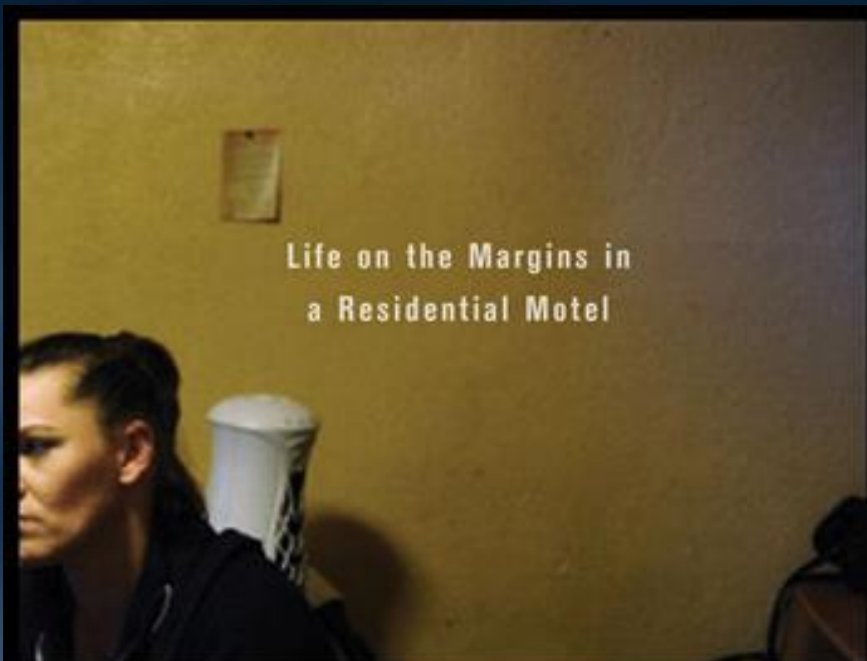


Exiled in America: Life on the Margins in a Residential Motel

2017 Sex Offender Management Conference



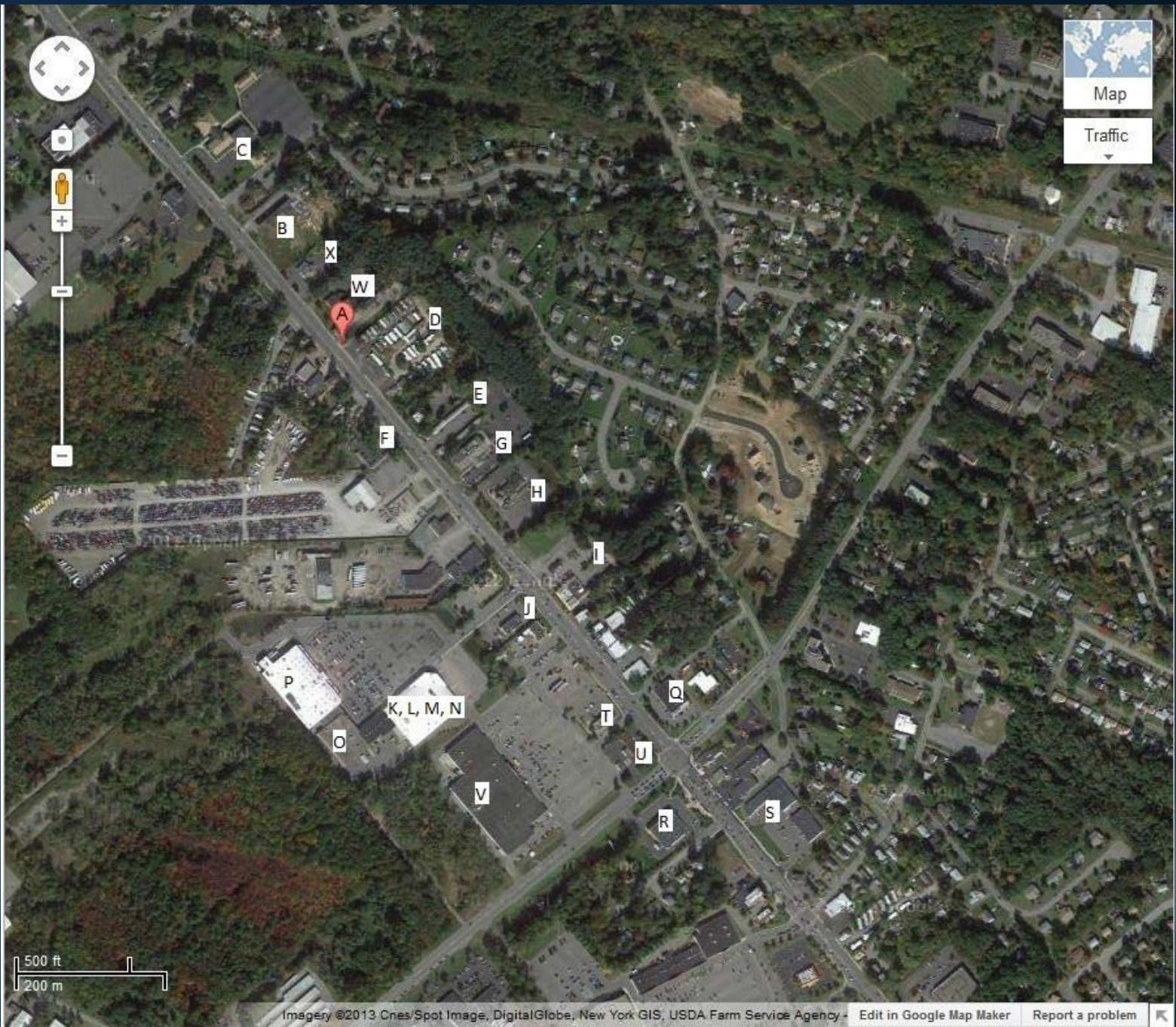
Life on the Margins in
a Residential Motel

EXILED **IN** AMERICA



CHRISTOPHER P. DUM







Boardwalk Motel

Google

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A Deteriorating Reputation

- “Obscenities are scrawled in the dust on the office windows and hand-lettered signs disclaiming liability are stapled to the wallpaper.”
- “This strip was simply much nicer before they bought in. The biggest problem is that they don't screen the people they rent to.”
- “Desolation row”

The Social Services Era

- As early as 2002, the Boardwalk provided rooms for the county Department of Social Services (DSS) to shelter individuals in need of temporary assistance
- July 2007, a local legislator found that DSS had placed families with children at the Boardwalk with registered sex offenders
 - From 2005 to 2006, 14 families with children were placed at the Boardwalk while sex offenders were living there

Code Violations

- *“water damage, mold throughout entire room, exposed wiring, gas leak, missing bathroom tiles, rooms missing smoke detectors, bug infestation, bathroom mold, debris piled outside rooms, electric socket falling from wall, spliced wiring, cracked toilets”*

Fallout

- In 2009, a bill was proposed in the Town that would prevent Level 2 or 3 sex offenders from living within 1500 feet of each other.
- August 2009, Dutchland passed a law that limited the number of registered sex offenders who could stay in motels and required motel owners to purchase licenses in order to rent to sex offenders.
- The passage of the law did reduce the number of sex offenders in the area.

Sex Offender Legislation

- Laws include Jacob Wetterling Act, and community notification laws, such as Megan's Law.
- Information on sex offender registries is inaccurate and residence restrictions have little effect on recidivism (e.g. Petrosino & Petrosino, 1999; Sandler, Freeman, & Socia, 2008; Vasquez, Maddan, & Walker, 2007).
- These policies may limit sex offenders' access to affordable housing, which could lead to financial and emotional hardship, which in turn could lead to new offenses.

Consequences of Sex Offender Laws

- RSOs are often forced to live in neighborhoods considered to be socially disorganized with few social supports (e.g. Hughes & Burchfield, 2008; Hughes & Kadleck, 2008; Mustaine, Tewksbury, & Stengel, 2006a, 2006b; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2008; Socia & Stamatel, 2011; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2006, 2008)
- Restricting SOs to these neighborhoods may decrease the chances of successful reentry by surrounding them with neighbors who offer little social support, and often engage in drug use and criminal behavior.

Consequences of Sex Offender Laws

- Sex offenders experience significant hardships in the community due to residential restrictions, registering in sex offender databases, and the social stigma they inevitably face from the community
- Reentering prisoners face difficulties finding employment, establishing (or re-establishing) strong relationships with romantic partners and children, and securing stable housing

Punitive Criminal Justice Policy and Residential Instability

- From 1978 to 2009, the number of federal and state prisoners rose from 294,000 to over 1.5 million
- In 2012, 637,411 individuals were released from state and federal prison.
- In 2012, 21,800 sex offenders were released from prison to the community

Motel Use and Social Services

- Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, California, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Oregon, District of Columbia
- Massachusetts spent \$48.1 million in 2013 to house nearly 2,000 families in motels
- Portland, Maine placed families in motels for 198 nights in 2013, an increase of 191% in 2012.
- In July of 2016, 4,000 homeless NYC residents slept in 46 motels across the city. Compare this with 1,000 residents in 8 locations in January 2015.

Research Questions

- How do sex offenders interact with residents once settled at the motel?
- How do these interactions affect sex offenders who live at the motel?
- Ultimately, what evaluations can we make of the policies that affect the motel?

Ethnographic Research

- Professor Dum rented a room at the Boardwalk from June 2012 to June 2013.
- Renting a room enabled him to conduct an in-depth examination of the social setting created at the Boardwalk Motel.
 - A social setting is the interaction of one or more actors engaging in activity at a particular time in a particular place.
- Immersion in a social setting allows researchers to capture what inhabitants view as meaningful and important by observing daily conversations and activities.

Ethnographic Research

- Ethnography, is the systematic study of people and social groups as they go about their daily lives.
- Ethnographers collect data during observation and record them as written fieldnotes.
- Properly recorded fieldnotes capture and preserve indigenous meanings without relying upon preconceptions about the members of a social setting.

Exiled in America

- Fieldwork for a calendar year
- 147 days in the field
- Over 70 participants
- Over 900 hours of fieldwork
- Over 780 pages of single spaced fieldnote data
- Other examples of ethnography include “Code of the Street” (Eli Anderson), “Sidewalk” (Mitch Duneier) and “Evicted” (Matthew Desmond)

Sex Offenders and Stigma

- The overriding narrative at the motel was that all residents were pedophiles.
- *“Most of the women here are on what? Drugs. Drugs, and most of the men are pedophiles. Why would a person in their right mind want to live here? You a druggie or you a pedophile.” – Roy*
- Some residents felt that sex offenders were “rewarded” with free rooms
- Fears of violence

Reggie's Experience

- When he was 18, he and his good friend had consensual sex with a girl who was 15. He pleaded guilty to statutory rape and spent a year in jail and had to register as a Level 1 sex offender.
- Transient residential history
- Desk manager of the Boardwalk outed Reggie as a sex offender to other residents, *"He's a sex offender, he tries to say he's not, he is."*

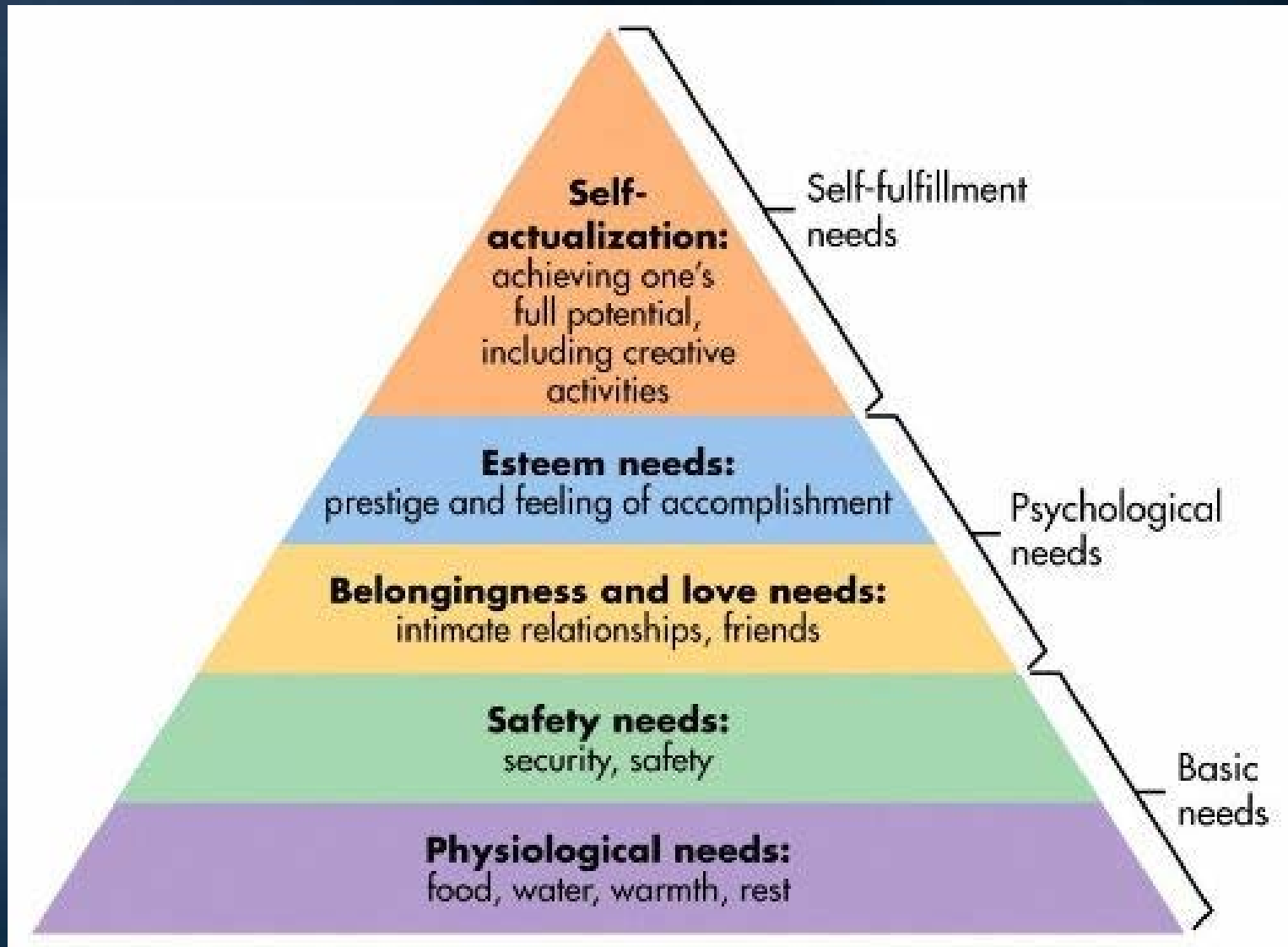
Tat's Experience

- *“Some people that I met, you know I mean, they uh, got told by Elizabeth, watch it, he’s a sex offender, he’s okay. He’s a good people but he’s a sex offender. And theys like oh okay, he’s one a those, he’s one a those. Now, this is before they got to meet the attitude, you know, the character.” - Tat*

Tat's Experience

- *“But when he, I tell you, he had balls tellin’ me to my face he was a Level 2. I’m like, you know what? We good with our conversation. You can walk away from me now. I’m like dog, you know, you tellin’ me this, and you know, if we was in jail, you woulda got it. I told him straight up, you woulda got it dog. I’m good talkin’ to you man. Don’t bother me and I won’t mess with you. Like he was proud of it. You supposed to keep that on the hush, know what I mean? You don’t want anybody to rock yo shit. I got nieces and nephews” - Spike*

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs













Meeting Daily Needs

- Many residents attempted to address material and social deprivations by interacting with other residents, creating an underground economy of trading goods, services, and emotional support.
- Conditions of parole prohibited parolees from interacting with anyone with criminal history. Parolees risked violating their parole in their attempts to meet their resource deprivations.
- Poverty and scarcity in the form of poverty actually reduces cognitive function, leading to choices that favor short-term benefits (Anandi Mani, 2013)

Draining Valuable Resources

- Over time, these resources were drained as long-term residents fought a losing battle against the motel's living environment.
- \$820 a month did not guarantee heat, air conditioning, a fridge, kitchen, or even drinkable water.
- They struggled to make monthly, even weekly rent payments, and because of this, putting down a security deposit and first month's rent for an apartment was nearly impossible.

Darryl's Experience

- DSS' goal was to move him to a location that was cheaper than the Boardwalk and a few options were available
- They wanted him to find an apartment for \$350 a month, but this was near impossible, as only 7.5% of rental units nearby could be had for \$399 or less.
- "I'm not good with this, I'm not good with living with other people, I freak out." - Darryl

Darryl's Experience

- At the end of January 2013, Darryl was approved to move into a 12-room boarding house.
 - “This is like slum city.” – Darryl
- Residents often turned on the oven to 450 degrees and then left the door open in order to heat the first floor.
- April 2013, Darryl found out that a park was under construction behind the building and because he could not live within 1000 feet of a park, he was evicted from the boarding house.

Darryl's Experience

- Moving issues
- Less than a month later, parole informed Darryl that he could not live there because there was a daycare within 1000 feet.
- “Moving was a crazy day. We were supposed to move to a two bedroom, the day we were supposed to move the landlord canceled on us. He rented it to somebody else. So we ran around all day finding a different apartment and moved in the evening.” - Darryl

The Power of Stigmatization

- *“stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination.” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 367)*

2013 Code Violations



2013 Code Violations



Closing the Motel



Wiping the Boardwalk Off the Map



History Repeating

- “Some have proposed abolishing Hobohemia as a slum, but the many roads that lead to such a place as Hobohemia would still have to terminate at a common point.” – Nels Anderson

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

