p.m. each evening with attendance optional. Services last one hour and conclude with enough time to permit bunk registration. Tramps have the opportunity to pre-register before the evening meal and these residents are free to shower and retire following the placement of their belongings with the dormitory attendant. Curfew is scheduled for nine o'clock p.m. but late retirement usually follows a larger volume of registrations and the customary exchanges between residents and the dormitory man. Clothing closets and dormitory exits are locked and lights are turned out between nine-twenty and nine-thirty p.m.

Rescue missions maintain a daily schedule which allows the resident transient to predict his daily activities and to plan his day accordingly. Meals, showering, clothing distribution, employment, chapel services, curfew and registration are sustained on a regular daily basis. This assists in establishing order for the resident and mission staff alike and also helps familiarize the resident with the mission operation.

CHAPTER 3

The Social Ills of Transiency

It is necessary to establish a point of view concerning transiency as it is understood by the rescue mission. Missions establish programs based on the needs of the transient as the missions perceive them. Foremost among these needs, rescue missions see transiency itself as a "problem." This chapter will define transiency and the social ills which are commonly associated with it. Next, the mission program is explained in terms of treatment of these ills.

Transiency or homelessness is often associated with a number of social problems. Spradley identifies four social identities which are commonly linked to the transient--a popular identity, a medical identity, a legal identity and a sociological identity (1970:66-70). According to Spradley, the "popular" identity labels transients as failures, social dependents, and unpredictable, self-indulgent individuals. The "medical" identity defines the transient on the basis of disease. He is an alcoholic. When viewed according to the "legal" identity, transients are seen as criminals, usually guilty of public intoxication or vagrancy. Finally, Spradley explains the "sociological" identity as a synthesis of legal and medical identities, congruent with locale or more appropriately, the lack of locale--"the homeless man."

Sociologists Caplow, Bahr and Sternberg define homelessness as a condition of disjuncture and disorganization from the settled population:

Homelessness is a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures (Caplow, et.al. 1968:494).

The sociologists point out that homelessness is a matter of degree, affecting the family least and the individual most. In their evaluation of these degrees of homelessness, they rate the transient "at the extreme point of the scale (demonstrating) the possibility of nearly total detachment from society" (Caplow, et.al. 1968:495).

In her study of the homeless male population of Lincoln, Nebraska, in the early 1950's, Hoffman (1953) isolated a number of personal and social problems of city transients. Using data gathered from case histories, she found that first, highly mobile individuals are driven to transiency because of personality disturbances and maladjustment brought on by social crises. Secondly, Hoffman found that these crises reinforce mobility. Third, she concluded that sustained transiency is a form of self-perpetuating adjustment. Hoffman goes on to say that transients often take more hazardous jobs, fail to tend to their medical needs and drink excessively. She believes that because of the need to make numerous decisions, there is also an emotional strain associated with transiency. According to Hoffman, this added emotional stress is compounded by diminished group contact and personal isolation and loneliness.

A final sociological view is offered by Clinard (1966). Citing other sociologists such as Anderson, Sutherland and Locke, he lists several social problems common among transients--family conflict, feelings of failure, disgrace or embarrassment and fear of punishment. Clinard states that these are the precipitants which cause men to desert home

and community. Other factors such as desire for new experiences or wanderlust are also cited by Clinard as reasons contributing to transiency. He cites economic as well as familistic problems leading to transiency:

Thus the road to dependancy generally (involves) not only such factors as prolonged marginal dependancy or a long period of economic deterioration, but marital and sexual problems, excessive drinking, cultural conflicts, detachment from family and personal friends and personal crises (1966:103).

In contrast to the viewpoints discussed above, transients themselves point out that their most serious problems concern women and employers. Marital conflicts, salary disputes or disagreements involving working conditions may lead to drinking or serious criminal activities--robbery, assault, etc. However, transients seldom indicate other reasons apart from early employment or marital difficulties which may lead to transiency. Mission records confirm that only a small proportion of transient residents are married (.03%) while seventeen per cent are separated and twenty-nine per cent are divorced. Of the remainder, 47.5 per cent are single and 6.5 per cent are widowed (People's City Mission 1975:18).

In addition to personal difficulties mentioned above, transients also discuss the need for wanderlust. They feel that it is difficult for the settled population to comprehend this need. Without reservation, sensing this need is adequate reason for a man to become a transient. According to one informant, "It's in the blood."

Implementation of the Mission Goals

The design of the rescue mission program is largely conditioned by the various perceptions of transiency discussed above. Based on these

perceptions, the mission program attempts to deal with transiency through counseling services, the employment program and a religious program.

Mission Counseling Services

A major emphasis of the rescue mission program stresses the need to deal with alcoholism. Despite the restrictions on consumption of intoxicants in the mission, transients (and some staff personnel) excessively partake in the adjoining alleyways or on nearby sidewalks or in local bars throughout the day. Because of his own personal conflict with alcohol, the director of People's City Mission has written extensively on the problem of alcoholism (Dunn 1965, 1969, 1971, 1974).

Mission rules prohibit possession or consumption of alcohol anywhere on mission grounds. Residents caught in possession of intoxicants must relinquish them for confiscation and destruction by the mission staff. Furthermore, the guilty party is required to leave. Individual attention is given by the director and his staff to each incident involving alcohol. Certain staff positions are filled by former mission residents, some of whom have problems with alcohol. Likewise, some residents are habitually inebriated at curfew time. The staff remains flexible with each case of drinking violation, rather than banishing all offenders. Familiarity with residents is an important consideration. In the case of a staff offense, three chances are given to correct drinking problems before final disciplinary action is taken. Consequently, rules are bent to accomodate both staff and resident drinking problems and backsliding.

When the alcoholic resident approaches the mission staff for assistance, he may be directed to either the chaplain or the director

for personal religious counseling. If the problem is especially complex or if the resident decides against religious help, he is offered a variety of choices regarding treatment. The City of Lincoln maintains a Chemical Dependency Unit at one of the local hospitals. Detoxification treatment covers a three-day period after which time the patient is released. The "Detox" program is offered to all individuals apprehended for public intoxication in lieu of incarceration. During the research period, it was observed on numerous occasions that transients returning to the mission from detoxification explained to mission residents that incarceration was preferable to them because of the quality of city jail food. Good meals in jail are in incentive to remain incarcerated for some alcoholic tramps.

Chronic transient alcoholics may also be referred to one of three long-term treatment facilities. The Hastings Regional Center (located in central Nebraska) deals with transient alcoholics who are ineligible for treatment at the Veteran's Administration Hospital or cannot get into the Salvation Army center when filled to capacity. Both services are located in Lincoln. Transients who are military veterans can be treated for alcoholism at the V.A. hospital. Counseling therapy is available and tramps with other physical ailments can also have their medical needs attended to there. The Salvation Army center is limited to ninety men and is usually full at all times. The program here is voluntary and uses a combination of counseling, employment and religious therapy. City Mission residents often move to the Salvation Army center when space permits. Although the center's director denies that their program treats alcoholic transients, these men can expect treatment.

Despite the association of alcoholism (as a medical identity) with all transients, only a portion of these men suffer from this illness. Although comprehensive statistics are not available, Schneider and Pittman (1968) report that the incidence of alcoholism and other related drinking pathologies as well as psychiatric and physical disease is unquestionably high among the transient population.

Drinking behavior around the mission is almost non-existent and is confined to group sharing of port wine (usually purchased by the pint). If the transient is interested in becoming inebriated, he will choose an alternate place to do so (i.e., bars, alleys, flop houses) and will return later to the mission, hopefully without being detected. Heavy drinkers are permitted to socialize with residents if they do not cause disturbances or supply them with liquor. In most cases however, they will not be given food or lodging.

Mission Employment Program

The rescue mission employment program offers additional treatment and rehabilitation for the transient. Social dependancy is a recognized social problem associated with transiency. The operational slogan of People's City Mission is "A hand up, not a handout." It is felt by the mission that the employment program that it administers will somehow return the transient to a life of usefulness. Implicit in this philosophy is the notion that transiency is worthless. By replicating a settled existence through daily employment, the mission feels that it will instill in the transient middle-class values and habits. Such values and habits are instrumental to a worthwhile, settled life (according to the mission

philosophy). Food, shelter and clothing are other useful resources but regular employment is an admirable virtue.

Various local employers actively solicit labor through the rescue mission. Typical jobs registered with the program include: egg-sorting through a local hatchery, furniture-moving, dishwashing, cooking jobs, janitorial cleanup and sod-laying. Late summer and early fall jobs are annually available for harvest work or "roustabout" carnival positions during the State Fair which is held in Lincoln.

Several criteria are used by the tramp to decide on which jobs to choose. These include practical reasons (such as rate of pay and working conditions) and personal reasons. The transient may be concerned with length of employment required before he will be paid as he may have immediate travel plans. He may wish to follow seasonal harvests or have a Veteran's Administration pension check mailed to an address in another city. Regular mission residents are familiar with local employers and know which to avoid working for. Wages or working conditions may not always be as promised. Tramps are quick to point out that if they are unfairly exploited by employers they have little recourse since the mission requires active participation in the employment program as a condition of residency. The best that can be done is for the transient to pass on information regarding employer reputability to new arrivals before they make a decision to work for them.

People's City Mission employs some of its own residents. Dishwashing, clothing distribution and pickup and delivery jobs are offered in exchange for food and lodging. These intermittent staff positions are filled by soliciting the resident day room population. Transients may also request employment. The needs of the transient, the needs of the mission and the

financial condition of the mission are all factors in hiring part-time personnel. The mission director can anticipate frequent resignations but can find other willing residents to fill these positions. According to job descriptions, the staff dishwasher, dormitory attendant, clothing room attendant and replacement or "swing" man are all considered "rehabilitative." Although some of these positions are often vacated, the mission feels that they are useful tasks which will lead to sedentary life for the transient.

Employment as a permanent staff member gives the transient the added benefits of salary and the potential for raises. He also enjoys the added status which accompanies his position--accessibility to staff areas and power over the residents. During the staff turnover, the director and other staff personnel fill in until replacements are found.

Mission records indicate that residents who habitually work and pay for their room and board bear little of the financial burden of the total mission budget. Daily room and board fees are a "token" payment for services received. Regardless, the mission feels that even this small payment is a rehabilitative tool which symbolizes usefulness and responsibility. However, residents feel that their payments subsidize illegal graft and profit for the mission director while paying for a major portion of mission operations.¹ This claim cannot be justified according to the annual financial statements of the mission. Over the past several years, the volume of transients served has steadily increased while community funding, job availability and remunerative payment from transients has remained relatively constant.

The Religious Program

Although alcoholic counseling and employment are features of the rescue mission program designed to deal with specific social problems of the transient, the religious program encompasses all social problems experienced by the transient. The sermon of each evening chapel service is directed to a host of transient social problems.²

The individuals and groups who alternately hold chapel services at People's City Mission conduct them according to their individual religious persuasions and are not trained by the Mission. Daily chapel service is held each evening at seven forty-five p.m. Monday through Saturday. Over twenty churches, groups and individuals rotate responsibility for the hour-long service each evening.

Residents use the time before chapel to rest and relax, converse with each other, watch television, read, etc. Shortly before the service, a call is made by a staff member for the men to enter the chapel. At this time, disinterested residents are free to leave the mission until curfew and the outer access door to the mission (through the smoking area) is locked. Thereafter, all subsequent resident traffic must pass through the chapel. To avoid the service entirely, disinterested residents do not re-enter until the service is completed.

Residents participating in religious services are given a hymnal and choose a pew beforehand. Roughly eighty per cent of all residents attend daily services. Participants can expect a similar format regardless of the service leader. Chapel begins with several Christian hymns blended with a testimony of salvation by the speaker. More hymns follow and the service is concluded with an altar call, requesting testimonials and

prayers from any willing participant. If the resident feels that he is spiritually saved, he indicates this by raising a hand and comes forward to receive the blessings of Jesus Christ. The transient can consider that his past faults have been forgiven and that his personal problems will be cared for.

Although it is somewhat discounted by some rescue missions, the evening chapel service is a vital part of the total mission program. As Paul states:

The heart of the rescue mission is the service. No matter what the other facilities may be, the service is still the important, strategic and significant part of the mission (n.d.:63).

According to Paul, there are two fundamental principles to be observed at the service:

(First) The message should center around conversion. Every Rescue Mission worker should ask the question, "Is this message going to bring conviction into the hearts of sinners and will it win them to the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior?"
(Second) It is honestly and sincerely a soul-saving station...(63).

To further emphasize the redemptive nature of the rescue mission, chapel service speakers are useful as model Christians. Many are themselves former sinners who have received miraculous cures from their social problems through total dedication to a Christian life. It is hoped that through this shared common experience that the transient will regain hope and decide to change his life through religious conversion.

Some residents actively participate in the chapel service while others ignore the speaker and are easily distracted. Speakers read these cues to

determine the length of their sermons. While some residents may gain encouragement through these services, other transients indicate that the chapel service offers some distraction from their customary mundane routine and nothing more.

The rescue mission program is designed to involve the transient in useful and worthwhile activities while he is in residence there. Alcoholic counseling is offered through several facilities and through the mission director and chaplain. Employment programs are designed to instill middle-class values--responsibility and regularity. Jobs are a means of encouraging a sedentary life. Religion is a panacea for any physical, spiritual, or social ailment the tramp may have. It is offered through individual counseling as well as through chapel services.

The total program of the rescue mission conforms to the various transient "identities" recognized by the settled population--popular, legal, medical, and social. Each service offered (counseling, employment or religion) is a means used by the mission to solve the various personal and social problems of the transient and are meant to complement each other.

CHAPTER 4

Transiency as a Way of Life

For many transients, the "mission circuit" is an important part of their lives. The experienced tramp has learned the significance of the rescue mission as a cultural resource where basic physical needs as well as employment can be assured. As he travels, the transient discovers that certain missions provide free lodging and meals contingent upon a good behavioral record or attendance at specified evening chapel services. Wiseman calls this a "giant musical chairs." "Actually, you could get a free bed every night if you went to all the churches and missions (1970:23)."

As an example of this "circuit," one mission in the western United States offers the transient three free night's lodging per month if he attends one Sunday chapel service. Also, other missions might provide in-house meals or free tickets redeemable at local eating establishments under similar conditions. If the transient can coordinate where he wants to be at a certain time along with the day when a free meal or bunk is offered in that city, he can develop an annual route throughout the country. Thereby, the tramp can get to his destination, be assured of desired services and spend a minimum of cash in the process. Such "mission hopping" is facilitated by continued practice and by experience on the road.

After spending days in an uncomfortable, dirty boxcar, the transient welcomes an occasional stopover at the rescue mission if only for brief

rest and refreshment. Tramps need not register to use the mission facilities. Often, after showering the transient will change into clean clothes, consume a meal and then depart on the next available freight. Resident transients also enjoy cleanliness and rest after returning from daily employment and will discard their soiled clothing in favor of fresh garments before dining.

As a temporary stopover, People's City Mission affords the tramp with some measure of recreation. He can rest and relax there, enjoy a magazine, book or newspaper or he can watch television or talk to fellow tramps. His only interest may be to pass the time between freights or to have a meal prepared for him as a change of habit. With all mission meals served on a fixed schedule, the transient knows when he can eat and register for the night if he chooses to remain. Mission regulations stipulate that only registered transients are eligible to dine there. However, the tramp can circumvent this requirement because volume and constant traffic of men prevent the staff from enforcing this regulation. This added flexibility of meals without registration facilitates mobility.

Main Functions of the Rescue Mission

Based on information supplied by resident transients, the rescue mission served three key functions as a temporary transient home base. First, the mission supplies the tramp with safe and secure accommodations. Temporary residency at the mission guarantees relative safety from robbery and assault. Secondly, the rescue mission eliminates the worries

associated with weather changes and sleeping outdoors. Finally, the accessibility of intoxicants to alcoholic transients is substantially reduced at the mission.

Transients often rely on impromptu sleeping accommodations either outdoors or in protective shelters.³ While sleeping out-of-doors, in abandoned autos, in "flop" housing, there is an increased danger that the tramp will be assaulted and robbed. Shaw (1930) discusses the dangers of encounters with "jack rollers"--individuals who prey upon drunken or sleeping tramps. Other transients are also suspect. By temporarily residing at the rescue mission, the tramp is not totally immune from robbery and assault. Unattended personal possessions are sometimes taken and fights also erupt at rescue missions. However, the threat of robbery and physical violence is appreciably reduced for the tramp in residence there. Fellow residents are constantly aware of local police patrols in the area. As a further deterrent to theft, all rooms and closets containing valuables are conscientiously locked.

Because of climatic variability in the United States, transients are able to sleep outdoors throughout the year. During warmer months, or in warmer climates, weather is no threat to the tramp aside from precipitation. If he prefers a "natural" sleeping place or is low on cash, the tramp normally spends his nights in weed patches, abandoned freight cars or other ready-made sleeping places. As a change during warm weather or out of necessity during cold or wet weather, the transient may prefer to sleep at the rescue mission. People's City Mission has a national reputation among transients because of its accommodations, cleanliness and reasonable rates.

Alcoholism is an uncontrollable habit among some mission residents and the prohibitive rules against intoxicants is an asset to these residents. Intoxication can establish a bad record or tarnish a good one and may lead to a total banishment from a mission. It is therefore imperative for the tramp to control his drinking and keep a good record at the mission if he ever intends to utilize the mission again. If he needs assistance with his problem, he can be assured that it will be provided for him if he calls it to the attention of the mission staff.

Choosing the Mission

The basic criterion used by the transient in his decision to reside at the rescue mission involves an opposition between restriction and freedom. With a free choice to stay or move on, he must decide if he is willing to give up a certain measure of autonomy enjoyed elsewhere in exchange for the services that he will be provided.

Living by the mission rules not only requires that the tramp registers, pays for services if able and actively seeks employment. He must also submit to a regimented schedule which includes hygiene, eating and sleeping. He is restricted to the mission after curfew and must remain there for the night if he registers. His clothes and valuables are locked away and he is locked into the dormitory until morning.

He cannot drink or smoke where he pleases. He bathes communally among strangers and may be required to wear a nightshirt. If sleeping facilities are provided by a rescue mission, it is reasonable for the tramp to assume that some or all of these restrictions will be enforced. Because of the rapid turnover of the resident population coupled with the concern of the mission to maintain order, these restrictions have

been imposed on the transient. There is an interest to protect physical well-being along with personal property. The mission considers this as a service furnished to the transient.

The mission residents know that they will be confined for the night and do so with some reluctance. Missions that allow later hours or do not require standardized bed clothing may limit other services such as number of meals served per day or continuous days of lodging allowed. In each case, the benefits and inconveniences of residency at a certain mission are weighed before a decision is finalized. Regardless of restrictions, the mission may be a welcome change from another form of transient accommodation available. Also, a tramp may simply need a temporary mailing address for correspondence or pension checks. He has only to ask residents or staff personnel what is required of him in order to reside at the mission and obtain other services. The tramp bases his decision on the value of these benefits as opposed to the amount of personal freedom he must sacrifice to have them.

In his ethnoscientific study of a tramp subculture, Spradley refers to the "contrast set" of mission "flops" as supplied to him by a transient informant (1968b:9). The criteria given include: flop (how many nights allowed per month); cost (whether or not chapel service attendance or religious testimonials are required); work (availability of employment from or through the mission); eat (eating at the mission or provided meal tickets redeemable elsewhere); clothes (furnished by the mission or not) and finally, cleanup facilities (bath or showers available). Criteria supplied by Spradley's informant corresponds to services offered by People's City Mission.

Alternative Transient Residencies

Several different types of transient shelters exist in and around the city of Lincoln. Choosing to reside in these various shelters is based on the same criterion used to evaluate rescue missions--the opposition between restriction and freedom. In some cases however, these other types of transient lodging facilities involve a risk to property and personal safety. These alternative living situations include: local "flop" houses, the Salvation Army center, the Y.M.C.A., a transient railroad "jungle," and various out-of-doors localities.

Several flop houses well-known to both the police and local transients are convenient as a source of temporary housing for tramps. Four separate flop hotels are located within a six block radius of the mission and consist of single and multiple ill-kept sleeping rooms. All are located above taverns or local businesses and have an established nightly rate of two dollars. Mission residents move into these rooms to enjoy the personal freedom of unrestricted drinking. Transients often take such rooms for weekend "binges" and return penniless to the mission on Monday mornings anticipating free food and lodging. The mission staff is aware of this routine but can do little to curtail it. Transients who choose these flop hotels do so at the risk of personal injury or robbery and arrest. Police report that they are often called to settle disturbances at these hotels. Inebriation is the primary cause of these disputes.

The Salvation Army Center operates in a similar fashion to the City Mission but restricts the activities of its residents (or "beneficiaries") more severely than the rescue mission. These beneficiaries must accept mandatory chapel services and counseling therapy sessions, mandatory

employment with the Salvation Army (in its reclamation center) and minimal pay and enforced curfew. Beneficiaries also receive free room and board, and an activity ticket which is only redeemable through the Center. This treatment program is voluntary for ninety days and transients may leave at will. If they choose to stay beyond their treatment period, beneficiaries are given permanent positions but must pay room and board.

The local Y.M.C.A. has a men's dormitory which transients occasionally use. Available rooms are good quality and transients are free to come and go as they please, provided that they cause no disturbances. Daily room costs are beyond the means of most tramps--seven dollars. Consequently, the Y.M.C.A. is used as a luxury for the transient with extra cash to spend.

Transient railroad "jungles" and open-air sleeping places are the most dangerous of all alternative locales for the tramp. While in these jungles, transients enjoy the companionship of fellow tramps and share information and material goods with each other. Also, because of the large and rapid turnover of transients who use these "jungles" as staging areas for boarding freights, the tramp can never be certain of his personal safety. Despite the companionship that he enjoys, the transient must also consider the risks involved in residing in these railroad jungles.

Other open-air sleeping arrangements can be found near the railroad right-of-way. These are solitary spots usually situated in tall weeds or close to buildings. Alleys are also popular sites. Tramps who select these areas must consider similar risks as those encountered in the railroad jungles and may also be subject to police searches. Squad cars patrol sectors not covered by railroad security police and also investigate alleys and railroad jungles. Personal freedom is inhibited as these random searches are a signal to transients that there are local police

present. Such searches occasionally uncover criminal fugitives traveling as tramps.

The circuit of rescue missions throughout the country provides the transient with opportunities for free services on a personally-scheduled basis. Mission facilities can be used for temporary rest and refreshment or as semi-permanent residences. Several key functions are furnished by the missions--safety and shelter from robbery and assault, protection from foul weather and as a mediating force to restrict access of intoxicants to chronically alcoholic transients.

Deciding on residence at the rescue mission or local, alternative transient lodging involves consideration of the freedom-restriction criterion. In the case of the rescue mission, the transient must weigh the sacrifices to be made in personal freedom for the benefits of clothing, lodging, employment, and food and shelter that are offered by the mission. In choosing alternative transient lodging, the tramp must consider the threat to his personal safety and belongings and weigh this against the personal freedom he enjoys under such conditions.

CHAPTER 5

The Social Network of the Mission Transient

In order to fully understand the role of the rescue mission and its subsequent use by the transient male population, it is necessary to analyze the social network of the mission transient. The rescue mission can be analyzed in terms of the theory of "equivalence structures" as an explanatory model of this social network. This theory was developed by Wallace (1961).

Wallace states that in all social systems, individuals are driven by different motives and cognitions. Furthermore, he explains that "cognitive non-uniformity" may be a functional postulate for stable social interaction. According to Wallace, stability is achieved by the individual's perception of the "equivalence structure":

By this is implied the recognition--as a result of learning--that the behavior of other people under various circumstances is predictable, irrespective of knowledge of their motivation, and this is capable of being predictably related to one's actions (1961:35).

This equivalence structure among groups and individuals is a means of integrating behaviors into what Wallace calls "reliable systems" which require little shared cognition or motivation.

Wallace uses the concepts "organization of diversity" and "replication of uniformity" to outline his theory. These concepts are useful in analyzing behaviors at the rescue mission between staff and resident groups and among members of these groups. Wallace states that individuals who share a common group identification behave in much the same fashion in similar social situations. Ideally, these individuals would learn the same things in a "homogeneous" cultural environment. Wallace labels this the "replication of uniformity":

Under such circumstances, the society may be regarded as culturally homogeneous and the individuals will be expected to share a uniform nuclear character (1961:22).

On the level of resident group interaction, the establishment of "partnerships" and material and non-material exchanges are especially significant. These behaviors involve a replication of uniformity among residents because they represent two important group activities. First, they denote an enculturation process whereby individuals learn about transiency and how to survive as transients. Secondly, these interactions symbolize the "uniform nuclear character" of the transient subculture by reaffirming an individual and group transient identity.

Among staff members, the replication of uniformity is manifest in a similar way. A "uniform nuclear character" is apparent because staff members agree in their understanding of the purpose of the rescue mission. Their role as staff members is to provide emergency material services for the mission residents. More importantly however, the staff maintains that the rescue mission is a soul-saving institution promoting evangelism and salvation. Transiency is perceived by the staff as a social problem that must be corrected through religious conversion.

Replication of uniformity among staff and resident groups consists of a common perception of the secondary, superficial role and function of the rescue mission. Transients share an interest in obtaining food and shelter while at the mission. Mission staff members also believe that these material services are necessary. These shared perceptions between resident and staff members promote harmony and allows these two groups to successfully predict each others' behaviors.

In his explanation of "organization of diversity" Wallace stresses the disparate habits, motives, personalities and customs within certain culturally organized boundaries:

Culture...appears to be a turbulent species, constantly oscillating between the ecstasies of revitalization and the agonies of decline...Culture...is characterized...by diversity of both individuals and groups, many of whom are in continuous and overt conflict in one subsystem and in active cooperation in another (1961:23-24).

Within the culturally defined boundaries of the rescue mission, there are also differences between the motives and cognitions of the residents and staff as well as between these two groups. Among some residents, the material needs offered by the mission are less important than is the opportunity for self-improvement. These transients openly subscribe to the religious ideology of the rescue mission, becoming staff members. The majority of residents only tacitly accept the religious overtures of the rescue mission and agree to attend chapel services because of a misunderstanding of mission policy, as a diversion or as a symbolic gesture of repayment for material services received.

Some former residents who become staff members do not retain these "rehabilitative" staff positions and return to a transient way of life.

Because of this, an organization to diversity exists among staff members. Also, some permanent staff members do not share in the interests of rehabilitating transients. These individuals are more interested in job security and the room and board that is provided for them.

The fundamental conflict which exists between the mission staff and resident transients involves differing perceptions of transiency and the problems associated with a transient way of life. The religious and employment programs at the rescue mission are designed to induce change in the behavioral patterns of the tramp, causing him to realize his past sins, settle down and establish regular daily work habits. Transients do not, however, feel that such a change is warranted or useful to them. Nonetheless, despite the differences in cognitions that exist between staff and residents, these two groups can successfully function in terms of what Wallace calls a "mutually facilitating equivalence structure" (1961:24).

The rescue mission satisfied the interests of the transient and the interests of the individuals who operate the facility. For the transient, his physical and social needs are met by his use of the rescue mission as a source of food, shelter, employment and group fellowship. The interests of the mission staff are met by providing these services and also by making an effort to tend to the moral and spiritual needs of the residents. For both groups, the motives and interests are different but the apparent conflict caused by this disparity is resolved.

According to Wallace, such cognitive non-sharing is a functional prerequisite for the successful operation of the rescue mission. He explains that conflicts between groups are not decided by a shared conformity but rather by the ability to predict one another's actions without knowledge of their motives:

We may say that as any set of persons establish a system of equivalent behavioral expectancies, an organized relationship comes into existence. Culture can be conceived as a set of standardized models of...contractual relationships in which the equivalent roles are specified and available for implementation to any two parties whose motives make their adoption promising. The relationship is based not on a sharing, but on a complementarity of cognitions and motives (1961:36).

By following the mission rules, the transient is assured that he can continue to make use of the mission and enjoy the services that it provides. In contrast, by furnishing these services, the mission staff will carry on in what it feels are the best interests of the residents, namely religious inspiration. Generally, transients are not interested in personal change or religious conversion. They are interested in survival.

For most tramps, the personal salvation, sedentary existence and regular daily work associated with these activities are unnecessary. The rescue mission staff is motivated to provide rehabilitation and spiritual salvation. Wiseman points out that the goal of the rescue mission is to satisfy two basic transient needs--revival of religious enthusiasm and establishment of orderly employment habits "to enable the men to return to society" (1970:169).

Most transients refuse to abide by this philosophy. They maintain that providing for their emergency needs is more meaningful to them than altering their behavior. The mission chapel service is especially significant in illustrating the differences in mission and transient ideologies. According to City Mission policy, it is the sole decision of the resident (rather than a requirement) to attend the evening chapel service. Transients are familiar with mission policies elsewhere which require daily

chapel attendance before food and lodging are given. Not all residents realize that at the City Mission attendance is their own choice. Most attend regardless of this knowledge because this behavior serves their best interests at rescue missions in general.

If they are aware of the choice, transients may want to attend services to remunerate for material services. This may be especially true for indigent tramps. If the residents do not realize their option, they are satisfied that they have followed an unwritten rule of rescue missions to avoid potential denial of services.⁴ The mission staff hopes that the men have attended chapel of their own free will in order to obtain spiritual assistance rather than to satisfy a regulation. The staff wants there to be a sincere conversion rather than having the feigned acts of a "soup Christian." For this reason, the decision is elective. There is a mutual non-sharing of cognitions between staff and residents regarding the motivation for attending chapel. Differences exist between the perceptions of the two groups but these do not inhibit the successful functioning of the mission social structure. In fact, according to Wallace, such differences are necessary in creating a structure of complementary roles.

Resident Social Interaction

Although the transient has chosen to separate himself from the mainstream of the settled population, he is not restricted to a life of total solitude. The rescue mission is an important locus for the transient to establish and maintain relationships with fellow tramps. Those relationships vary in duration and intensity depending on the social or material

needs of the individual and those of the men with whom he is associating. If he decides to remain with another for an extended period of time, the tramp has developed a "partner" relationship.

When the decision is made, the transient realizes that he becomes a part of most or all activities in which his partner is involved. Partners act in consort, protecting one another and their possessions, sharing these items and securing them by whatever means necessary. A partnering relationship is especially evident upon arrival at the rescue mission. These men enter the mission together, guard one another's belongings and travel in and around the mission together. They share the same table for meals and the same set of bunks for the night. (They may even take jobs from the same contractor). These pairs of tramps may also be involved in less reputable activities such as rolling drunks and petty thievery. Furthermore, as an open affirmation of their friendship bond, these men refer to each other as "my partner."

If the tramp has not already formed such a friendship before entering the rescue mission, he may wish to do so if he remains in residence there for an extended period of time. Decisions to take on a partner will be contingent on shared interests. Most importantly, these interests will involve similar traveling plans to a particular area of the country. Mutual trust and dependability are notably important in railroad yards or transient "jungles," where the threat of physical violence is great. With a partner to share responsibilities for protection and material needs, the life of the tramp is facilitated. The rescue mission is one locality for the transient to form such lasting, mutual relationships.

Transient Material Exchange, Reciprocity and Group Fellowship

Similar to the partnering relationship, material exchange, reciprocity and group fellowship among transients are several important means of maintaining the "uniform nuclear character" of the transient subculture. These behaviors denote the enculturation process whereby individuals learn to become transients and to improve their cultural skills as transients. Also, these interactions reaffirm the identity of transients as individuals and as a cultural grouping.

The exchange of vital information is as significant to the transient as the friends he makes. The rescue mission furnishes an excellent cultural setting for these exchanges to occur. Transients arrive there daily possessing information about their recent travels. Likewise, mission residents have information about the local job situation as well as knowledge passed on by transients who have recently departed from the mission. Residents can also inform the new arrival about living conditions at the mission.

In an article related to transiency, Caplow emphasizes the importances of these exchanges;

(Transient) society is characterized as no other by the exchange and diffusion of information and deliberate distortion or unwillingness to share information are rarely encountered. The rather free acceptance of the stranger seems to be dependent upon the necessity of keeping the grapevine intact (1940:737).

Caplow continues, describing the nature of these exchanges:

A rather rigorous convention exists for the creation of acquaintances: a preliminary silence, a set of standard questions, the exchange of immediate, relevant information,

another silence, the ritual offer of tobacco and then general conversation. This convention is modified in different situations but extended to all comers alike (1940:737).

Occasionally, the process may include the sharing of a roadmap, a gift of a razor blade or the offering of seating space followed by a reciprocal material exchange and information return. Customary material exchanges include those items which are considered basic and valuable necessities to the transient--tobacco, toiletries, clothing, food items and money. An example best illustrates this "convention." A new arrival to the mission may have the ultimate intention of seeking areal information (i.e., jobs, police patrols, sleeping places, freight schedules and destinations). He is smoking and he needs a shave. In turn, a nearby mission resident may desire a cigarette but is waiting for the proper context to obtain one. He owns a razor and notices the new arrival smoking. The remaining exchange conforms to Caplow's description. Standard questions asked by new arrivals include inquiries about length of stay and point of origin of the resident and living conditions at the rescue mission. The resident reciprocates with questions for the new arrival about the last point of departure and length of travel.

Non-material exchanges are part of the informal indoctrination procedure of each new arrival to the mission. As part of this adjustment process, these new arrivals participate in an equalized exchange of material goods initially and later, the exchange of knowledge. The new arrival obtains information beforehand related to the location of the mission. Railroad yard men, fellow transients or local police (who pick up transients hitchhiking) may have supplied this knowledge.

The resident transient and new arrival each possess knowledge that is complementary to their respective traveling strategies. If the resident anticipates a move in the near future, it is necessary that he knows what to expect in the next city along the railroad line. He will consider present conditions at the mission and information about another city or cities supplied by the new arrival. He may have arranged a ride with another resident who owns a car. He needs the knowledge of the new arrival to help make his decision. The new arrival needs information on which to base his decision to remain at the mission or to move on. He will consider the work situation and living conditions at the mission before making his decision.

The rescue mission supplies a cultural setting for this type of material and non-material reciprocity to occur. New arrivals to the rescue mission are always assured of a sizable population of residents, each of whom has been there for a different length of time. These transients possess a large and diverse body of knowledge about survival strategies. From their standpoint, residents are assured of a steady flow of new arrivals with knowledge about possible destinations elsewhere.

For the transient as a temporary resident, the rescue mission satisfies the principle of group fellowship. In the context of material and non-material exchanges, initial social contacts between residents may be instrumental in partnership formation. Apart from this, the rescue mission is a locus for the tramp to reaffirm his identity as a tramp. Talking to others and sharing common experiences is a means of maintaining individual and group identity of the transient subculture. These behavioral similarities conform to Wallace's criteria for a "uniform nuclear character" and illustrate the "replication of uniformity" among the transient group at the rescue mission.

Because certain mission residents serve on the mission staff, it is apparent that some disparity also exists in the motives, interests and habits of the resident group. Several staff positions (mentioned above) are designated as "rehabilitative" and offer the resident an opportunity to hold a position with some responsibility. Room and board are provided. The mission believes that by offering these positions, the transient has a chance to become a settled individual and can learn regular employment habits as contrasted to his habitual, intermittent employment routine. In turn, he rejects transiency and accepts spiritual salvation.

Residents dislike these staff members and privately gossip about them. Sometimes they refer to them as "stiffs" because of their passive attitudes about refusing to relinquish their transient attitudes. But residents tolerate these men and recognize their contrasting viewpoints by harmoniously coexisting with them at the mission. Despite their contrasting interests, resident tramps share enough knowledge of each others' motives and cognitions to effectively interact with these new staff members.

As part of the total equivalence structure of the rescue mission, the "replication of uniformity" and "organization of diversity" are both apparent within the resident population. Partnering relationships, material and non-material exchanges and group fellowship illustrate a uniformity in transient behavioral patterns. Some residents accept the evangelical approach of the rescue mission and cognitive non-sharing is also a part of resident behavior. In spite of their ideological differences, the relationship between these former residents as mission staff and current residents is based on complementary cognitions and motives rather than overt hostility.

Resident-Staff Interaction

Social interaction between staff and residents is largely conditioned by the formal structure of the rescue mission. That is, the intensity of daily social contacts between these groups is determined by factors related to job assignments and the status of the staff member. Administrative positions limit accessibility of certain personnel to residents. These include: the mission director and his clerical staff--the secretary-bookkeeper and the assistant director. Line staff members have direct daily contact with mission residents. These positions include: the cook, dormitory attendant, clothing man, registrar and relief man.

Because of the social isolation caused by separate resident and staff facilities, a cool relationship between these two groups is maintained. Certain staff members privately express contempt for transients based on the popular or legal identities previously mentioned. Likewise, transients envy the differential treatment which is afforded staff personnel--separate rooms and meals and segregated dining and recreational areas. The tension caused by this physical and social isolation is somewhat eased by staff members who share their daily leisure time socializing with residents. Also, transients are more likely to accept new staff personnel recruited from among themselves because of their recent group ties.

Mission staff members are required to attend morning prayer meetings daily. These meetings involve biblical readings and later discussion and are used to demonstrate a Christian approach to daily life at the rescue mission. Although line staff are not actively involved as evangelists among the residents, they must accept the dictum that transiency is morally and spiritually wrong and can only be eliminated by religious

conversion. Those staff members who socialize with transients listen to their various personal and social problems and offer informal counseling to them, sparing religious overtones. Only the mission director and his chaplain give religious advice to tramps.

Transients feel that to satisfy the mission's desire to offer a religious alternative, they will attend the daily chapel service. Not all tramps share in the knowledge that chapel service is elective. Mission staff personnel are also unaware of the motivations of the residents. Taken together, the differences in staff and resident cognitions (regarding the primary and secondary role and function of the mission), these perceptions represent both the replication of uniformity and the organization of diversity. The two groups do not totally share in the knowledge of each others thoughts and motives, but they share enough complementary knowledge to enable them to effectively interact with each other. Both groups agree that emergency material services are important to the transient and that they should be offered. Because some residents eventually become mission staff members, there is some agreement among residents that religious salvation is a viable alternative to transiency. For the majority of transients, moral and spiritual needs and middle-class work ethics are irrelevant. Because of these disparate attitudes within and between staff and resident groups, an equivalence structure promotes stability and allows these groups to effectively interact in the rescue mission social network.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

The preceeding chapters contain description and analysis of the structure and function of the transient rescue mission. Throughout the country, these missions serve the immediate physical needs of the male transient or "tramp" population. Although these facilities offer emergency food, shelter and clothing for such men, their primary, long-term goal is to assure spiritual salvation through a combined program of religion and employment.

Transiency is perceived as a social problem that the mission must ultimately deal with if it is to be successful. Alcoholism, family troubles and poor work habits are the principal social ills which are commonly associated with transiency. By initially dealing with the physical needs of the tramp, the mission's purpose is to resolve the social needs of these men by providing spiritual guidance and rehabilitative employment as viable options to transiency.

The unsettled life of the transient means that he willingly accepts intermittent employment and temporary living accomodations. Because of these irregular work habits and impermanent residential ties, the mission offers alternatives through its religion and employment programs. The religious program entails a Christian ideology whereby the mission staff accepts transiency as a sinful life that must be changed. This is the

organizational ideal of all rescue mission programs. It is manifest during evening chapel service sermons. Speakers decry transiency while supporting a settled life with regular, orderly work habits and salvation and Christian living.

By making employment available to transients, the rescue mission expects to return the individual transient to what it considers a life of usefulness. Also, the mission periodically offers "rehabilitative" positions on its own staff for interested residents. Transients who serve in staff positions are expected to conform to mission expectations (in principle) by accepting the viewpoint that transiency must be refuted as an instrumental step toward a meaningful life. The task of conversion is left to members of the administrative staff while line personnel are in charge of material services.

The transient in residence at the rescue mission experiences physical and social segregation from the mission staff and a regimented daily schedule covering wakeup, meals, employment, chapel service and curfew. Status distinctions between staff and residents are implemented through exclusion from meals, separate staff sleeping rooms and locked access to certain areas of the mission. Mutual hostility and suspicion are enforced by such an arrangement. The main function of the mission regimen is to initiate a daily timetable similar to that of a settled person. Hopefully, this will instill in the resident a set of middle-class values--self-sufficiency, regularity and dependability. Staff employment offers the added incentives of improved social status and access to staff areas and salary. Advancement in staff rank is another possibility.

Most transients do not respond to the religious program of the rescue mission. The typical mission resident seeks not eternal salvation but

rather, immediate satisfaction from hunger, for new clothing and temporary shelter and for ready cash. The mission satisfies these needs and provides a place for the transient to relax and refresh himself and socialize with fellow transients.

The mission setting allows transients to congregate, fraternize and exchange goods and knowledge which are critical to survival. The rescue mission can be used either as a semi-permanent residence (with social, moral and religious functions) or as a brief stopover facility for the convenience of the transient.

Rescue missions are operated differently than the way in which they are used by tramps. Perhaps, the operational philosophy of the mission is a reflection of the values of an urban-oriented, middle-class society. While the mission is interested in the spiritual well-being of its clientele, the mission resident is equally determined to sustain his migratory behavioral pattern.

The social interaction which occurs among residents and staff and between these two groups is best explained by the use of Wallace's "equivalence structure" (1961:35). According to Wallace, cognitive non-sharing is a functional prerequisite to the success of society and thus, the rescue mission also. Ideological differences between residents and the mission staff are resolved through complementary behaviors. While residents receive material goods and services, they reciprocate by attending chapel services and adhering to the stated mission rules. Most residents use the rescue mission for immediate physical gratification and for recreation and socializing. Some residents accept religion and become staff personnel.

The "replication of uniformity" is evident within the resident group because of material and non-material exchanges, semi-permanent partnering relationships and group fellowship. These behaviors all occur at the rescue mission. Because of the shared motives involved in satisfying physical needs, uniformity also occurs between staff and residents.

Diverse behaviors representing the "organization of diversity" also occur among residents because some of them join the mission staff. Open hostility is averted between these new staff and residents by the mutual recognition of individual interests and motives. Complementarity of behaviors between residents and staff is an important part of the total equivalence structure of the rescue mission.

In spite of the apparent conflict between the ideal purpose and subsequent use of the rescue mission, staff and residents can accurately predict each other's behavior. Services are furnished by the staff and made use of by residents. In turn, residents attend chapel services (regardless of their knowledge of stated mission policy) and actively seek employment to repay the mission for the material services they receive, as a source of temporary income, and to establish a good behavioral record for future visits to the mission. According to Wallace, this permits an organized, contractual relationship to come into existence where complementary, specified roles are available for both staff and residents to use. The survival of the rescue mission hinges upon this relationship.

An ethnographic study of rescue missions is significant for several reasons. First, such a study is useful in understanding the mission and its role and function from the standpoint of the transient and the mission staff administration. Secondly, the rescue mission provides a context in which one can gain some understanding of transiency as a cultural

pattern. Finally, the existence of rescue missions today points out the extent and nature of transiency in complex urban society.

The mission is an important cultural resource for the transient. While at the mission, the transient is more secure and protected from robbery and assault along with threatening weather. For those tramps with serious drinking problems, the mission also exerts artificial control over their habits by imposing a prohibitive drinking policy. The rescue mission is also a setting for transient group interaction. Through shared cultural experiences and mutual support, the transient reaffirms his own identity and the identity of the transient group.

Resident interaction at the rescue mission provides significant insights into behavioral strategies employed by transients. A great deal can be learned about decision-making before travel, material necessities used by transients and alternate choices of residency available to tramps in large cities. The rescue mission is but one of these alternatives. Transients must choose between restrictions and freedom when deciding to reside at the mission. Criteria used to make that decision are learned through residence at rescue missions.

Finally, the visibility of the transient in the settled population may be somewhat obscured by his relative isolation from that population. Contact is limited between the two groups and failure to recognize transients is common. In outward physical appearance, the tramp is indistinguishable from most common laborers. Also, most transients in large cities are confined to the "skid row" areas. Although transiency was more widespread as a cultural pattern a half century ago, the continuance of a national network of rescue missions indicates an enduring need for them by a sizable transient population today.

By expanding our perceptions, we can realize that the transient subculture is still a vital part of urban society today, interacting with it while maintaining a unique cultural identity and integrity. Despite several alternate transient living accommodations, the rescue mission remains as an important and reliable resource by which transients can maintain their unique integrity.

End Notes

¹Wiseman (1970:196-201) and Spradley (1970:41-42) discuss transient perceptions regarding exploitation by the rescue mission for financial gain. Both authors report that some missions use statistical information about volume of men served and lodged as a means of gaining increased community funding while making a handsome profit.

²Seath (1974:133-149) explains that the purpose of the evening chapel service and the entire rescue mission program is to "minister to the whole person." As counseling guidelines for rescue mission workers, Seath lists four major areas of concern regarding treatment of the transient: 1) Home Relationships, 2) Church and the Social Man, 3) Health and Welfare and 4) Personal Security. As part of the rehabilitative process Seath feels that transients' family ties should be renewed, that their impulses should be controlled and that friendships should be established. He also feels that transients should learn to maintain permanent residential ties and achieve self-reliance through job re-training and abstinence from alcohol.

³The various native categories of transient sleeping arrangements (or "flops") is extensively explored by Spradley (1968 et.seq., 1970:97-127, 1972:27-38). The reader should consult these sources for further, detailed discussion of this interesting subject.

⁴Although feigning a religious conversion (in transient terms, "taking a nosedive") or voluntarily attending evening chapel services (or "getting an earbanging") may not be essential for the tramp to receive food and lodging Spradley (1968b:9) reports that it may be "a good idea" to perform one or both of these behaviors at most rescue mission chapel services.

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