

this project can be accomplished without homogenizing or reifying “groups” is a major achievement. This slim volume is recommended to researchers and graduate level-instructors in the fields of ethnic and religious inter-group relations and political sociology, especially concerning post-war Europe and France, though comparisons with the United States will also be interesting.

Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness, by **Russell K. Schutt** with **Stephen M. Goldfinger**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. 376pp. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780674051010.

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A seemingly simple question lies at the heart of *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness*: who knows best what the residents of housing programs need—residents themselves, or the professional staff who oversee them? In the socio-political context of U.S. homeless management—including a punitive social welfare policy culture shaped by notions of deserving and undeserving poor, racialized law-and-order policing that seeks to disappear poor populations in service of post-industrial consumer economies, and decades of political and media representations which pathologize unsheltered populations as unruly animals incapable of self-management—the implications of asking the question, not to mention answering it, are unfortunately profound. Based on two decades of research on an experimental housing program established by the researchers themselves, *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness* looks at a common preference for independent apartments against the realities of the challenges and pleasures of living in group home settings.

Russell K. Schutt and his fellow researchers followed residents of two different types of housing: group homes with a residential staff in which residents played an active role in governance, known as evolving consumer households (ECHs); and independent apartments with no roommates and no onsite

staff, with caseworkers visiting on a regular basis. The project design produced rich opportunities for comparative analyses not only of the two housing approaches, but also of social service “expertise” and residents’ own self-knowledge.

Following a discussion of theoretical approaches to understanding community and social interaction and an historical overview of shifting forms of institutional help, from early asylums to state hospitals to modern shelters, chapters discuss research results through a series of thematic debates on a range of key topics: residential preferences, social relations within residential settings, substance use, mental health, relations with outside community, experiences of self-determination and empowerment in residential settings, and housing loss. In a chapter entitled “Satisfying Wants and Meeting Needs,” Schutt challenges rational choice accounts by examining housing preferences and desires along with perception of needs for support services. While the conclusion may not be shocking—desires and needs changed along with changing living situations—it challenges static and objectifying models in social work and social science, and calls for more nuanced engagement and interpretation. A chapter focused specifically on the mental health needs and experiences of residents thoughtfully explores both medical and sociological models. By considering how experiences of stress and trauma unfolded in the context of housing, Schutt offers a complex and dynamic engagement with both biological and social factors, cautiously concluding, “If a medical model of mental illness interprets mental illness as an immutable barrier to the development of community, the participants in our project showed that model to be lacking. If a sociological model presumes that reducing structural strains will have a parallel effect on mental illness, our participants’ experiences suggest that model misses the mark” (pp. 172–73). While the thoroughness of the research is certainly impressive (if sometimes overwhelming in its detail), more significant perhaps is the conceptual model Schutt offers in his engagement with data drawn from residents. The text avoids a technical abstraction often found in epidemiological studies that seem coldly to forget there are human

experiences of life, vulnerability, and death on the line. But it avoids as well the twinning of pathologization and sanctification that can animate ethnographic accounts of so-called street and shelter life. The text is compassionate without being self-indulgent.

Even as it departs from disciplinary tendencies, *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness* is nonetheless hemmed in by the limits of a sociology of homelessness. Like popular and political accounts, sociology has focused on the mental health statuses of those living without shelter. While Schutt complicates these often lurid depictions, the text still operates within a constrained frame of analysis that relegates social forces and political economy to the background. Schutt challenges pathologization by engaging in meaningful ways with the interests and experiences of program residents, and I think this work would be extended further by a consideration of those social and political contexts. For example, Schutt interrogates the desire for privacy that motivates resistance to the idea of group homes. While this is an understandable response to the invasions of privacy enacted by surveillant social services, not to mention living in public without shelter, there is also a political, economic co-constitution of individualism and private property, traced back at least through Locke. How this supports desires for certain living conditions would be interesting to pursue and would further the anti-pathologizing arguments of *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness* by de-exceptionalizing the residents under study. In other words, how are their experiences representative of forming selves under general conditions of privatized, financialized housing markets? How do populations with access to private housing markets also demonstrate the mismatch between preferences, needs, and experiences? This de-exceptionalizing analysis would then allow for a critical assessment of how social and political depictions of homelessness, as a failed personhood, cast unsheltered populations as unentitled to private space.

Finally, the text misses an opportunity to grapple with the racialized dimensions of homeless management. While most research on housing takes for granted the disproportionate representation of African Americans,

Latino/as, and Natives among street and shelter populations, in fact, not only is housing insecurity shaped by the race hierarchy-building project of privatized housing, but its management is as well. Contemporary homelessness policy—including both quality-of-life policing and more seemingly benevolent chronic homelessness initiatives—responds to race panics over “urban disorder” and its threats to so-called renewal. Furthermore, policy push for independent living programs (referred to as “scatter-site”) has not been motivated by a concern with residents’ preferences, but rather by NIMBYism—neighborhood resistance to sharing space with shelters and housing programs. In its applications, Schutt’s research must inevitably contend with these local unfoldings of a racialized war on the poor.

Players Unleashed!: Modding The Sims and the Culture of Gaming, by **Tanja Sihvonen**. Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2011. 221pp. \$45.00 paper. ISBN: 9789089642011.

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Players Unleashed! is a book about players of *The Sims*, a computer game created by developer Maxis, published by Electronic Arts and often considered to be a simulation of “real life.” Players assume a god-like perspective, steering their characters to perform ordinary tasks in a digital microcosm. Tanja Sihvonen’s study focuses on game modding: the practice of writing additional, unofficial game code, which allows players to modify the appearance of game objects and characters. The resulting “mods” are then circulated among the player community and beyond. Modding is a marginal practice in the sense that only a minority of players actually engage in it, but it is important because many, perhaps most players, enjoy and appreciate its results. Central to Sihvonen’s thesis is that playing a game and modding it are not and never have been thoroughly discrete activities, because in playing a game we necessarily change it and make