



BOOK REVIEW

Matthew D. Marr, *Better Must Come: Exiting Homelessness in Two Global Cities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

It is almost cliché among emerging researchers of homelessness to explore how people come to be homeless. “What happened to you that you ended up here?” An implicit goal of this research is a better understanding of the causes of homelessness at an individual level. It is also a classic form of sociological social class voyeurism. Notably, the question assumes a kind of terminal point—that someone has “ended up” homeless, rather than being what the experience really is for all but a few: a transitory phase en route to more conventional destinations.

Matthew Marr’s new book, based on his dissertation, avoids this worn path of study, and instead turns it on its head. The questions guiding his research concern the pathways *out* of homelessness. The inquiry is intended to inform us about what works to help people exit, and what more could be done to support that objective. It is the obverse of the goal often of the research on pathways *into* homelessness: what can be done to avert homelessness? Yet as practice and research have found, homelessness risk is often very hard to predict, target, and prevent. Alternatively, people who are *actually* homeless are much easier to target, and therefore their circumstances are more readily and efficiently addressable. Indeed, the most significant homelessness policy shift in the United States recently has attempted to do just that, through a variety of “rapid rehousing” programs. In that light, Dr. Marr’s research is quite timely, and makes an important contribution both to research and to the policy and practice discussions currently under way.

Dr. Marr’s book takes a comparative approach to homelessness exits in Los Angeles and Tokyo. His multilevel theoretical model is essentially the mirror image of the multilevel models of the *causes* of homelessness, now widely accepted. People become homelessness because of the interaction of inequitably distributed markets in housing and work, through limited and failed social protections, and the mediation of these forces in the conflicted lives of disadvantaged people, families, and communities. Perhaps not surprisingly, people get out of homelessness through the reverse mediation of these larger markets and social forces and through helpful social connections. Here, Dr. Marr introduces the term *forgiving* to describe the social contexts that make it possible to exit homelessness: While surmounting the complex problems that drive people into homelessness requires substantial individual resilience, exits from homelessness also depend on *forgiving contexts* at multiple social levels—whether favorable conditions in local labor and housing markets, flexible and holistic social service settings, or cultural milieux that promote mutual aid among friends, family, and community. These are social contexts that work against the global and local trends driving inequality and that can promote exits from homelessness. (p. 15)

In Los Angeles, high housing prices and a more advanced and entrenched “globalized” labor market (more temporary and contingent work opportunities) makes it far more difficult for people to get out of homelessness. Consequently, people have to rely much more on forgiving social ties, either through family and friends who can share housing, or through the homeless program staff who can help people secure subsidized housing placements. In Tokyo, housing and labor markets are more forgiving. People are able to secure full time work at minimum wage more readily and with that can rent small accommodations, often with shared bathrooms and kitchens, for \$300–\$400 a month. People in Tokyo are also generally ashamed to reveal their homelessness to family members, so homeless program staff are important for providing instrumental and social support.

Dr. Marr considers his findings in the context of global urbanization and growing inequality. According to him, homelessness is nearly 30 times as prevalent in Los Angeles as compared to Tokyo. But he doesn't focus on the punitive and exclusionary policies so commonly cited in critiques of globalization. Instead, he sees hope in ameliorative, helpful policies and programs that assist people in the escape from homelessness. A critic of transitional housing (an area in which he once worked), he sees promise in the "housing first" and "rapid rehousing" programs that today are designed to get people out of homelessness as a first priority, and which don't require treatment compliance or sobriety to get into housing. These programs provide just the "forgiving contexts" that he has identified as facilitating exits from homelessness in his research. He is forgiving himself toward the often easily criticized program staff, who he sees as having the difficult job of being both holistic and caring, but who also have to guard against misuse of programs or from being deceived by clients.

By focusing on exits from homelessness, Dr. Marr also has an interesting vantage point from which to view some longstanding claims in homelessness research—for example, that the population is often trapped in a subculture of deviance and that people take on an identity of homelessness that is self-perpetuating. Dr. Marr's longitudinal study instead finds those claims to be simplistic and overstated. People don't stay trapped in homelessness, and they break free from the condition in most cases. Accordingly, he argues that homelessness is not a trait or identity, but a temporary predicament, a perspective that doesn't as readily emerge from cross-sectional research as it would in a longitudinal study.

Dr. Marr's book provides an interesting and valuable contribution. We learn not only about the interesting differences between homelessness in Tokyo and Los Angeles, but about the difference that a longitudinal perspective can make, and how a focus on exits, as compared to entrances, can provide valuable new insights into the forgiving contexts that social policy and social programs should aim to create if indeed we hope to end peoples' homelessness predicaments.

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