

THE PERCEPTION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE:  
IMPORTANT FACTORS IN  
DETERMINING PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE HOMELESS AS DANGEROUS

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study uses two quantitative and two qualitative data sources to determine if homeless people are viewed as dangerous and if they are what factors contribute to this perception. Areas examined are respondent's characteristics, media affects and the perceived rights of homeless people to urban space. Actual levels of perpetration among the homeless are examined to allow for comparisons between perception and reality to be made.

Findings showed that race plays a major role in the perception of homeless people among whites, while gender is more influential among blacks. There was no relationship between media and perceptions. A negative relationship was found between support of rights of the homeless and the perception that they are dangerous. While the homeless have higher incarceration rate as compared to the poor-but-never-homeless, the crimes for which they are sentenced appear to be non-violent in nature and are often what are characterized as nuisance crimes.

Recommendations were made to study actual perpetration rates among the homeless to allow for a more in-depth analysis of criminal involvement.

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## CHAPTER ONE

In the popular mind, homelessness and crime are tightly interwoven (Amster, 2003). Homeless shelters and other locales frequented by homeless people are routinely avoided because they are perceived as crime hot spots and homeless people themselves are routinely avoided because of their real or imagined criminal potential (Snow, Baker & Anderson, 1989). While it is true that some homeless people do commit crime, one of the few studies on the topic showed that the typical arrest of a homeless person is for a minor offense such as vagrancy or shoplifting (Snow et al, 1989). And yet, consider the following from the Cambridge (MA) police department:

The Crime Analysis Unit understands that the most common complaint of the average citizen or business involves “visible” problems such as public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, and sleeping on public benches – not necessarily harmful or malicious incidents. However, we suspect that if the average Cambridge citizen or business comprehended the extent of crimes committed by homeless individuals – particularly in the Central Square area – their priorities regarding homeless crime would rapidly shift. (<http://www.cambridgema.gov/CPD/reports/2003/annual/adobe/homeless.pdf>)

Indeed, the perception that homeless people commit, and the facilities that serve them attract, both property and violent crime is one major reason why citizens and local associations so often oppose the siting of homeless facilities in their neighborhoods (Barak, 1991).

Among advocacy groups, the concern about homelessness and crime is focused on the victimization that the homeless endure while on the streets. From this perspective, the homeless are viewed as a vulnerable group, more likely to be victimized than to

victimize (National Coalition for the Homeless ((NCH), 2006). While the relationships between crime and homelessness involve varying perspectives and perhaps invite selective presentation of the evidence, it is important that we understand not only what the objective reality is, but also the ways in which the domiciled population perceives homeless people. To best understand this relationship, six specific purposes of the current work have been developed:

1. Explore the relationship between the perception of homeless people as dangerous and the role that racism plays in these perceptions.
2. Attempt to discern differences in the perception of homeless people in term of respondent's race, income level and gender.
3. Determine the traits specific sub- groups of homeless people possess that alter people's perceptions of them.
4. Determine how exposure to different types of media influences people's perceptions of the homeless.
5. Determine what rights the domiciled population believes that the homeless have.
6. Ascertain the actual level of criminal perpetration by homeless people and understand the nature of the crimes perpetrated by typical homeless offenders.

## Homelessness

The current outbreak of homelessness has been a major social issue for well over three decades (Burt et al, 2001; Donley & Wright, 2008; Allgood & Warren, 2003).

While the true number of homeless people cannot be definitively known (NCH, 2007), the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty ((NLCHP), 2007) estimates that 2.3 to 3.5 million people experience homelessness in a given year and the true number could well be twice that. Of those, about 800,000 are thought to be homeless on any given evening (US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2007). Accurately counting the homeless is virtually impossible, but whatever the true number may be, most everyone agrees that homelessness is a serious issue worthy of attention.

The term “homeless” is not straightforward. Many different definitions have been offered. Some define those who sleep on a friend’s couch or those that live in severely dilapidated housing as homeless (NCH, 2006). Other definitions are more stringent. The definition laid out in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is that a homeless person is “(1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is-(A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.” Even this lengthy definition is not entirely clear. In part 1, the term “adequate” admits of many definitions. Sleeping on a friend’s couch, if not “fixed and regular,” will sometimes cause someone to be considered homeless while it will not under other definitions.



It is important at this point to mention that people may be perceived as homeless when in fact they are not. This issue in defining homelessness is vital when examining perception. This is most relevant in the discussion of panhandlers. For many in the general public, panhandler and homeless person are synonymous terms. However, in reality there is a sizeable proportion of panhandlers that are in fact domiciled. Likewise, several studies have demonstrated that the majority of homeless people do not engage in panhandling. While these distinctions have been recognized in academic studies, these studies often do not affect the view of the typical person (See Lee & Farrell, 2003 for a review of this topic). Therefore, someone could have an experience with a (domiciled) panhandler that would affect how he or she views the homeless population, however unfair or misguided that might be. In this case, it is not the reality that is important but rather the perception of what is reality.

### Characteristics

For the majority of people, homelessness is a transitory situation, with typically less than one third of the total population considered to be chronically homeless (Wright, 2008). To speak of “the” homeless is to speak of a very diverse group, one that includes men, women and children, people of all age brackets and all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Many have alcohol or substance abuse problems, while many do not. Likewise many are physically or mentally handicapped while many are able bodied and sane (Wright, Rubin & Devine, 1998). While the homeless as a group are exceedingly diverse, some generalizations and patterns can be discussed based on the literature

that has been accumulating since the early 1980's. These generalizations are reviewed next.

### Homelessness and Race

Somewhat surprisingly, there is relatively little research that focuses specifically on race and homelessness (Bliss, Blum, Bulanda & Cella, 2004). However, Hopper (2003) in his work *Reckoning with Homelessness*, discusses the history behind the increase in homelessness as it pertains specifically to young, black men. This discussion is a particularly pertinent one for the present work. Hopper (2003) discusses that in the accounts of homelessness in America dating from the 1700's up until the 1970's, blacks were basically absent from the portrayal of homelessness. Although black homeless people existed, their numbers were almost certainly undercounted. One reason is that in the 1700's, the laws addressing vagrancy targeted runaway slaves. Therefore homelessness under these circumstances was a criminal endeavor. From the 1870's through the 1920's, when homelessness was viewed as "tramping," the criminalization of black, homeless people persisted. Therefore, while a census of tramps conducted during that time showed only 1% of the tramps to be black, a review of jail records from the same time shows how blacks accounted in some cities for over 10% of vagrancy arrests (Hopper, 2003).

During the Great Depression, the percentage of blacks among the homeless grew. Some cities reported that as many as a quarter of their homeless population was black. During this time period, undercounting persisted because of the continued trend

of criminalizing vagrancy. Black, homeless, men knew the risk involved with being viewed as a vagrant and many avoided assistance organizations to avoid being arrested. This trend continued until the 1940's with the advent of skid row areas in major American cities. During this time, blacks accounted for nearly a quarter of the numbers of homeless on New York City's skid row and yet the information on this group is very sparse. Through the 1960's these numbers remained stable in counts of areas where homeless congregated however, other than the percentage of blacks present, this aspect of homelessness went widely unreported and unnoticed. It was not until the 1970's, when the numbers rose to unprecedented levels, did the overrepresentation of blacks among the homeless receive real attention (Hopper, 2003). Blacks continue to be highly overrepresented among the homeless population compared to their rates among both the domiciled population at large and as compared to the poor, domiciled population (NCH, 2006; Burt et al, 2001).

The National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) is currently the only nationally representative sample of homeless people available. These data show that blacks are disproportionately represented among the homeless. This is true even when the percentage is compared to the percentage of blacks in the poor, domiciled population (Burt et al, 2001). Race is an established risk factor for poverty (Iceland, 2003) and poverty is a risk factor for homelessness (HUD, 2007). However, why is there an increased presence of blacks among the homeless population as compared to the poor population? It has been suggested that black poverty may run deeper than the poverty of other racial and ethnic groups, thus making it more likely that home-

lessness will eventually result (HUD, 2007). Plainly put, poor blacks may be financially closer to homelessness as opposed to other, non-black poor people.

Poverty is one of the major risk factors for homelessness (NCH, 2006). In a study of 200 newly homeless adults, researchers found that the newly homeless individuals had significantly less education as compared to a control group of never homeless, low income adults. The newly homeless also earned less income from all sources, including monetary assistance from family members (Caton et al, 2000). Because poverty rates are higher among racial minorities (Iceland, 2003), it is logical that more minorities would be on the financial brink of homelessness. This is particularly true for those people without family members or friends that are capable or willing to assist them (Hopper, 2003).

Using the previously mentioned NSHAPC data, Burt, et al. (2001) presented a breakdown of the racial and ethnic composition of homeless people. Of the 1,788 currently homeless people in her sample, 41% were white, non-Hispanic, 40% were black, 12% were Hispanic while 9% identified as "other." The authors also present the racial and ethnic composition of the currently homeless broken down into three categories: crisis homeless, episodically homeless and chronically homeless. As can be seen in Table 1, the plurality of the chronically homeless clients were black (49%), while the plurality of the episodically homeless were white (48%).

Table 1. Race and Category of Homeless Status.

	Crisis homeless	Episodically homeless	Chronically homeless
Black	38%	34%	49%
White	38%	48%	37%
Hispanic	15%	11%	9%
Other	9%	6%	6%

More recently, the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2005) found in its 2004 survey of 27 cities that the homeless population was 49% Black/ African-American, 35% White, non-Hispanic, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian. Both this survey and the NSHAPC data cited above violate the census delineation between race and ethnicity. However, by categorizing Hispanics as a racial group, important differences among groups are made apparent. These breakdowns vary based on locale, with whites comprising the majority of the rural homeless (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Regardless of which numbers are used, blacks are overrepresented in the homeless population and racial and ethnic minorities combine to constitute the majority of homeless people.

#### Homelessness and Gender

Gender has been much more widely researched as compared to race in studies focusing on homelessness. Single males have always been, and continue to be, the majority of the homeless population in America. Although the population of homeless women and children has certainly increased (Snow et al, 1994), adult men still comprise the larger share of the homeless population in almost all locales. According to HUD's 2007 Report to Congress, summarizing point-in-time counts from all cities that applied

for HUD “continuum of care” funds in 2006, 47% of all sheltered homeless people in America are single adult men. This can be compared to only 20% of poor people in the U.S. who are adult men living alone (HUD, 2007). Therefore, single adult men are highly overrepresented among the sheltered homeless population.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007), members of homeless families comprise approximately 30% of the total homeless population. Another 17% are single women, while 53% are single adult men. No matter what methodology is used or whether the counts are of sheltered or of all homeless people, what is consistent is that single adult men repeatedly account for basically half of the total homeless population, with the other half comprised of adult women, children, and members of homeless families.

Homeless singles, regardless of gender, have longer histories of homelessness as compared to homeless families and single men specifically have the fewest financial resources compared to other homeless subcategories. Among homeless men, many other characteristics are also important to note. It is estimated that 40% of homeless men are veterans. This is compared to 34% of the general male population. Homeless male veterans are more likely to be white, better educated and married as compared to non-veteran homeless men (Rosenheck, 1996).

### Causes of Homelessness

In the current literature, the two main causes of homelessness in America are the increasing lack of affordable rental housing coupled with an increase in poverty (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). The lack of affordable housing is already a ma-

major problem and it is believed that the situation will worsen in the coming years (Wright, Donley & Gotham, 2008; Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2007). Measures of housing costs, including median rents and rent-to-income ratios, have been found to have a significant positive effect on the magnitude of the homeless population (Quigley & Raphael, 2001). Particularly pertinent to the study of homelessness is the destruction of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels. During the 1970's when gentrification was occurring in nearly all major metropolitan areas, the entire SRO stock was nearly depleted. SROs had been the place where single men in particular could afford to stay (Hopper, 2003). Gentrification has also led to an increase in the market value of rental housing as areas become more attractive to higher income people (Rengert, 2002).

“The key to persistent widespread homelessness in the United States appears to be the persistent and worsening mismatch of housing cost to available housing resources” (Burt et al, 2001, p. 322). The proportion of low income households that allocate more than the standard thirty percent of income towards housing costs has increased from 67 to 79 percent from 1970 – 2000 (Quigley & Raphael, 2004). This means that an increasing number of poor people are vulnerable to becoming homeless (Burt et al, 2001). Subsidized housing units that were available under programs such as Section 8 are also being lost. Millions of Section 8 contracts have expired during the 1990's and millions more will expire soon. Many owners of housing that was once Section 8 are improving their properties and renting them to higher income people. Finally, programs such as HOPE VI are also depleting the stock of affordable housing. Under HOPE VI, public housing developments are being torn down and are being replaced

with mixed income housing, only a small portion of which is affordable to low income residents. While these programs differ, the outcome is the same: less housing that is affordable for low-income people (Rengert, 2002) and an increase in homelessness (Burt et al, 2001).

While there are many causes of homelessness, the unavailability of affordable housing and the increase in poverty are two of the main factors. Poverty disproportionately affects minorities in America. It is then not surprising that minorities are highly over-represented in the homeless population. Moreover, single men make up nearly half of the homeless population, while single, female headed- households account for nearly a third. The preceding is a simplified overview of what the research of the past decades has taught us about the correlates and causes of homelessness. What we have learned in that same period about crime is the second part of this dissertation's topic.

## Crime

Until very recently, the crime rate in America for virtually every crime had been flat or falling for nearly a decade (Crutchfield, Kubrin, Bridges & Weis, 2008). Nevertheless, historians generally agree that America is a relatively violent nation (Lane, 1999). Crime, and even more so, the fear of crime, are major parts of American life. The recounting of crimes is a fixture on the nightly news and the public's fear of crime has led to legislative policies at the national level (Lane & Meeker, 2000). Although one can reasonably argue that anyone can become a victim of crime, there are definite characteristics that make one more likely to actually become a victim (Crutchfield et al, 2008), characteristics that are common among the homeless.



The Uniform Crime Report annually compiles statistics voluntarily submitted by over 17,000 law enforcement agencies around the nation. The most recent data available come from 2006. Crimes are divided into Part I and Part II crimes. Part I crimes are violent offenses and are typically referred to as "index offenses." The eight crimes that comprise Part I are: homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft and arson. Part II crimes are typically non-violent offenses and include everything not covered in part one such as vagrancy, drug violations, and vandalism. UCR statistics on crimes are for arrests only and do not include information on victimization. Another somewhat troubling fact for the present work is that the UCR only presents information on race, not on ethnic origin, meaning that there is no indication on the number of Hispanics involved in crime (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2007). This is problematic and does not allow comparisons to be made with the crime data and the NSHAPC data, which does include ethnic origin.

In 2005, the FBI estimates that in all, 14,094,186 arrests were made. This figure contains all arrests made except those for traffic offenses. The violent crime rate increased 1.3 percent from 2004 and stood at 469 per 100,000 inhabitants. The rate of property crime decreased 2.4 percent from the year before and stood at an estimated rate of 3,430 property offenses per 100,000 inhabitants.

As mentioned earlier, the FBI does not compile information on ethnic origin of offenders; therefore, no evidence can be presented regarding Hispanics and crime with this data set. In terms of race, in 2005, the majority of arrestees were white (70%) while 28% were black. The most common reason for arrest for white adults was driving under the influence, while for blacks, it was drug abuse violations. Whites accounted for 61%

of all adults arrested for violent crimes and 69% of those arrested for property crimes. The picture is somewhat different when examining juvenile arrest data. For property crimes, 67% of the arrestees were white. However, for violent offenses, 50% of the arrestees were black and 48% were white (FBI, 2007).

While the data presented above say something about who is arrested in America, it does not and cannot elucidate anything about crimes that go unreported or crimes that are never solved and do not result in arrest. To help fill in these gaps in our understanding of crime, we turn to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The NCVS is an annual survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of 77,200 households and approximately 134,000 individuals from those households. Respondents are asked about their experiences with criminal victimization which allows for estimates to be made on the likelihood of victimization by many different crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

In the 2006 report, only 49% of all violent victimizations and 38% of all property crimes were said to have been reported to the police. While this data is self-reported and could be flawed to some extent, the fact that less than half of crimes are reported justifies the use of such a survey in understanding the amount of crime in America. The report, *Criminal Victimization in the United States*, states that in 2005 there were over 23 million victimizations. These numbers of course do not include homicide, as the victimization is self-reported. Property crimes accounted for 77% of all crimes, with theft being the most common. Of the 23% of all crimes denoted as personal, violent crime was the most common, which includes attempted and completed violence as well as all forms of sexual assault and rape.

In America, it is well established that crime is not equally distributed across populations (Crutchfield et al, 2008; FBI, 2007). Blacks are more likely to be involved in violence than whites are and to a lesser extent, Latinos (Sampson & Bean, 2006). For young blacks aged 10-24 years in America, homicide is the leading cause of death (U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 2007). According to the NCVS data, the rate of personal crime victimization per 1,000 in 2005 was 32.6 for blacks and 25.5 for whites. Therefore, not only are blacks arrested at a higher rate for crimes, but they also have a higher rate of victimization. The differences in black and white offending and victimization rates have been researched for decades, with the typical finding being racial disparities as reported above (Lafree, O'Brien & Baumer, 2006).

It has been argued that by focusing on blacks and their overrepresentation as crime perpetrators relative to their proportion in the population, the reality that whites commit the majority of crimes in America is overlooked and ignored. This has resulted in negative stereotypes and beliefs about all blacks as dangerous and the idea of the “criminalblackman” (Young, 2006). This point is certainly valid and the intention of this work is not to propagate stereotypes. Instead, because blacks are overrepresented in both crime and homelessness, it is an attempt to understand what forces are at work that influence both of these issues.

#### Intersection between Homelessness and Crime

While rural homelessness certainly exists, in general homelessness is concentrated and more visible in urban areas. There are also typically more services for homeless people located in the urban cores. The rural “homeless” are often precariously

housed, i.e., at risk of homelessness, not literally homeless. They usually do not sleep in shelters or on the street but rather in cars or campers, with friends, or in severely dilapidated housing (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007a).

The NSHAPC data defined rural as any area outside of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), and by that definition, 9% of the NSHAPC homeless were rural. In this sample, however, rural homeless were probably undercounted (Burt et al, 2001). Nevertheless, 9% seems to be the most agreed upon estimate, although some report figures as high as 18% (National Rural Health Association, 1996). Regardless of the estimate used, although rural homelessness is a serious problem, the majority of America's homeless still live in urban areas (NCH, 2007a).

Likewise, although crime certainly occurs in rural areas, typically crime is more common in the cities. In the 2006 NCVS data, the rate of violent crime victimization per 1,000 households in rural areas was 16.4. This compares to rates of 37 for smaller urban areas (500,000-999,999 residents) and 27 for larger urban areas (1,000,000 or more residents). In the NCVS, rural is defined as "a place not located inside the Metropolitan Statistical Area." This category includes a variety of localities, ranging from sparsely populated rural areas to cities with populations less than 50,000" (pg. 142). Therefore, while rural and suburban crime is an important issue, the current work will focus instead on where crime and homelessness along with race generally intersect: in the central city. While some have argued that this position is a simplification at best (Cox, 1944), social class and race in America, more often than not, intersect and overlap. This is evident in the over representation of blacks in both the poor and the homeless populations.

## Perceptions of Homeless People

There are two general ways that the homeless are often viewed. The first is that the homeless have chosen their lifestyle and have no one but themselves to blame for the situation they face. The opposing viewpoint sees the homeless as victims of macro-level social forces such as a shortage of affordable housing, extreme poverty, mental and physical disabilities and a lack of social service assistance (DeLisi, 2000). There is, no doubt, some truth in both perspectives. When thinking about homelessness and crime, viewpoints become less polarized, as people may want the homeless to be helped in an abstract way, but may simultaneously view them as dangerous and prone to criminal behavior. Public perception frequently seems to equate homelessness and crime (Barak, 2002), whether this belief is empirically supported or not.

Many people are simply afraid of the homeless, or maybe more specifically, people are afraid of what they perceive the homeless population to be. The most visible homeless are sometimes easily recognizable due to such negative attributes as being dirty, smelling of alcohol or carting a multitude of belongings, they cannot easily blend in with the people around them.<sup>1</sup> Because many have no place to go during the day when the shelters are typically closed, they may stay for hours on a bench, in a public library or in a park. Their visibility, appearance and demeanor make many people nervous. Many domiciled people believe the homeless are easily capable of violence and thus fear being victimized. Sometimes, though, fear of crime may not be the biggest issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it would be more correct to say that dirty, smelly people wandering aimlessly through city streets are usually *assumed* to be homeless and are feared as such, even though they may well have someplace where they live.

“Most Americans want the homeless off the streets, but no one wants them next door” (Jencks, 1994, p.117).

This negative view of the homeless leads to the NIMBY-ism (Not In My Back-Yard) so often apparent in a community’s responses to proposed shelter facilities. In one city, residents opposed the potential building of a shelter in their area because of their expressed fears that the homeless would commit crimes, including rapes of neighborhood women (Snow, Baker & Anderson, 1989). Efforts to relocate Orlando, Florida’s largest homeless facility in an area nearer a local high school were opposed on the grounds that the population of men utilizing the facility contained child molesters, pedophiles, drug dealers and other unsavory types who would be dangerous to the students. Neighborhood organizations are very often successful in blocking any development plans for any type of housing option geared towards the homeless or even towards the low income population (Jencks, 1994). As more urban areas “revitalize” and gentrify their cores, areas that were once home to shelters and services for the homeless are becoming off limits (Schwartzman, 2006).

Online searches also reveal people’s fears of the homeless. One aptly named site, BumFinder.com, “...enables anybody to locate and discover areas frequented by Homeless People, Vagrants, and Bums so they can avoid those areas to feel more safe and secure.” The text on the site states “...major cities around the country aren’t doing enough to keep their citizens safe from Homeless, Vagrants and Bums.” The site includes the ability to click on a city name and obtain a satellite map with all known concentrations of homeless individuals shown. Data is compiled by “tips” sent in from people visiting the site.

One video available on youtube.com, a preview for a supposed upcoming short film on damage done by homeless people, includes the following text posted by the creator: "I am sick and tired of the false notion that most bums are war heroes. Most of them are dangerous criminals that have never served in our armed forces...We need to bus them out of the country" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlelOxFo9sQ>). Elsewhere in the video, homeless people are referred to as "trash," "beasts" and "monsters." Although sites such as these do not give insight into the number of people that fear homeless people, they do illustrate that the perception that homeless people are dangerous and should be avoided is a common viewpoint.

### Homelessness and Crime

In what is arguably the most comprehensive article to date on homeless crime perpetration, Snow, Baker and Anderson (1989) examined data from homeless men in Austin, Texas over a 27-month period. Their findings showed that as compared to the general male population in the city, the homeless did have a higher arrest rate; however, the crimes they were charged with were primarily non-violent. The most typical arrest was for public intoxication followed by theft or shoplifting. They also found that the majority of crimes were committed by homeless men who were under 35 years of age, had been on the streets for longer periods of time, and those who had previous contact with the mental health system.

Literature focusing on incarceration and prison re-entry among homeless individuals is also relevant to the area of homelessness and crime. What is important to remember in this area, however, is that high rates of incarceration do not necessarily

mean that the homeless are violent, as arrests can and often do occur for minor offenses (Snow, Baker & Anderson, 1989). Nevertheless, this is an important area of inquiry because of the lack of literature on homeless criminal perpetration. There is a clear relationship between the two as a many homeless people have previously been incarcerated and many incarcerated people were previously homeless (Metraux, Roman, & Cho, 2007). First, men that were homeless at the time of their arrest are overrepresented in the prison population as compared to the number of homeless in the general population (Ditton, 1999).

Secondly, a sizeable proportion of men in homeless shelters have previously been incarcerated. Rates vary from a quarter of the homeless shelter population having an incarceration history (Kushel et al, 2005; Metraux & Culhane, 2006) to as high as 3 in 5 homeless men (Burt et al, 2001). The rates of previous incarceration are nearly twice as high for homeless men as they are for homeless women (Burt et al, 2001). Overall, blacks are overrepresented in both the homeless and the incarcerated populations. More specifically, the homeless and the incarcerated are disproportionately young, black, males (Burt et al, 2001).

An examination of incarcerated men looked at differences based on housing status at time of arrest. Records of 100 homeless and 100 domiciled jail inmates were reviewed and showed that the homeless inmates were more likely to have been arrested for non-violent, petty offenses, to have more extensive criminal histories and to have prior arrests for weapons, drugs and alcohol. The homeless inmates were also 222% more likely to have a mental illness diagnosis as compared to the domiciled inmates, although only 12% of the homeless inmates were mentally ill (DeLisi, 2000).



While all released prisoners will not become homeless people, according to prison officials, securing housing for released prisoners is their single, biggest challenge. For them, it poses an even greater challenge than assisting released inmates in securing employment (Petersilia, 2005). Serving time in jail or prison can be distinctively different, each with its own set of implications once released (Metraux, Roman, & Cho, 2007). The release of incarcerated people is often now termed community reintegration because, although each group may face some different challenges, both must contend with leaving an institution and securing housing in an unfriendly market (Metraux & Culhane, 2004). This area of study is relatively new (Metraux, Roman, & Cho, 2007) with only a handful of studies focusing on the crossover between homelessness and incarceration (Metraux & Culhane, 2004). Within this area, there is also the issue that many homeless people eventually are incarcerated. Thus, there is a bi-directional relationship where homelessness can progress to incarceration and vice versa. For some, this can result in a sort of revolving door between homeless shelters, jails and prisons (Wright, 2007).

Metraux and Culhane (2002) have done the most comprehensive study to date on the relationship between incarceration and homelessness. They examined data from a cohort of 48,424 prisoners who were released from New York State prisons to New York City from 1995-1998. They found that 11% had gone to a homeless shelter while another 33% had been re-imprisoned within two years of release. Moreover, they found that a previous record of shelter use was significantly associated with both shelter use and re-incarceration. While this study was large and provides valuable insights, the au-

thors themselves caution against generalizing or attributing causality because so little research in this area has yet been done.

### Wilson

There is a great deal of literature that focuses on the low-income populations in America. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) writes about what he termed the black “underclass,” a term that is discussed in depth in the next chapter. For Wilson, the black underclass is categorized by high rates of crime, teen age pregnancy, female headed households and welfare dependency, or what Wilson calls “the tangle of pathology,” a term borrowed from Moynihan and Lewis. Wilson argues that these high rates of social dysfunction cannot be explained by modern day discrimination alone. Instead he offers other reasons. One is that the poor blacks who migrated to urban cores, and those that replaced them, are overwhelmingly young and youth is positively correlated with all of the effects discussed above. This influx of younger people occurred at a time when the American economy shifted from a goods producing economy to one focused on services. Unskilled laborers were particularly affected by these shifts. While at one point in history, a younger person could obtain a relatively high paying and stable job at a factory in an urban core, which is simply no longer the case. The result is that joblessness among unskilled, black inner city residents rapidly increased.

It is the effect of joblessness upon which Wilson focuses. Because middle class blacks left these areas, the result was highly concentrated areas of poverty, or “ghettoization.” Wilson believes the presence of middle class residents served as a “buffer” from the plights of the inner city. Middle class residents served as role models and pro-

vided economic revenue to the community. While some individuals were still poor and jobless, the community was not primarily made up of poor, jobless people. The community itself still contained businesses, churches, places to recreate and to socialize. The community was not just a representation of the very poor. When the middle class left, these institutions left too, leaving an underclass in an area where role models and potential job contacts no longer existed. The underclass became increasingly isolated as people chose not to venture in if they did not have to and those that could leave already did (Wilson, 1987).

The role joblessness plays in homelessness has been a major concern for many researchers for several decades. Rossi (1989) echoed Wilson's sentiment that joblessness is a major cause of homelessness in his text, *Without Shelter*. He points out that employment opportunities and wages for young men declined during the same time periods when homelessness increased. Likewise, Jencks (1994) found joblessness to play a major role in the growth of the homeless population throughout the 1980's. He states that this trend continues today as no changes have been put in place to tighten the labor market.

#### Massey and Denton

Wilson (1987) and others clearly focus on the effects of joblessness, as an extension of class, as a main cause of the inner city poverty present in so many urban cores today. However, others, particularly Massey and Denton (1993) offered another possible explanation, namely the impact of residential segregation. In *American Apartheid*, they posit, "residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically under-

mines the social and economic well-being of blacks in the United States” (1993, p. 2).

While they agree with Wilson’s assertion that economic factors are partly responsible for the current conditions within inner city ghettos, they argue that without widespread residential segregation, the economic effects would not have been as damaging as they have been.

No group in American history has been as racially segregated for as long as black Americans have. Although other groups have developed ethnic enclaves in the past and newer immigrants continue to do so today, no group has been so severely segregated for the amount of time that blacks have. The residential segregation of blacks is the “missing link” in our understanding of urban poverty today (p.3). Black residential segregation became entrenched in the years after the end of World War II and continues unabated today. It is a system maintained by institutionalized racism and fueled by the exclusionary preferences of the dominant group.

The extent and importance of racial segregation can be further illustrated by examining residential patterns of Hispanics and comparing the patterns of blacks and whites within this group. The segregation index is defined as the number of people that would need to relocate to allow neighborhood compositions to correspond to the area demographics. The higher the number, the more segregated an area is. White Hispanics have a segregation index of 52, inter-racial Hispanics have an index of 72 while Black Hispanics have an index of 80. The residential segregation index for Black Hispanics is comparable to the index for Black Americans as a whole (Massey & Denton, 1993). This is not simply a result of economic standing, as middle-class Blacks are more likely to live in lower status neighborhoods than are middle-class Whites, demon-

strating that race, not class, is the decisive component in residential segregation (Alba, Logan, and Stults, 2000). Moreover, it is not simply the effects of class or the effects of race in isolation; rather, it is the intersection of the two that has hurt black Americans (and now black Hispanics as well) and their overall life chances (Massey & Denton, 1993).

### Synthesis

What does all of this mean in terms of the larger study of the perception of homelessness and criminal perpetration? The “underclass” is disproportionately composed of blacks (Massey & Denton, 1993), thus illustrating the intersection of race and class. The concentration in the urban cores has resulted in an isolated group of people that must contend with poverty and often homelessness. Opportunities for work in legitimate occupations are limited and thus the engagement in illicit activities is common. Overall life chances in a myriad of areas are negatively affected. While homelessness and crime occur certainly outside of urban areas, both are more commonly located within the cores of our nation’s cities and thus the theories presented above provide a good foundation for why these two phenomena overlap.

While blacks are over represented in criminal perpetration, they do not account for the majority of the crimes committed. Moreover, while blacks are often assumed to be responsible for the majority of crimes committed against whites, this is utterly false. Whites account for the vast majority of crimes against whites and yet whites often fear blacks, particularly black men because they are viewed as threatening (Feagin, 2000). Likewise, the poor are viewed as eschewing mainstream values, such as having a

strong work ethic, stressing the importance of education and promoting intact families (Gans, 1995). Because race is entangled with both crime and homelessness, it is posited that the belief that black men are dangerous can and may in fact, translate to the perceptions of homeless people in general.

Massey's (2007) study of stratification presents a model (Figure 1) to illustrate Fiske et al's (2002) work regarding the way people evaluate others. They determined that this evaluation is based on two psychological components: warmth and competence. The bottom left quadrant of the model represents groups that are viewed as low in competence and likability. This quadrant contains the sub populations of "drug dealers, lazy welfare recipients, sex offenders and the chronically homeless" (p. 13).

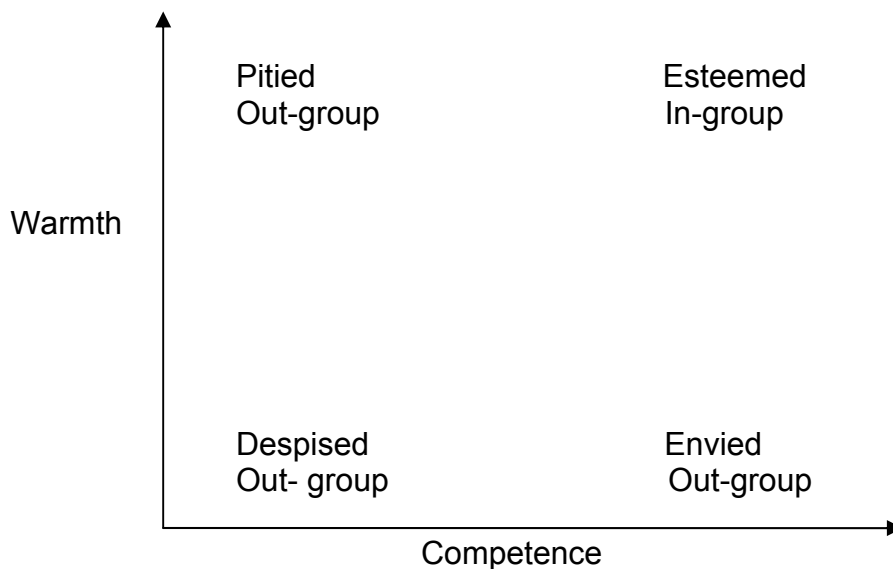


Figure 1. Massey's Compilation of Warmth and Competence

The examples of the despised group are based on crime and poverty. Massey goes on to say that African-Americans in the Jim Crow south would also fit into this quadrant.

The question here is what racial prejudices remain in shaping the perception domiciled people hold towards the homeless.

## Media

While the extreme racism that was once entrenched in American society has abated, beliefs and prejudices based on race still remain. One way that these views can be shaped is through the media, specifically television (Gerbner et al, 2002). The role that the media plays in shaping views may be particularly pertinent when examining which groups of people are viewed as dangerous. Because the media does not report all of the news, they select the stories which they deem will be most interesting to their viewers (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). This can result in inaccurate representations of groups of people and lead viewers to develop beliefs about others based on a distorted presentation of the situation.

In terms of race, there are several studies that have documented disparities in representation of perpetrators and victims on television news reports (See Greenberg, Mastro & Brand, 2002 for a review). One example of this type of study is from Entman (1994) who examined 55 days worth of local news in Chicago. During this time nearly half of all of the news stories on local news focused on blacks involved in violent crime. He went on to theorize that these overrepresentations and distorted focus in the media may negatively influence viewer's perceptions of black people and result in unfounded fear.

Not only is race an important issue affected by the media, but likewise members in the lower economic classes can be negatively perceived. In the book, *Framing Class*,

Kendall (2005) discusses the way in which the media presents members of various classes in very different ways. She argues that television news programs, particularly the “infotainment” programs and newspaper stories promote and celebrate higher class people while negative stereotypes are propagated about people in the lower classes. A major part of this is “media framing” which is defined as the way in which the media of all genres frame a story before it is aired or printed. In this process of framing the tone that will be conveyed, the images that will be shown and the terms that will be used are all determined. It is in this process that the presentation of stories about people from different classes can be shaped.

By analyzing New York Times articles, Kendall (2005) analyzed the way in which homeless people are presented. She determined that while those in the upper classes are discussed in great detail, those that are poor or homeless are often presented as numbers instead of people and as problems, not members of a community. In her analysis she summarized that poor people are typically portrayed as “...losers, welfare dependents, mentally ill persons or criminals” (pg. 94). In reports from 1851- 1995, 4,126 articles contained the word “poverty” in the headline. Within these stories, poverty and suicide are often linked. So too is poverty and crime.

Borchard (2005) also examined media and the presentation of the homeless by conducting a content analysis of newspaper articles. His study focused solely on the presentation of homeless individuals and was confined to Las Vegas. He used not only newspaper articles from the *Las Vegas Review Journal* but also homeless service provider’s mailings and other associated documents. He found in his analysis of the newspaper articles that three main themes were present in the articles: homeless men



should be feared, they should be given sympathy and third, they should be both feared and pitied.

### Purpose of the Present Work

The main purpose of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between the perception of homeless people and the role that race, class and gender play in these perceptions. As presented above, while blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime, the actual majority of crimes are committed by whites. Nevertheless, for many, there is a fear related to blacks, particularly black men. Although there have been many applicable studies of how the media presents stories about minorities, the poor or the homeless, the role the media plays in shaping opinions about the intersection between these lines has yet to be thoroughly explored.

Chapter four explores this connection in depth. Data that examine people's views of homeless people as dangerous are analyzed. For many it seems, the connection is an obvious one. Black men are criminals, homeless men are black, and therefore, homeless men must be criminal as well. While the connection may never be explicitly acknowledged and is never presented as unambiguously as I have just stated it, there is evidence that this stereotype exists and shapes the way housed people think about the homeless. Chapter four explores the extent to which racial stereotypes affect the housed public's view of homeless people. The analyses in this chapter will also look at the differences present in these perceptions based on several different demographic indicators.

The role the media plays in affecting one's views is also analyzed in chapter four. The analyses presented help understand whether exposure to the media negatively or positively affects the way that domiciled people view the homeless. Analysis is also presented that focuses around the space that homeless people may occupy and their rights within that space. Therefore, a thorough examination of how homeless people are perceived, why they are perceived that way and what rights they are believed to have is presented.

The second main purpose of this dissertation is to ascertain the actual level of criminal perpetration by homeless people. While there is no doubt that homeless people like other people, commit crime. The extent of their criminality has never been definitively established. The homeless as a group however are often depicted as criminals and dangerous. Consider the following, a quotation from Deputy Police Chief Vince Golbeck of Dallas, Texas, commenting on a local church's homeless assistance program (Curry, 2007). "A majority of property crimes in downtown Dallas are caused by the homeless. I'm not saying all homeless commit crimes, but the suspects, arrested persons we deal with, do have a lengthy record, and their background is homelessness," Golbeck said. "Those are just facts."

The National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2002) however, assert that homeless people are actually less likely to commit property and violent crimes than domiciled people. Chapter five presents analysis of data from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) in an attempt to ascertain more knowledge about the levels of perpetration among the homeless. It is essential to try to determine the level of criminal in-

involvement among homeless people in light of the perceptions that have been presented. While these data are not able to tell the whole picture, the analysis may help better understand the reality of the situation.

To add to the understanding of criminal perpetration, qualitative data from a previously conducted study of unsheltered homeless in East Orange County, Florida, as well as a study of sheltered homeless men in Orlando are presented. By adding these types of findings to analysis on nationally representative data, the goal is to present a more thorough understanding of the role that crime plays in the lives of homeless people. This includes not only criminal perpetration but also victimization and criminalization. The qualitative data allow for a more thorough understanding of causal relationships presented between criminality and homelessness as well as information on how past criminal involvement can prevent someone from exiting homelessness.

Chapter six presents conclusions based on the data analysis and potential policy implications. It is argued here that people's perceptions of the homeless affect policies that are targeted towards them. This chapter reviews new policies that have been enacted recently that are pertinent to the area of focus here. Many jurisdictions across America have instituted ten year plans to end homelessness as well as task forces to contend with what has for many areas been a growing issue. There are also fears in many areas that growing economic troubles will exacerbate the problem of homelessness. Because of this, new policies are being instituted and those that seem the most promising as well as the most controversial are presented.

## CHAPTER TWO

This work simultaneously focuses on the intersection between homelessness and crime as well as the perception of the relationship. To examine this interaction, the effects of race, gender and class on such perceptions are examined. Because the perception of homeless people as dangerous includes many factors, no single theory can fully explain all of the complex dynamics at work. Therefore, theoretical integration has been necessary. Theoretical integration has been used extensively in criminological work for over two decades and dates back to the work of Merton in the late 1930's (Barak, 2002).

Theoretical integration is defined as "...connecting, linking, combining, and/or synthesizing the relations and fragments of other models and theories into formulations of crime and crime control that are more comprehensive than the more traditional and one-dimensional explanations that have been perpetually elaborated on..." (Barak, 2002, p. 2). There are several different ways in which researchers integrate theories. The three most common ways within the positivist approach are structural, conceptual and assimilative. Structural links the basic propositions of theories in some sort of sequential order. Conceptual integration combines theories that focus on the same things but employ different methods while assimilative calls for the unification of different theories based on their frameworks (Barak, 2002).

Another way to integrate theories is via a post-postmodern approach. This is the method that is employed in the current work. This method allows the researcher to combine the principles from both modern and postmodern theories (Barak, 2002). The

current study theoretically centers on Herbert Gans's work. His discussion of the way dialogues are formulated, labels are applied and perceptions are shaped of the lower economic classes forms the basis of this work. Another theory that will be used is space theory, a postmodern view of physical space as well as Boudrieu's discussion of space. To examine race, classic theories coming out of the Chicago School are used, so too is Anderson's "code of the street." Theories of framing which come from the study of media are of integral importance as well, as it is argued that these presentations play an important role in shaping people's perceptions. While some theories are informed or include micro level interaction, others focus solely on the micro level. Goffman's theory of stigma is one such theory that does this. This theory helps to explain the effects of perception on homeless people. It is argued here that by combining the guiding principles and central tenets from many different theories, from different disciplines and across many different time periods, the way that homeless people are perceived by the domiciled population can be thoroughly explored.

### Herbert Gans

In the text, *The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy*, Gans (1995) discusses the ways in which the poor are labeled and what the labels connote. He explains that the further someone is away from a group in terms of social distance, the more apt a person is to rely on media accounts and conversations with others to form their views, as opposed to actual experience. With regard to the poor, the labels are often negative in nature and promote the idea that the poor are undeserving. While the labels themselves are just words, the meaning they hold can lead to the stigmatiza-

tion of people and a belief that “they” are not like “us.” One label that has been used extensively since the 1980’s is the term “underclass.”

While this term is used repeatedly in this work, it is used to discuss the way others view people in lower economic classes. Gans (1995) takes this position as well, however the term itself holds many implications. On the very surface, it implies the class that is under all of the other classes. However, the term also conveys images of moral depravity, a lack of values, and as Gans explains a belief that the people that make up the underclass are undeserving. The underclass is composed of many different groups of people including homeless people. The underclass as it is defined is also almost exclusively composed of Black people. Therefore, this label is important in determining why people perceive members of the underclass in the way they do.

Another important connotation of the label underclass is the implied dangerousness of members of this group. Gans (1995) explains this in depth through his discussion of implied threats and association of fears. In essence, the domiciled population in general has some fear of crime, even though this fear may be somewhat irrational. Street crimes, such as muggings, are feared because they are an invasion of space and are by definition unpredictable occurrences. The media focuses on stories recounting these crimes resulting in a possibly irrational fear of such an event occurring to any one individual.

Because some homeless people, or people that are perceived to be homeless, panhandle, sleep or occupy public spaces, they are viewed as invading domiciled peoples’ privacy. Therefore, while a homeless person panhandling may never commit an act of violence, they are perceived as dangerous because they are in a space that is not

their space. Their sheer presence in an area where they are not wanted is perceived as criminal. Gans continues that because the visible homeless are often black males, the black, male criminals often shown on television and the black, male homeless men on the street can actually be perceived to be one and the same.

### Stigma

Like Gans' discussion of how fear of crime can be shared through conversations with other people, Erving Goffman's work focuses on the interaction between people in their shaping their views of the world. One particularly salient concept of his in the study of homeless people is stigma. In his text, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963) presents a theory of stigma for a concept that has arguably been around for thousands of years. For Goffman, stigma can occur if one of three things is present. The first is physical differences, such as being in a wheelchair or being an amputee. The second is a blemish of character, which refers to such conditions as mental illness or having a substance abuse problem. The third area refers to defects of tribal, national or religious affiliation. This area generally refers to ascribed statuses such as race or ethnicity.

Obviously homeless people can be affected with traits stemming from each of the three areas that can result in stigma. Being homeless in and of itself clearly falls into the second category as it is assumed to be a defect of character by many members of society. Moreover, the homeless are also tribe unto themselves. Homeless people are perceived by many to all be the same, hence "the homeless" and not "homeless people." However, among advocates, the term "people experiencing homelessness" is now often

used, which focuses on the condition rather than the status of a person (NCH, 2007). In all types of stigma, Goffman states, “an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him... He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated...” (Goffman, 1963, p. 5). This stigma then can inhibit those that are homeless from ever leaving their situation, especially if they possess other stigmatized traits.

Stigma is a difficult concept to succinctly apply to homeless people. Often their appearance is the cause of other’s disdain, not necessarily their homeless status. Other times, a homeless person’s appearance may not allow others to know that he or she is homeless, and therefore stigma would not apply. Nevertheless, the role that stigma plays is important in understanding the way in which the domiciled population views homeless people. This theme will be explored in depth in chapter four where the focus is on people’s perceptions of homeless people as dangerous individuals. The analysis will attempt to discern the different effects that race and homeless status have on others’ perceptions.

### Stratification

Several theories have been presented to attempt to explain why the homeless are perceived in the ways that they are. Something that has been ignored thus far is why the homeless are more generally located in urban areas and why certain groups of people are over-represented among the homeless population. To examine these broader questions, classic and relatively recent theories examining poverty, urban areas and



race will be discussed. These theories are necessary to understand not only why the homeless are concentrated in the urban area and why minorities are over-represented, but also the affect this has on others perceptions of the homeless as individuals.

### Theories of Race

Race was the focus of many of the first sociological works written by Americans (Frazier, 1947). Being written in a country at a time when slavery was entrenched, these articles and their propositions could be viewed as nothing less than shocking to a modern day reader. Nevertheless, they are important as they show where the field began and where it has come today. Many of these early works focused on the importance, and provided justification for, slavery. Some of these early articles are documented in Frazier's (1947) review of race relations and sociological theory. Hughes' (1854) *Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical* focused on the importance of slavery to America. Likewise, Fitzhugh's (1854) *Sociology for the South: or the Failure of Free Society*, explained why slavery was necessary to build a moral society. Views on slavery aside, these works focused not on the racial groups themselves but more on their contact with the white majority. Early, founding sociologists were clearly products of their time and often their works reflected what today is considered to be at best, a Eurocentric approach (Winant, 2000).

By the early 1900's, this was changing. Ward (1903) is one such person that opposed the view that whites were naturally superior and instead he attributed the inherited status afforded to white people to be the cause of their apparent dominance (Frazier, 1947). This marks a shift from a belief in natural superiority built on biological fac-

tors to a belief in the powers of social structures and the effects they have on people in the society. Up until this time, race was viewed in biological terms. It was something that was innate and unchangeable (Winant, 2000). This turn away from purely biological explanations was evident in the works of sociologists at the Chicago School and in the works of W.E.B. Dubois.

Park articulated a theory of race prejudice which held that racial prejudice is simply one form of prejudice. Prejudice can be based on many different traits including class or religion and is at its core, about domination. The prejudice faced by black Americans comes from the resistance on the part of whites to accept the changes that are going on around them. Prejudice then is the result of the progress being made by blacks in America. He wrote, "...every effort of the Negro...to move, to rise and improve his status, rather than accept his condition, has invariably met with opposition, aroused prejudice and stimulated racial animosity" (Park, 1928, p. 13). While an interesting theory to be sure, there were some vocal critics that took issue with Park's discussion of race and race relations in America (Brown, 1939; Cox, 1944).

Others called into question the idea that improvement of condition but not status was accepted. Brown (1939) stated that prejudice was not the cause of blacks' oppression in America but a simple part of the aftermath of slavery. Prejudice developed after blacks were used for their ability to provide labor. He argued that improvement in condition may be viewed as an increase in status, something that could meet with violent reaction, particularly in the South at those times. Although, different definitions have been used, traditionally condition refers to one's state of being, while status refers to one's position in society. While the two concepts can easily be related, condition is a more

concrete and measurable term. In terms of these theorists, condition referred specifically to such things as having a decent job, enough food and decent shelter. One can clearly have all of those things yet be of very low status.

Cox (1944) also called into question the belief that whites were only resistant to improvements in status as opposed to improvements in condition. He wrote that prejudice, at that time, was believed to be the main cause of black Americans' condition. Seeking to understand the link between status and prejudice, Cox concluded that prejudice would only abate if blacks and whites were to work together in all sectors including political, economic and social. Only through cooperative efforts where blacks and whites focused on the same goals would prejudice begin to wane. Brown and Cox both argued that many of the most prominent sociologists of the time, Park in particular, were understating the influence that prejudice has in regard to the condition of black Americans. Brown (1939) explained that Park's work seemed to reflect in a way the sentiments largely expressed by Booker T. Washington.

Washington was a leader of the black community at the time and himself a former slave, and took a position that blacks in America must conform to mainstream white values and in essence, appease the white majority. He strongly advocated vocational training as a means of blacks improving their *condition*. In his Atlanta Exposition Address (1896), Washington called on blacks to understand that "no race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem" (p. 13). He believed in blacks helping the whites of the South make the South prosperous and successful. While he calls for equality under the law, he believed this equality must come as blacks work hard and show their worth as opposed to worth simply being bestowed

upon them. Equality in Washington's view had to be earned and not the result of "artificial forcing" (pg. 16). While Washington believed in the rights of black Americans and strongly espoused a belief in the importance of education, he advocated a position that was clearly meant to appease to the white majority, a position that, although supported by the vast majority of whites, was vehemently opposed by many blacks.

It was DuBois who observed in 1903, "The problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (DuBois, 1903, p. 9). DuBois was arguably one of Washington's most outspoken critics as DuBois's views on racial progress differed sharply. In the seminal text, *The Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois (1903) devoted a chapter to his reaction to Washington's point of view. In this chapter, DuBois wrote that the reaction of whites to Washington's goals are: "If that is all you and your race ask, take it" (DuBois, 1903, p. 27). DuBois believed in striving for, and insisting on, more. He wrote extensively on the impact that segregation has had in America on black people and Marx's influence on DuBois is apparent, as DuBois believed that to understand race in America is to understand the role people play in the larger economic structure. DuBois agreed with Washington about the importance of education, but found vocational programs to be limiting. He believed that while many blacks may benefit from vocational training, many would indeed benefit more from academic training as vocational training would not suffice for all. He believed not just in the improved condition of blacks but also in their improved *status*. He advocated not just an increase in material goods but more importantly an increase in political and social rights, with the ultimate goal being equality (DuBois, 1903).

As the defining issue in the Twentieth century, there is no shortage of literature focusing on race and race relations. Space does not permit a thorough examination of them all here. However, a few of these theories and classic writings require brief attention as they too are instrumental in the examination of race today. The first is Gunnar Myrdal's text, *An American Dilemma*. Written in 1944, this text examined every aspect of black American's lives, including the role of religion, education and most importantly racism. In his extensive study, Myrdal concluded that the problems facing blacks were actually problems for whites, as whites were the ones to blame. Nevertheless, Myrdal did include what can only be considered to be negative and false stereotypes about blacks. For example, he wrote that blacks are lazy and particularly prone to criminal endeavors. He believed that this was in part due to effects of racism; however, the use of such stereotypes clearly impacts the way in which this text is viewed. Even with the inclusion of such statements, the importance of this text cannot be overstated. It was an integral part in the Supreme Court's decision in overthrowing the separate but equal doctrine in the case, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* and laid the groundwork for years of research to come (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2001).

The other theory that will be mentioned here is the contact hypothesis as articulated by Allport (1954). The contact hypothesis discusses propositions that, in theory, would reduce intergroup racial prejudice. Among the propositions are that programs, which are supported by those in power, must be developed. People must voluntarily participate in such programs and all participants must be of equal status within the program. The programs must be free of conflict, foster cooperation and allow for the devel-

opment of personal friendships. The contact hypothesis has been deemed one of the most successful and enduring ideas in the field of social-psychology (Brewer & Brown, 1998). The premise behind the contact hypothesis is that racial prejudice comes from being ill-informed. If people from other groups can get together under the above conditions, then people will see similarities in one another. Stereotypes or prejudices that were held can be called into question and eventually eliminated through positive contact (Bramel, 1999).

Lee, Farrell and Link (2003) have examined the contact hypothesis in depth as it relates to homeless people. Using the data that is used in chapters four of this work, they examined the amount and type of contact that is necessary to cause people to have more favorable views of the homeless. They found that face-to-face contact was not essential to increase respondent's favorable attitudes. They also found that the size of a city's homeless population indirectly influenced attitudes respondents had towards the homeless in general. That is, a larger homeless population within a city was correlated with more positive attitudes among respondents. One of their conclusions was that the parameters necessitated in the contact hypothesis should be widened to include indirect types of exposure.

The history of race theory in America is at once fascinating, contradictory and filled with dissent. While certainly no one today advocates on behalf of slavery, many of the themes that these early theorists tackled are the same themes that are present today. Racial prejudice and race relations are still at the core of a country that has now seen the growth of a new minority group, one that has replaced blacks as the largest. This is clearly an important area of study in relation to crime. Blacks are not only over-

represented among criminal perpetrators and victims, but also in the impoverished and homeless populations. This intersection was explored in depth by Park and Burgess (1925). More recent theorists have further explored the concentration of poverty in urban cores and the role of race in this concentration.

### The Truly Disadvantaged

Wilson's work was mentioned in chapter one; however a fuller discussion of his work is presented here. In Wilson's (1978), *The Declining Significance of Race*, he posits that class has replaced race as the defining characteristic of the American system of stratification. While he does not deny the effect race has in overall life chances or in the presence of discrimination, he does argue that among the African-American community a class structure has emerged. Therefore, to speak of a single black experience is no longer possible. The effect of this newly developed class structure has resulted in one's class position being more influential than one's racial categorization in everyday, normal life. This class structure among blacks in America is one, Wilson says, that previously did not exist in America.

Wilson (1978) organizes the history of black-white relations in America into three distinct phases. The first phase, *racial caste oppression*, refers to the slave era (p.2). The second phase occurred during the Industrial Revolution, when according to Wilson, racial oppression and conflict between classes ensued. The third period was solidified during the Civil Rights Era and was characterized by the shift from inequality based on race to inequality based on class. This third period has seen the creation of a black

middle class. The black middle class has made educational and economic gains allowing them to leave urban ghettos. They have benefited greatly from the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent legislation. Those who have not made similar gains are left in the ghettos, areas now devoid of role models and economic opportunities. The result is a black *underclass*, a group that in Wilson's (1978) view is more the victim of economic oppression than racial oppression.

### Collins

Another theorist that examines race and economic inequality is Collins (2000). By incorporating the work of Goffman, Collins seeks to study the effects of inequality on the individual. He believes that the interaction between people and how individuals experience and navigate daily life is integral in understanding the effects of inequality (Collins, 1975). In his analysis of class, he discusses the role, which he argues is an increased role that race plays in class divisions. In general, he suggests that a society's class structure is not composed of easily identifiable strata but rather overlaps and intersects depending on the flow and use of money. While at the very top of the hierarchy Collins places the financial elite, it is those at the bottom that are of most relevance here.

At the lowest level are those that "are outside any circuits of monetary exchange" (Collins, 2000, p. 23). While people in this class may receive money from others in the form of donations or as the result of panhandling, and others may receive government assistance, what restricts them is how they can participate in the exchange. Often their money, in the case of government assistance, is required to go towards housing or food (via food stamp cards). For the homeless the money must certainly go to goods for daily



survival (what is necessary for daily survival is of course dependent on the individual).  
What is the key is the restriction.

Collin's (2003) analysis of status draws on Goffman's discussion of rituals to determine how status is evident today. Collins states that status is not clearly defined and can vary dependent on the situation, meaning your occupation may bring you high status at a professional conference where knowledge is prized but low status at a dinner party if one is in fact quite boring. Status therefore is not immutable and is dependent on micro interactions. He then looks specifically at deferential behavior as defined by Goffman and concludes that in modern society, people generally receive very little deference from others, regardless of status. The only noteworthy exception to the lack of deference in modern day interaction is said to be the behavior exhibited among black Americans living in the inner city. Drawing on Anderson's *The Code of the Street* (1999), Collins explains that deference within the inner city is for some a matter of survival. This is most highly noted among young, black, inner city, males who must either defer or demand deference from others in order to gain respect and to ultimately ensure their safety.

For Collins, class and status distinctions as described by the classic theorists no longer apply. Today, interaction is not centered around the distribution of power and property. While the analysis of micro interaction was present in the classical conflict theories, today the micro system is controlled by different means. Modern day life is more segmented and includes places of work, which are separate from other public or private places. In the past, these places were often one in the same or overlapped considerably. The appearance of class level today is not as obvious, save for the one nota-

ble exception of race, a trait that does not become invisible over time. The very visibility of race and the relative invisibility of class lines is for Collins the explanation for why, although there is now a large black middle class, blacks are still considered a solitary excluded group. He concludes, "Black Americans would probably be better off today if there were more class consciousness; class categories could help dissolve the racial category and make this categorical exclusion and discrimination more difficult in the ritual dynamics of everyday life" (Collins, 2000, p. 41).

This theory is particularly interesting to the present study because it can be argued that the homeless are the only group in which class can still be visibly assessed. Joel Blau's (1992) book on homelessness in America is entitled, *The Visible Poor*. It is the visibility of homeless people in America today that has helped to shape the way they are perceived. It is true that some homeless people do not in fact look homeless and would not be perceived to be as such by others. Other people may be perceived to be homeless when in fact they are not. However, it is the combination of race, gender and apparent housing status that matters in the study of perception- not the reality. If a panhandler is in fact housed misses the point that domiciled people can make assumptions about the homeless population based on their interaction with the housed panhandler. It is the perception and not the truth that is important. Most domiciled people think if someone is panhandling they are homeless (Lee & Farrell, 2003). The over representation of blacks and men to the visible, apparently homeless population only adds to the ways in which they are perceived in a negative way.

In the previous chapter, a summary of Hopper's (2003) account of the invisibility of blacks in the history of homelessness was presented. It is argued that this invisibility

has been replaced with extreme visibility in modern day America. Not only are there more people on the streets but they are more visible. One reason for this is where the homeless people are typically found in major American cities. It is the urban space they occupy. Space that was once unwanted and written off is being reclaimed. The space that was forgotten is being taken back and the visible people that live in these spaces are viewed as in the way.

### Social Ecology

The theories under social ecology are particularly pertinent to this study because they focus on the urban environment. Theories of social ecology come out of the Chicago School in the 1920's. Chicago School sociologists Park and Burgess (1925) developed a model of urban life first published in *The City*. This model was a depiction of an urban city as composed of five concentric circles. The theory, concentric zone theory, explained the distribution of land and the residential patterns of people based on class.

As shown in Figure 2, their model consisted of five rings and showed how wealth and wealthy residents would increasingly be located farther from the urban core. This theory supposed that competition over resources, namely land, would result in this distribution of space. The result would be those that had the least amount of resources would be concentrated in the inner circle of a city while those with the most resources would be on the outer rim of the cities. This model depicts the concentration of lower-income, predominantly minority communities that are still evident, and the topic of much of the work in the field, today. While this theory was dismissed as being over simplistic

for years following World War II, it has more recently been used to explain modern day urban life.



Figure 2. Park & Burgess' Model

This model attempted to explain the concentration of low income, minority communities in the urban cores. Several theories, from many different disciplines, have built on this model that expands the established line of thought with a new focus on why people get involved in crime. It is important in the current study because the visibility of homeless people in urban cores used to be a problem that went virtually ignored. However, with the advent of gentrification in American cities, this has changed.

Areas that had been all but forgotten have become areas that people now want to live in. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the conversion of the notorious Cabrini Green public housing complex in Chicago being refurbished and former subsidized units being sold as luxury condos to young professionals. Space that once was considered highly undesirable has shifted to being highly desirable. The homeless that inhabit these areas have gone from being ignored to being problematic.

## Postmodern Study of Space

While the roots of this theory lie in the early work of Park and Burgess, the direction that has been taken is a long way from their writings. The works that will be focused on here come from postmodernism and post-postmodern geography. The writing on social space extends the work begun by Park and Burgess (1925) and continued through Anderson's (1993) work in *Code of the Street*. The focus in this theoretical school is on the space itself- the urban cities- and the politics that define them.

Bourdieu (1991) like Collins (2000) focuses on the space and its relation to capital. He argues that social space is organized and distributed based on the accumulation of capital. He disagrees with Marx's arguably simplistic views of classes being based solely on monetary means. Instead, Bourdieu states that classes are the result of decisions made and interactions with those in the position to make decisions. The decision makers within society are those that hold the positions of power. In terms of places where the homeless typically occupy, these are areas that others have historically not wanted. The areas are typically composed of low-income people and are viewed as dangerous areas. Interactions homeless people may have with others outside of these areas may result in consequences that will dissuade homeless people from leaving their space in the future.

Soja (1989) was one of the first to point out what many were already discussing tangentially. That is the role that space plays in the formation of society. He argues that many seem to assume that space simply happened instead of focusing on the way it was constructed by people. Time he argues has always been of more value to theorists,

while space has not fully been understood. But it is the actual physical space that can define the interaction between people, can segregate people, and can limit life chances. Indeed, Park and Burgess, Wilson, Massey and Denton, and Anderson all discussed the impacts of the neighborhood. Soja calls for examining why the neighborhood is where it is in the first place, thus harkening to Bourdieu's discussion of interaction between those in power and those without.

Davis (1998) produced his own model building on what he has termed "the dart-board" model of Chicago by Park and Burgess (See Figure 3). His model is much more complex and is based on a modern day Los Angeles. While his model is drastically different from the one developed by Park and Burgess, some key elements are still present. What is most relevant for the present work is the center of his model, what is labeled the "homeless containment zone," a term that was actually coined by the city government of Los Angeles in reference to the city's Skid Row area. It is this type of area in cities across the county that is now being "reclaimed" by many city governments. The model clearly shows the informal but seemingly impenetrable borders present in cities- from the inner city ghettos to the affluent gated communities. The city is a place of difference, segregation and boundaries.



eas of most American cities and yet they are no longer welcome where they live. Therefore, the areas that were once designated as the areas where they were “allowed” to live are no longer available.

### Parramore

A current example of such a struggle can be seen in the historical African- American neighborhood of Parramore, Florida. An area of town that sits next to the central business district of Orlando, it is separated from the downtown area by a road named Division Street and Interstate 4. Division Street once divided the black and white parts of town and in many ways, it still does. Parramore is the neighborhood where the majority of the city’s homeless shelters, food pantries, and social services for the very low income are located. It is an area characterized by high rates of crime and poverty. It is also a residential community with families, schools and small businesses. In recent years it has become an area of great debate (Larsen, 1998).

The condominium building boom of the mid-2000’s in Florida made Parramore an attractive area to re-develop given its proximity to downtown Orlando. Today, there is a large high rise of condominiums that overlooks the largest homeless shelter in the city. There is a lot of future development that is still planned for the area (Pathways for Parramore, 2008). One consequence of these plans is that a city moratorium has been put in place prohibiting this same homeless shelter from expanding or improving its facilities while in its current location. Another example is that a public low-income housing project was torn down years ago and the promised mixed income housing that was supposed to be built on the site has yet to be built.



Parramore also borders one of the large lakes downtown, Lake Eola. This lake is home to festivals throughout the year, paddle boats and concerts. It is also a place where homeless people often spend time and where some groups will feed them meals. These meals have come under fire. In a ban that received national media attention, the city placed some of the most stringent restrictions in the nation on feeding groups of people on Lake Eola property. Under Orlando's new law (currently being challenged by several organizations including the ACLU), a person or group cannot feed more than twenty-five people at a time without obtaining a permit. This permit can only be obtained twice a year. At first, the Orlando police simply ignored the ordinance as unenforceable, and then tried to work with local organizations to assure that homeless people were being fed in lots of 24 or less. But in March, 2007, bowing to pressure from downtown residents and business interests, the Orlando police arrested an activist from the organization Food Not Bombs after he was filmed violating the feeding ordinance by undercover officers. His arrest was the first effort to enforce this controversial ordinance, which is supported by the majority of the local business community, particularly those located near the park where the feedings and this arrest took place. Feedings continue to occur on a weekly basis despite the arrest (the case was thrown out by a local judge) (Donley & Wright, 2008).

This type of restriction spreads into the central business district as well. In 2004, the city of Orlando, Florida, passed an ordinance requiring panhandlers to obtain a permit from the municipal police department. The Orlando ordinance further makes it a crime to panhandle in the commercial core of downtown Orlando, as well as within 50 feet of any bank or automated teller machine, except in specially designated "blue box-

es” which have been painted onto downtown Orlando sidewalks. Thus, downtown Orlando panhandlers must have a police permit and stay inside the designated blue boxes, although few actually do this. It is also considered a crime in Orlando for panhandlers to make false statements, to disguise themselves, or to use money obtained with a claim of a specific purpose (e.g. food) for anything else (e.g. alcohol). So in Orlando, if you tell someone you are hungry if in fact you are not, then take the money you are given and use it to pay for a bus ride, you are in technical violation of the panhandling ordinance (Donley & Wright, 2008).

The question seemingly asked on both sides is: Where do the homeless go? The homeless are not welcome on the city or suburban streets. Those that hold the political power in the cities do not want them anywhere within their jurisdictions. Residents protest the potential plans to build shelters out of fear of increased crime. So, the answer of where to go is seemingly an impossible one to answer. Many cities’ reactions have been to criminalize the behavior most commonly associated with homelessness which allows the answer on where to go to become jail, prison, or under the radar enough to where residents do not know you are there.

### Integration

As stated in the first paragraph of this chapter, the goal of the work is to integrate tenets from a variety of existing theories in an attempt to make sense of the relationship between homelessness, crime and race. Many theories of interest have been discussed. This section attempts to make sense of all that has been presented thus far. First and foremost, homelessness must be understood by examining the environment in

which it is most common. Park and Burgess' early work provides a good foundation as to why the homeless are concentrated in urban cores. Wilson and Massey and Denton have expanded on this early work by illustrating the large, macro forces, lack of jobs and residential segregation respectively that are at work, resulting in the concentration.

More recent postmodern examinations of the urban landscape have focused on the value of the land itself, a theory that is particularly useful in understanding criminalization measures that have been enacted in cities across the country, as a consequence of gentrification. Prior to this shift, macro forces had been in place to keep the homeless in the urban cores. As the land in these cores has become more valuable and gentrified the homeless have become an unwanted nuisance. The reaction has been criminalization measures that serve as a motivation for homeless people to leave the urban cores that others now want.

Crime too has been concentrated in the urban areas. The theoretical integration is complex; however, the relationship between race, crime and homelessness necessitates such an approach because it is a very complex relationship. Race is an issue of great importance in both homelessness and crime as minorities are overrepresented in both areas. Race is also theorized to be the influencing factor in people's perception of homeless people as dangerous. Many of the theories that have been presented provide a good background for understanding the urban environment.

Gans' (1995) work has synthesized many of these theories that have been presented here in his analysis of how the poor are treated in America. His discussion of how homeless are perceived as dangerous because the most visible members are often black, males, and are therefore linked to street criminals because of the space they of-

ten occupy (which is not “their” space) and the media’s presentations of black men as dangerous is the very core theoretical premise of this work. While the fear of crime may not be fully justified, the perceptions may be based on uninformed stereotypes, and applying attributes from one group to the next may not be fair, it is argued here that it nevertheless occurs. This matters because how homeless people are perceived not only affects them on an individual level but also in larger discussion of programs and policies.

## CHAPTER THREE

The majority of the data used in this study come from a survey conducted by Bruce Link and colleagues (1991). While the data are now nearly twenty years old they remain useful for several reasons. First, their survey represents one of the only if not the only study to focus on the homeless as a threat or potential threat. Secondly, most surveys of this nature focus on reasons behind homelessness, asking respondents to give their beliefs regarding the reasons people becomes homeless. The Link et al (1994) survey however, focuses on how domiciled people feel threatened by poor and homeless people and how that is related to their views on race (Gans, 1995). Thirdly, much of the data has not to date been analyzed and therefore there is potentially still a lot to learn from the analyses. Fourth, the survey contains questions to allow for analysis focusing on the media's affects on people's perceptions as well as people's beliefs on the space that homeless people may occupy. Finally, these data continue to be used in articles focusing on this topic as to date nothing that is superior has been produced.

The survey includes many questions that are central to the current study. Some examples of these are questions asking respondents how many newspaper articles or television shows they have read or watched that focus on homelessness; the respondent's opinions on the rights of the homeless to panhandle or to sleep in public places; the respondent's belief that the homeless are more dangerous than domiciled people or that the homeless are more likely to commit violent crimes; and questions asking respondents to estimate the percentages of the homeless population that are male, black, Hispanic, and have a criminal background.

To date, only the white sub-sample has been analyzed in a study that focuses on the perception of the homeless as dangerous. However, the black sub-sample represents 10% of the total sample and is of vital importance to the current study. Whaley and Link (1998) wrote an article that discusses the role that white's racial attitudes have on attitudes towards the homeless. This study and the analysis it contains has been re-created here but with a focus on the black population. In the original study, Whaley and Link (1998) found that white's estimation of the percentage of the homeless population that is composed of blacks was positively correlated to their belief that homeless people are dangerous. The simple question then is: Do blacks feel the same way? If not, what variables are significant in blacks' belief that homeless people are dangerous?

Chapter four first presents the most relevant findings and analyses from the original Whaley and Link (1998) study, as it is the basis for the analysis that follows. Duplicate analysis using only the black sub-sample is then presented. This allows for comparisons across racial and ethnic lines to be made. This analysis is useful for two main reasons. The first is that the role of race versus class can be explored. It is hypothesized that those in lower income categories will be more sympathetic and less fearful of the homeless. It is also hypothesized that blacks will be less fearful of the homeless in general and that the perceived percentage of the homeless population that is black will have no affect on their perceived dangerousness. The analysis will allow for this to be explored and to determine if class level has more impact on someone's views or if race is the more determining factor. The core of the data analysis in this work focuses on the perceptions of the domiciled population towards the homeless. However, data will be

presented in chapter five that will attempt to accurately reflect the real situation in terms of homeless people and criminality.

The next section of analysis focuses on the role the media plays in the formulation of people's opinions. Because this is a new line of analysis using this data, the entire sample is used. In the survey, respondents were asked how many television shows they had ever watched as well as how many newspaper articles they had ever read where homelessness was the focus. They were also asked to rate how important the media has been in shaping their views of the homeless. Analyses are presented that show the impact that exposure to the media has in forming one's views of the homeless as dangerous.

The media is often cited as a propagator of stereotypes and inaccurate representations, particularly with regard to race and class (Kendall, 2005). Borchard (2005) found in his study of articles related to homelessness that the media promotes the views that the homeless should either be pitied or feared. The data that are used allow us to determine if exposure to stories about the homeless in the media have significant effects on the view that homeless people are dangerous. Some researchers have found television to be a more powerful form of media in affecting people's opinions (Gerbner et al, 2002). The analysis in chapter four examines separately the impact of exposure to television and newspaper articles allowing for potential differences to be determined. It is hypothesized that greater exposure to the media, both newspaper and television, will have a positive, significant affect on the perception of homeless people as dangerous.

The third and final section of chapter four relates to the issue of urban space as discussed in chapter two. Respondents were asked several questions about the rights

of homeless people. These questions are excellent proxy variables for the concept of space since they focus on urban spaces and situations. Questions include peoples' belief that the homeless have the right to panhandle, to sleep in public places and to erect tents in public parks. It is hypothesized that there will be a significant, negative relationship between support for the rights of the homeless and the perception that they are dangerous.

In the analyses of media effects and space, frequencies on the variables discussed above are presented first. This is followed by cross tabulations and correlations between the variables of interest and variables assessing perceived dangerousness. Finally each section concludes with a logistical regression model based on the original model used in the Whaley and Link (2002) article. The regression model allows for possibly influential factors such as race, political affiliation and social desirability to be controlled. Both media affects and urban space are analyzed in these models by including a scale that combines the responses for five questions.

For media effects, the scale includes newspaper and television exposure as well as self-reported importance of media in shaping one's views of homelessness. For the urban space analysis, another scale is incorporated which combines the responses to questions about homeless people's right to panhandle, sleep in public, erect tent in parks, to vote and whether seriously mentally ill homeless people should be sent to mental hospitals even if they do not want to go. Both of these scales were created by the original researchers, who also analyzed scale reliabilities.



## NSHAPC Data

To examine the homeless as perpetrators of crime, data from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) are used. These data were collected in 1996 via interviews with 4,207 clients of homeless service provider centers all across the United States. Sixteen different types of homeless service providers were included in the study, including soup kitchens, shelters, and outreach programs. The majority of the clients in the sample were currently homeless (53.5%); however, a sizable number were either formerly homeless (22%) or have never been homeless (24%). The never homeless are included because they are clients of homeless assistance providers, such as soup kitchens, although not actually homeless (Burt et al, 2001).

These data were obtained through detailed surveys of clients. The data is limited in that homeless persons that do not receive services at or from a homeless service provider had no chance of being included in the sample. Nevertheless, this sample is a representative national sample of service-utilizing homeless people and is unique because it covers the entire country, including both urban and rural areas. While detailed criminal histories are not included, the survey does ask questions about arrest and incarceration, which will allow a more thorough understanding of how much crime homeless people actually commit than is possible in other data resource available. In addition to this analysis, pertinent literature on the topic of perpetration will also be reviewed. While only a few studies to date have attempted to assess the level of perpetration among the homeless, some conclusions can be drawn.

Because this data is cross-sectional, in depth analysis of causal relationships between crime and homeless is not possible. However the questions do allow for analysis to be run that can determine if a homeless individual has ever spent time in jail or prison, how long a respondent was incarcerated and if the respondent came directly to a homeless shelter from a jail or prison. The latter allows for some causal relationships to be proposed, at least hypothetically. Analysis also shows differences in incarceration rates between currently, formerly and never homeless respondents and this too allows for some interesting causal speculations.

#### Unsheltered Qualitative Data

With funding from Orange County, Florida, The Institute for Social and Behavioral Sciences (ISBS) at the University of Central Florida (UCF) conducted a series of focus groups with homeless “campers,” i.e. homeless people residing in encampments in East Orange County. The focus groups began on February 15, 2007 and concluded on February 26, 2007. Five sessions were held in all with a total of 39 participants. The sessions typically lasted two hours. All focus group participants were recruited by the HOPE Outreach Team and transported by them to and from the focus group site, the conference room at a local social service agency. The HOPE team is the outreach service from the local Healthcare for the Homeless clinic. For many unsheltered homeless living in these woods, the HOPE team is the only social service agency that supports them. In addition to the participants, each group included a discussion moderator, at least two note-takers, representatives from the Hope Outreach Team, and other observers (Wright et al, 2007).

The focus group sessions began with an explanation of the project and a discussion of the consent procedure. This study had prior approval by the UCF's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and all participants signed consent forms prior to beginning the sessions (see Appendix A). The purpose of the study was to determine why some homeless people eschew public shelters and instead live in encampments in the woods but in the process we also learned interesting things about criminal and incarceration histories. Participants were asked about the factors that led to their homeless status, their experiences while homeless and what services they would like to be available (Appendix B). They also filled out a brief questionnaire to assess basic demographic information (Appendix C). As indicated, while not the primary focus of the study, participant's criminal histories were discussed. These data are discussed in depth in chapter five to illustrate how criminal histories can lead to homelessness, the ways in which they make homelessness difficult to exit and the interaction that currently homeless people have with the criminal justice system (Wright, et al, 2007).

### Sheltered Qualitative Data

To understand more about what shelter life entails, focus groups were conducted at a large emergency men's shelter (the Coalition for the Homeless' Men's Pavilion) in Orlando. The Men's Pavilion is a facility where up to 375 men sleep for the evening. It is also a community feeding program where as many as 500 people, including homeless and lower-income community members eat their evening meal. It is an emergency shelter that provides virtually no case management or other services to the homeless men, who pay \$1 a night to stay there (a fee that is waived when men show up who are

penniless). All of the men sleep on plastic mats on a concrete floor and there are no separate areas for the handicapped, the ill, or the elderly. Life at the Pavilion, in short, is a Spartan existence.

In all, four focus groups were conducted at the Pavilion beginning on April 2, 2007 and concluding on April 9, 2007. Each session consisted of 6-7 participants for a total sample of 24 men and was held in a private conference room in an adjacent building. This study had prior approval by the UCF's IRB and all men signed consent forms prior to beginning the sessions (see Appendix D). Sessions generally ran for approximately an hour and a half and focused on the perceptions of homeless men about life in and around a homeless shelter. Participants were fed breakfast or lunch depending on the time of day and paid \$5 for their time. Again, while not a primary focus, much information was obtained about criminal and incarceration histories of participants and this information is also summarized in Chapter five (See Appendix E for guiding questions and Appendix F for the questionnaire that was filled out by participants).

### Survey Methods

Data from surveys are used in the present work because they are capable of producing statistically generalizable findings. Both surveys that are used in this work are nationally representative. The Link, et al (1991) survey is generalizable to the American, domiciled, non-institutionalized, adult population, while the Burt, et al (1996) survey is a nationally representative survey of homeless assistance service utilizing adults. While there are certainly weaknesses associated with survey methods, because a standard-

ized questionnaire is used, one of the greatest strengths is that they are very reliable when administered properly (Babbie, 2002).

The former survey is an opinion survey that was conducted via telephone. Quantitative surveys are ideal for asking people about their opinions on topics of interest to the researcher (Nardi, 2006). In the United States, telephone surveys have become the primary means of data collection. This is due to many factors including the wide availability of telephone service, efficient sampling techniques and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) systems, which make data collection easier (Groves, 1990). Telephone surveys are a cost-efficient means of collecting data in a relatively short amount of time across a large area (Nardi, 2006).

The survey was accomplished using random-digit-dialing (RDD), a method which samples from working area codes and local telephone prefixes (Groves, et al, 2004). In all 1,507 adults were surveyed. The survey was approximately forty minutes long and had a completion rate of 63%. Respondents were paid \$10 to complete the survey. The sample is 83% white, 10% black, 4% Hispanic, and 3% "other." The study consists of a cluster stratified-sample design. This was done to oversample in the twenty largest American cities, or Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs). Forty percent of the sample consists of residents from the largest PMSA's while the remaining 60% come from non-PMSAs. All of the analyses presented here are conducted on the weighted data. (See SOURCE for more detail about the weighting procedures.) This weight was calculated by the original researchers to correct for, among other things, the over-sample of residents of major metropolitan areas. It also allows for analyses to be per-

formed in readily available statistical packages such as SPSS, the program used for the analysis presented here.

The NSHAPC was a study that used several methods. The data from the study that are used here come from face-to-face interviews with clients of homeless assistance programs. Although face-to-face interviewing is a much more costly and time demanding method (Nardi, 2006), it was necessary because the target sample population would be difficult or impossible to contact through other methods. The NSHAPC sampled 76 primary areas which included the 28 largest MSAs, 24 randomly sampled small and medium sized MSAs and 24 randomly sampled groups of rural counties and parts of counties. Six to eight clients at each selected program were randomly selected for the in-depth face-to-face interview. Interviews were conducted by trained US Census Bureau staff members and participants were paid \$10 for completing the interview (Burt, 1999). The data analyzed herein are weighted using the weight designed by the research team to account for the design of the study (see SOURCE for more information on the weighting scheme.)

### Focus Group Methods

Focus group methodology was employed to generate qualitative data that are used for several reasons. Focus groups have the ability to provide a thorough understanding of people's lived experiences and beliefs based on their own circumstances (Murphy et al, 1998) and are designed to foster conversation among participants (Parker & Tritter, 2006; Lofland et al, 2006). Through the group dynamic and the interaction among participants (Morgan & Spanish, 1984), discussions surrounding these issues

can result in deeper and more meaningful data than those elicited through individual interviews. They allow for members of the session to interact with one another as a way of recalling or adding details to shared interests. They also allow for people to disagree with another, which encourages oppositional viewpoints to be expressed. Therefore while they do not boast the reliability of surveys (Babbie, 2002), they allow for the context of a situation to be explored and do not require respondents to choose a response from a set list of responses.

Focus groups differ from group interviews in that the goal of focus groups is to promote interaction among the participants, not simply to have a group of people respond to interview questions. Although there was a list of “Guiding Questions” (Appendix E), these questions were used only to guide the discussions, not dictate their terms. To facilitate group interaction, it is helpful if participants do not know too much about one another. Nevertheless, by definition, focus groups consist of participants that share at least one thing in common (Parker & Tritter, 2006).

With this in mind, participants for the sheltered focus groups, although recruited through informal means, were carefully selected. Participants generally had contact with one another at the shelter but were not co-workers, relatives or close friends. During the day there are approximately fifty men on premises for various reasons, and each day when I arrived on site, the Pavilion manager and I would simply approach different men and ask them if they wanted to participate in a focus group. No one declined to do so. Although this sampling technique is one of convenience, it is different from snowballing as men were not asked to recruit their friends. This was done on purpose to avoid re-

cruiting people who knew each other too well to promote the desired focus group dynamic (Parker & Tritter, 2006).

The Institute for Social and Behavioral Sciences (ISBS) has conducted numerous studies at the Pavilion and at other programs on the same site over the past several years, employing several different methodologies including interviews, surveys and focus groups. Experience has shown that this population is particularly receptive to the focus group format. One-on-one formal interviews have in the past made some respondents nervous and getting them to talk freely has at times proven difficult. Survey questions are often misunderstood and completed questionnaires always contain numerous apparent errors of misunderstanding. Thus, focus groups have proven to be the most successful methodology for this population. Homeless men always seems to enjoy discussing the topics we present and flattered that researchers from the University have taken an interest in their opinions and views (Donley & Wright, 2008). For the study with unsheltered homeless, the recruitment was done by the HOPE team. Therefore, no researcher decisions were made in who should participate. Nevertheless, the HOPE team stated that the participants in the focus group sessions were representative of the population of interest and came from several different encampments (Wright et al, 2007).

Although the focus group format has been the most successful, it is also useful to obtain standard background and demographic information on focus group participants via a short survey filled out at the end of the session. Assistance in filling out this questionnaire accurately was provided if necessary. The final component of the sheltered homeless focus groups study consisted of an interview that was conducted with the



manager of the Men's Pavilion (Appendix G). This interview took place prior to the focus groups with residents. The purpose was to ascertain any potential differences between client and staff perceptions of life in the shelter. The interview with the manager took place on March 15, 2007 and lasted approximately an hour and a half. The interview contains questions very similar to those asked in the focus groups, but the manager's answers were not shared with focus group participants. It was used to inform the guiding questions and to form probing questions when needed.

Focus groups have some limitations, of course. The "sample" is not rigorous or random. Men who happened not to be on site at the shelter on the day of the sessions were not eligible. Therefore, people that were working or attending classes during the day did not participate. Also the focus group sample is small, 26 at the shelter and 49 for the unsheltered. Finally, crime was not the primary focus for either of the two series of focus groups that were conducted. Nevertheless, valuable data on the topic of interest here was gathered in all sessions. Because this data is qualitative it adds to the understanding of homelessness and criminal perpetration. These data also add to the discussion of urban space, the perception of homeless as dangerous, and race. Therefore, the presentation of these data here is useful to better understand the issues that are analyzed in the cross-sectional survey data.

### Handling of Qualitative Data

In lieu of transcriptions, two trained note takers were employed to take notes during each of the focus group sessions with the unsheltered homeless. This was done to minimize any discomfort from being recorded that the participants may have felt. Once

all sessions in the focus group series were complete, the notes were compiled and coded. Because there were only five sessions per focus group series, coding was done by hand. The focus group sessions at the Coalition were audio-recorded and the tapes were transcribed by an experienced, undergraduate employee of ISBS. These notes were also coded by hand.

The coding process began by using initial coding, a process which requires the researcher to go line-by-line through the transcripts or notes and begin to condense and interpret the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because both qualitative studies used here actually had other primary purposes, initial coding involved heavily focusing on the passages where relevant topics were central. Once initial coding was complete, focused coding began. Focused coding places the emphasis on looking for answers to questions that have been established (Charmaz, 2001). Therefore in the present study, the focus was on discussions of criminal perpetration, victimization, and the like.

While the focus groups do not allow for generalizable data to be produced, they do allow for a deeper understanding of issues. The quantitative data used here presents nationally representative information about the domiciled population's view of the homeless and the characteristics of the American homeless population. By combining these two methods in this work, the goal is to present a more complete picture of the relationship between homelessness, perceived dangerousness and actual levels of criminality.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Link and Whaley (1994) examined the factors that influence domiciled people's perceptions of the homeless as dangerous. In their article, they only examined the white sub-sample of the data set. Their study is the starting point of this project's data analysis section. The second part of this chapter attempts to determine if blacks view homeless people as dangerous and if they do, what factors contribute to this perception. The third part of the chapter uses the entire sample to examine the influence the media may have on people's perceptions of the homeless. The variables used assess respondent's exposure to media coverage of homelessness as well as their own belief in the importance of the media in shaping their views. The final part of the chapter again uses the entire data set with a focus on the space that homeless people may inhabit. Analysis of variables reflecting the perceived rights of homeless people are presented to discern which factors make domiciled people more amenable to sharing space with homeless people. All of the analyses in this chapter are conducted using the weighted data.

The white sub-sample analyzed by Link and Whaley (1994) consists of 1,240 individuals. Table 2 presents all of the relevant demographic data for this subsample. The plurality of the sample had a high school education, an income level of \$0 - \$19,999, and considered themselves to be politically moderate. These variables serve as the control variables in the subsequent regression analysis.

Table 2. Distribution of Selected Sociodemographics of the Weighted White Subsample (N = 1,240) of Respondents from a National Survey of Attitudes Toward Homeless People.

Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
<b>Sampling strata</b>				
PMSA	1	930	75	75
Non-PMSA	2	310	25	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	0	536	43.3	43.3
Female	1	701	56.5	99.8
Missing		3	0.2	100
<b>Education</b>				
0 to 8 years	1	37	3	3
Some high school	2	128	10.3	13.3
High school graduate	3	420	33.9	47.2
Technical school	4	30	2.4	49.6
Some college	5	293	23.7	73.3
College graduate	6	212	17.1	90.4
Graduate school	7	117	9.4	99.8
Missing		3	0.2	100
<b>Family income</b>				
\$0 - \$19,999	1	291	23.5	23.5
\$20,000 - \$29,999	2	279	22.5	46.0
\$30,000 - \$39,999	3	190	15.3	61.3
\$40,000 - \$49,999	4	159	12.8	74.1
\$50,000 - \$74,999	5	184	14.8	88.9
\$75,000+	6	102	8.3	97.3
Missing		35	2.8	100.0
<b>Political orientation</b>				
Very conservative	1	118	9.5	9.5
Somewhat conservative	2	394	31.8	41.3
Moderate	3	410	33.1	74.4
Somewhat liberal	4	226	18.2	92.6
Very liberal	5	76	6.1	98.7
Missing		16	1.3	100

Table 3 shows the mean response to questions of what the respondents believe to be the percentage of the homeless population that is black (42.11), Hispanic (31.61)

and male (59.21). This question reflects what people believe the percentage to be, not what the actual percentage. The remainder of the predictor variables reflects the make-up of the white sub-sample.

Table 3. Weighted Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges.

Predictor variables	M	SD	Range
Perceived% Black	42.11	17.69	0-100
Perceived% Hispanic	31.61	17.46	0-100
Perceived% Men	59.21	18.21	0-100
Sampling Strata	1.75	0.43	1-2
Gender	0.57	0.5	0-1
Age	41.49	15.78	18-95
Education	4.23	1.66	1-7
Family Income	2.98	1.62	1-6
Political Orientation	2.79	1.04	1-5
Structural Causes	3.1	0.62	1-4
Social Desirability	1.32	0.28	1-2
Criterion Variable			
Perceived Dangerousness	2.28	0.48	1-4

The variable “structural causes” is a scale composed of four questions about the structural causes of homelessness. These questions ask about a shortage of affordable housing, the failure of society to provide good schools for many people in this country, an economic system that favors the rich over the poor, and a shortage of government aid for poor people as causes of homelessness. These questions were offered in a sequence with other potential causes that focused more on individual shortcomings. Respondents were given a Lickert-scale response set of a lot, some, a little, or not at all. These four variables were combined to form a scale that ranges from 1 for low belief in structural causes to 4 for a high belief.

The dependent variable used in the presented model is “perceived dangerousness.” “Perceived dangerousness” is a scale variable which runs from 1-4 (low to high perceived dangerousness). It is comprised of six questions asking about homeless people: it is important to remember that homeless may be dangerous, homeless are more likely to commit violent crimes than other people, homeless people are no more dangerous than other people, it is natural to be afraid of a street person, in the interest of public safety, homeless people should not be allowed to gather in public places, and if I knew a person had been homeless I would be less likely to trust him or her. Respondents were asked to respond with the options, definitely true (1), probably true (2), probably false (3), and definitely false (4). Variables were recoded as necessary by the original researchers. The scale ranges from 1-4 where 4 equals a very high level of perceived dangerousness.

Responses to the six individual questions are presented in Table 4. There are some noteworthy patterns evident in the responses to these items.

Table 4. Responses to Statements Assessing the Dangerousness of Homeless People (in percentages).

Response	May be dangerous	Commit more violent crimes	No more dangerous than others	Natural to be afraid	Should not gather	Less likely to trust
Definitely true	9	4	15	13	6	6
Probably true	39	23	54	49	20	35
Probably false	42	61	26	26	43	40
Definitely false	10	12	5	12	31	20
Mean	2.5	2.8	2.2	2.4	3.0	2.7

Over half of the respondents state that it is true that it is natural to be afraid of a street person (62%); however the majority stated that it is false that it is important to remember that homeless may be dangerous (52%) and that they commit more violent crimes than others (73%). Therefore, while most respondents believe it is natural to be afraid of a street person, they reflect that they are not one of those people. Moreover, while 69% of people state that the homeless are no more dangerous than others, 41% state that they would be less likely to trust someone if they knew that they had been homeless. While it cannot be explained why so many respondents would be less likely to trust someone who had been homeless, it is interesting that having been homeless would negatively affect people's perceptions of someone.

The final variable that requires explanation is social desirability. Six variables were used to construct this scale. All questions were answered true or false. The questions are: you would never have an unkind thought about a homeless person, you would always go out of your way to help a homeless person, you would sometimes feel uncomfortable in the presence of a homeless person, when you think about a homeless person the only feeling you ever have is compassion, you would never laugh at a joke that made fun of a homeless person, and you might feel annoyed if a homeless person kept asking you for money.

These questions are intended to reflect social desirability as opposed to respondents' actual beliefs. They are worded with such terms as always and never which can assess whether respondents are giving what they believe to be the socially acceptable responses. For example, consider the statement, "I would never have an unkind thought about a homeless person." The idea that someone would never have had an

unkind thought about any homeless person is unlikely so to say that this is true of oneself is to give a socially desirable as opposed to empirically descriptive response.

As shown, respondents had six opportunities to give a socially desirable vs. empirically descriptive response to statements about the homeless. Responses were re-coded as necessary so that higher scores reflect the socially desirable response. These responses were then summed and divided by six, resulting in a scale which runs from 1-2 with 2 representing high social desirability tendencies. The median score on this scale for the entire sample is 1.33.

#### Original Study Analysis

In the OLS regression, the dependent variable was perceived dangerousness of homeless people (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for Multiple Regression Analysis with the Dependent Variable Perceived Dangerousness of Homeless People.

Independent Variable	1	2	3	4
% Black	.35*** (.09)	.25* (.10)	.21* (.10)	.27** (.09)
% Hispanic		.21* (.11)	.10 (.11)	.15 (.10)
% Men		.15 (.09)	.20* (.09)	.13 (.09)
Sampling Strata			-.03 (.03)	-.02 (.03)
Gender			.03 (.03)	.06* (.03)
Age			.00* (.00)	.00*** (.00)
Education			-.04*** (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Family Income			-.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Political Orientation			-.06*** (.02)	-.05*** (.01)
Structural Causes				-.08*** (.02)
Social Desirability				-.50*** (.60)
Intercept	2.13*** (.04)	2.02*** (.06)	2.33*** (.13)	3.19*** (.15)
R2	.016	.025	.077	.170

Note: The standard errors are in parentheses. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.



The perceived percentage of blacks in the homeless population was significant across all four models. That is, the more the respondent saw homeless people as black, the more dangerous the homeless were perceived to be. The respondent's gender was significant in the final model as was age.

Political orientation, structural causes and social desirability were all negatively correlated with the belief that homeless people are dangerous, as would be expected. Therefore, more conservative political leanings, a low belief in structural factors as a cause of homelessness and low scores on the social desirability scale are all significant indicators in the belief that homeless people are dangerous. (Note, then, that the response that homeless people are NOT dangerous reflects both social desirability bias and true attitudes).

This exact analysis is now replicated using the black sub-sample. The demographics of this sample are quite similar to the white sub-sample (Table 6). The plurality of the black sub-sample is high school educated, has an income of \$0-\$19,999 and is politically moderate.

Table 6. Distribution of Selected Sociodemographics of the Weighted Black Subsample (N = 158) of Respondents from a National Survey of Attitudes Toward Homeless People.

Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
<b>Sampling Strata</b>				
PMSA	1	56	36.4	36.4
Non-PMSA	2	99	63.6	100
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	0	50	32.1	32.1
Female	1	106	67.9	100
<b>Education</b>				
0 to 8 years	1	12	7.8	7.8
Some high school	2	22	14.2	22.0
High school graduate	3	71	45.9	67.9
Technical school	4	2	1.1	69.0
Some college	5	31	20.0	89.0
College graduate	6	7	4.6	93.6
Graduate school	7	9	6.0	99.6
Missing		1	0.5	100
<b>Family Income</b>				
\$0 - \$19,999	1	59	37.8	37.8
\$20,000 - \$29,999	2	46	29.5	67.3
\$30,000 - \$39,999	3	16	10.6	77.9
\$40,000 - \$49,999	4	13	8.4	86.3
\$50,000 - \$74,999	5	13	8.1	94.4
\$75,000 +	6	5	3.1	97.5
Missing		4	2.5	100
<b>Political Orientation</b>				
Very conservative	1	27	17.5	17.5
Somewhat conservative	2	39	24.8	42.3
Moderate	3	40	25.7	68.0
Somewhat liberal	4	31	20.1	88.1
Very liberal	5	13	8.7	96.8
Missing		16	3.2	100

Table 7 shows the breakdown of the variables that are used in the regression analysis. Again, the figures are relatively similar to the white sub-sample. However, the perceived percentage of blacks in the homeless population is 10 percentage points higher (52.36) than it was for white respondents. The perceived percent Hispanic (28.62) and percent

male (55.99) are both lower among the black sub-sample, but not substantially so. The black respondents also reported slightly higher scores as compared to whites on the structural causes, social desirability, and perceived dangerousness variables, although these differences too are not large.

Table 7. Weighted Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges.

Predictor variables	M	SD	Range
% Black	52.36	20.24	0-100
% Hispanic	28.62	18.05	0-100
% Men	55.99	19.53	0-100
Sampling Strata	1.70	0.46	1-2
Gender	1.68	0.47	1-2
Age	39.28	16.55	18-95
Education	3.47	1.56	1-7
Family Income	2.98	1.62	1-6
Political Orientation	2.72	1.23	1-5
Structural Causes	3.24	0.59	1-4
Social Desirability	1.45	0.27	1-2
Criterion Variables			
Perceived Dangerousness	2.38	0.56	1-4

The same regression analysis that was performed in the original article is performed using the data from the black sub-sample (Table 8). As hypothesized, the perceived percentage of the homeless population that is black is not a significant variable in the perception of homeless as dangerous among black respondents. Unlike whites, seeing the homeless as “more black” does not make them seem more dangerous to blacks, not a surprising result. In the final model, the only variable that is positively correlated with the perception of homeless as dangerous is the perceived percentage of men in the homeless population. Education, political orientation, and social desirability are all negatively associated with this perception.

Table 8. Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for Multiple Regression Analysis with the Dependent Variable Perceived Dangerousness of Homeless People.

Independent Variable	1	2	3	4
% Black	.12	(.00)	.03	(.00)
% Hispanic		.05	(.00)	.08
% Men		.14	(.00)	.19*
Sampling Strata			.12	(.09)
Gender			-.01	(.09)
Age			.07	(.00)
Education			-.14	(.03)
Family Income			-.15	(.03)
Political Orientation			-.15	(.04)
Structural Causes				.00
Social Desirability				-.22*
Intercept	2.18***	(.13)	2.00***	(.17)
			2.18***	(.34)
				2.90***
				(.49)
R2	.007	.006	.082	.112

Note: The standard errors are in parentheses. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Political orientation is coded so that high scores indicate more conservative viewpoints. Among both blacks and whites, conservative views are associated with a belief that the homeless are dangerous, as would be expected. Likewise, the less likely the respondent is to give socially desirable responses, the more dangerous they see homeless people to be. Education is negatively associated with perceived dangerousness, meaning those that report lower levels of education would be more likely to state that homeless people are dangerous. Finally, the higher the perceived percentage of men in the homeless population, the more likely a black respondent was to state that homeless people are dangerous.

Therefore, among whites, the racial make-up of the homeless population is an important factor while for blacks, the gender make-up is important. Race and gender are certainly influential factors. Other factors that do not focus on the demographics of

homeless people may be influential as well. Two potential factors that will be analyzed are exposure to the media and the belief in the rights of the homeless to public space.

### Sample Characteristics

The previous analyses examined racial sub-sets of the data. The remainder of the analyses deals with the entire sample, with race included in the regression models. Demographic data for the entire data set is now presented (Table 9). In the sample, women are overrepresented (57%) as compared to their composition in the general population. This is characteristic of telephone surveys as answering the telephone is still part of the gendered division of labor and thus more women participate in telephone surveys (Scheuren, 2004; Denk, Guterbock, & Gold, 1996). The mean age of the sample is 41 years.

Whites account for 83% of the sample, while blacks account for 10%. The plurality of the sample is high- school educated (35%). Virtually half (49%) of the sample report incomes of less than \$30,000. While this may appear to over sample lower income individuals, it is important to reiterate that the data are nearly twenty years old. Based on US Consumer Price Index figures for inflation (Halfhill, 2008), \$30,000 in 1990 would be equivalent to \$50,205 in 2008. Sixty-two percent of the respondents are currently married. While the plurality of the sample (33%) describes themselves as politically moderate, the sample as a whole leans towards the conservative side of the spectrum.

Table 9. Characteristics of Full Sample.

Mean age	41
Percent female	57
Race/ethnicity	
Black	10
Hispanic	4
White	83
Asian	2
America Indian	1
Other	1
Education	
0 to 8 years	4
Some high school	11
High school graduate	35
Technical school	2
Some college	23
College graduate	15
Graduate school	9
Family Income	
\$0 - \$19,999	25
\$20,000 - \$29,999	24
\$30,000 - \$39,999	15
\$40,000 - \$49,999	13
\$50,000 - \$74,999	14
\$75,000 +	8
Political Orientation	
Very conservative	11
Somewhat conservative	31
Moderate	33
Somewhat liberal	18
Very liberal	7
Marital Status	
Married	62
Divorced/separated	9
Widowed	6
Cohabitation	3
Never married	20

Notes: All numbers presented are percentages except for mean age. Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding errors.

## Media Effects

What role do the media play in the formation of perceptions about the homeless?

Respondents were asked five different questions related to the media, three of which are pertinent to the current project. The researchers constructed a scale using these variables to measure exposure to the media coverage of homelessness which ranges from 1-4, with 1 indicating very low exposure. This scale will be used in the regression model.

The first question respondents were asked is how many newspapers articles they have read in their lifetime that focus on homelessness (Table 10). Over 90% of the sample reports at least some exposure to homelessness through newspaper articles.

Table 10. Media Exposure and Importance of Media.

Number of articles	Percentage
None	7
A few	34
Some	31
A lot	29
Number of television programs	
None	20
1-2	39
3-4	25
5+	16
Level of importance	
Not important	12
Somewhat important	52
Very important	36

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

The plurality of respondents (39%) reported having viewed 1-2 television programs. Like exposure through newspaper articles, the smallest percentage of people reported having seen no television programs that focus on homelessness (16%). People's total ex-

posure to homelessness through newspapers is greater than the exposure through television. Nevertheless, over 80% of the sample had some exposure through television.

The third variable of interest in the examination of media effects is the question, “how important has the media been in the formation of your opinions on homelessness?” Response categories were: very important, somewhat important, and not important. Over half (52%) said the media had been somewhat important in the formation of their views regarding homelessness. Only 12% said the media was not important in the formation of their views. In sum, the majority has at least some exposure through newspaper articles and television programs and believes the media has had some effect on their beliefs related to homelessness.

It is not possible from the data to determine the nature of the newspaper articles and television programs. Borchard’s (2005) analysis of media coverage of the homeless showed that the media has two typical viewpoints: the homeless should be feared or the homeless should be pitied. The type of exposure that the respondent has encountered would certainly have the potential to affect respondent’s assessments of the homeless. Therefore, those that have read stories focusing on the homeless as a group to be pitied may be very sympathetic towards the homeless and not view them as dangerous.

To determine the effect the media has on people’s perceptions that homeless people are dangerous, several crosstabs were run using these three media exposure variables and variables assessing perceived dangerousness of homeless people. To ease discerning patterns in responses, the categories of the variables assessing perceived dangerousness have been collapsed into two categories: true and false. The first



variable that is used is “it is important to remember that homeless people can be dangerous” (Table 11).

There are significant differences between the groups based on exposure to newspaper articles ( $\chi^2= 30.49, p<.000$ ). Interestingly, the group that reported the greatest amount of exposure to newspaper articles was the group most likely to state that it is false that it is important to remember that homeless people are dangerous. This suggests that exposure to media coverage improves attitudes towards the homeless.

Table 11. Crosstabulation Between Media and Dangerousness of Homeless People.

	True	False
Newspaper articles		
None	51	49
A few	54	46
Some	48	52
A lot	42	58
Television programs		
None	40	60
1-2	50	50
3-4	53	47
5+	45	55
Importance of media		
Not very important	52	48
Somewhat important	51	49
Very important	52	48

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

Interestingly, for exposure to television programs, the opposite is true ( $\chi^2= 19.29, p<.05$ ). Those that reported never having watched a television program about homelessness were most likely to say it is false (60%), while those that report watching five or more programs are second most likely to say the statement is false (55%). This same pattern is evident in the self-reported importance of media ( $\chi^2= 23.57, p<.001$ ). Although

the groups were very similar in their assessments, those that report that the media is somewhat important were most likely to believe the statement is false.

The next analysis examining the role of the media uses the dependent variable, “homeless are more likely to commit violent crimes as compared to others” (Table 12). As in the previous analysis, the group that reports the most exposure through newspaper articles is most likely to say that the statement is false ( $\chi^2=29.16$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Table 12. Media and Belief that Homeless are More Likely to Commit Violent Crimes.

	True	False
Newspaper articles		
None	44	56
A few	28	72
Some	25	65
A lot	23	77
Television programs		
None	26	74
1-2	27	73
3-4	25	75
5+	28	72
Importance of media		
Not very important	22	78
Somewhat important	27	73
Very important	28	72

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors

Those that report reading no articles are most likely to say the statement is true (44%), a figure nearly double that of the group that read a lot of articles (23%). Television exposure did not produce a similar effect ( $\chi^2= 24.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Across exposure categories the answers are quite comparable. The group that had viewed 3-4 programs stated most often the statement was false (75%) while those that had viewed five or more stated most often the statement was true (28%). This variable produced a greater divi-

sion among respondents in terms of importance of the media ( $\chi^2 = 19.20, p < .01$ ). Those stating that the media has been very important in influencing their views towards homelessness were most likely to say the statement was true (28%), followed by those saying it has been somewhat important (27%).

The final dependent variable focusing on the perceived dangerousness of homeless people states, “the homeless are no more dangerous than others” (Table 13).

Table 13. Media and Homeless No More Dangerous Than Others.

	True	False
Newspaper articles		
None	63	37
A few	69	31
Some	70	30
A lot	69	31
Television programs		
None	65	35
1-2	68	32
3-4	71	29
5+	70	30
Importance of media		
Not very important	64	36
Somewhat important	68	32
Very important	72	28

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors

Groups with no exposure through the media were most likely to say it is false that homeless people are no more dangerous than others, as were those that state the media is not very important in shaping their views on homelessness. For newspaper exposure, the group reporting reading some articles is most likely to assert the statement is true ( $\chi^2 = 23.77, p < .00$ ). Those having viewed 3-4 television programs are also most

likely to say the statement is true ( $\chi^2= 24.12, p<.00$ ), as are those stating the media has been very important in shaping their views ( $\chi^2= 13.12, p<.05$ ).

While no clear and consistent pattern was produced through these analyses, some trends are evident. Overall, greater exposure to newspaper articles is correlated to beliefs that the homeless are not dangerous. For television, the relationship is less clear, however, greater television exposure is related to a higher belief in the homeless as dangerous. Analysis of the importance of the media did not lead to any coherent pattern. Therefore the variables assessing exposure through newspapers and through television will be included in a regression model (Table 14).

Table 14. Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for Multiple Regression Analysis with the Dependent Variable Perceived Dangerousness of Homeless – Media Added

Independent Variable	1	2	3	4
% Black	.13***	(.03)	.09**	(.00)
% Hispanic		.09***	(.00)	.06*
% Men		.06*	(.00)	.09***
Sampling Strata			-.04	(.03)
Race/ethnicity			.04	(.04)
Gender			.01	(.03)
Age			.06*	(.00)
Education			-.14***	(.01)
Family Income			-.03	(.01)
Political Orientation			-.14***	(.01)
Structural Causes				-.08**
Social Desirability				-.27***
Television				-.03
Newspaper				.05
Intercept	2.14***	(.03)	2.01***	(.05)
			2.38***	(.10)
				3.18***
				(.14)
R2	.016	.027***	.075***	.159***

Note: The standard errors are in parentheses. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

This model is similar to the ones presented earlier. The major difference is that because the entire sample is being used race is now included as a control variable. The race variable has been re-coded into two categories, 0=white, 1=non-white. All non-white peo-

ple were combined into one category because of the small numbers within some of the racial categories that would not allow for individual analysis on racial groups to be done.

When analyzing the entire sample, all of the variables that report the respondent's perceived make-up of the homeless population (% black, % Hispanic and % male) were significant. The respondent's race was also significant. Minorities were more likely than whites to report perceived dangerousness of homeless people. While there are many statistically significant findings, the relationships are weak. The strongest predictor variable is the social desirability scale, meaning the respondents with lower scores on social desirability are more likely to report that homeless people are dangerous. This finding is not surprising and underscores the importance of including such scales in studies focusing on topics such as this one. While there were some established patterns between media and perceived dangerousness of homeless people in the crosstabulations, neither media variable in the regression model was significant. Exposure to the media's coverage of homelessness does not appear to affect people's opinions of the homeless as dangerous, not of all other factors. Again, this may be reflective of the coverage to which respondents have been exposed. Coverage that reflects the dangerousness of the homeless as opposed to stories that encourage pity will potentially have very different effects on readers and viewers.

## Rights of the Homeless

A final line of analysis that can be pursued with these data is the perceived rights of homeless people to occupy and use public space. People's views on the spatial rights of the homeless can potentially be influenced by their belief that they are dangerous. Therefore, it is hypothesized that people who believe that homeless people have certain rights will be less likely to think they are dangerous. There are three variable of interest. These are: the homeless have a right to panhandle, they have a right to sleep in public places, and they have the right to set up tents in public parks.

As discussed in chapter one, panhandling is one of the most visible aspects of homelessness in America, even though there is not a perfect relationship between homelessness and panhandling. Panhandling has been ruled by the Supreme Court to be a protected form of free speech. Still, jurisdictions around the country have taken measures to lessen or restrict panhandling activities. As shown in Table 15, the majority of people in the sample believe that the homeless do not have a right to panhandle (69%). Only eight percent thought that they definitely had the right to do so.

Table 15. Rights of the Homeless

Important to remember homeless may be dangerous	Right to panhandle	Right to sleep in public places	Right to set up tents
Definitely yes	8	15	9
Probably yes	22	35	23
Probably no	34	30	33
Definitely no	35	20	35

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors

The opinions regarding the right to sleep in public places showed marked differences from the other variables. Somewhat surprisingly, respondents were much more supportive of homeless people’s right to sleep in public than their right to panhandle. The respondents were split with half thinking this was a right they had and the other half thinking it was not.

Support for the right to set up tents was more similar to the belief that homeless have the right to panhandle. Only nine percent thought that the homeless definitely had the right to do such a thing. The plurality thought that the homeless definitely did not have the right to so this (35%) and another 33% thought that the homeless probably did not have a right to so.

A crosstabulation between the right to panhandle and the perceived dangerousness of homeless shows major differences between the groups ( $\chi^2= 53.15, p<.000$ ). As in the last series of analyses, the response categories for the variables measuring dangerousness have been collapsed to two categories (true and false) as have the categories for the variables assessing rights (yes and no).

Table 16. Belief that Homeless are Dangerousness and Rights of Homeless

	True	False
Panhandle		
Yes	42	58
No	54	46
Sleep in public		
Yes	42	58
No	54	46
Set up tents		
Yes	44	56
No	50	50

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

There is a very clear pattern evident from the first crosstabulation. Without exception, those that do not support the rights of the homeless are the most likely to believe that it is important to remember that the homeless may be dangerous. Those that do not believe that the homeless have the right to panhandle were most likely to say it is important to remember the homeless may be dangerous ( $\chi^2= 53.15, p<.000$ ). This was also true among those that do not believe that the homeless have the right to sleep in public places ( $\chi^2= 1.03E2, p<.000$ ). While the overwhelmingly majority of respondents do not support the rights of the homeless to set up tents in public parks, those that do were the most likely to state that it is important to remember the homeless can be dangerous is false ( $\chi^2= 66.77, p<.000$ ).

When the dependent variable is “the homeless commit more violent crimes compared to others,” the same pattern is evident (Table 17).

Table 17.Homeless Commit More Violent Crimes and Rights of the Homeless

	True	False
Panhandle		
Yes	24	76
No	28	72
Sleep in public		
Yes	26	74
No	27	73
Set up tents		
Yes	25	75
No	27	73

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

Those that support the right of the homeless to panhandle are most likely to state that the homeless do not commit more violent crimes than others ( $\chi^2= 69.18, p<.000$ ). Like-



wise, those that support the rights of the homeless to sleep in public places ( $\chi^2 = 78.35$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and those that support the right of homeless to set up tents in public parks ( $\chi^2 = 78.11$ ,  $p < .000$ ) are most likely to say the statement is false.

The final dependent variable that is used states, “the homeless are no more dangerous than others” (Table 18). This analysis provides results consistent with the previous two analyses. The groups most likely to state that it is true that homeless are no more dangerous than others are those that support the rights of the homeless to panhandles ( $\chi^2 = 65.73$ ,  $p < .000$ ), to sleep in public places ( $\chi^2 = 86.62$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and to set up tents in public parks ( $\chi^2 = 87.48$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Table 18. Homeless no More Dangerous than Others and Rights of the Homeless

	True	False
Panhandle		
Yes	72	28
No	67	33
Sleep in public		
Yes	73	27
No	64	36
Set up tents		
Yes	74	26
No	66	34

Note: Figures are percentages. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding errors.

A regression model very similar to the last is now presented to assess the effects of opinions on rights of the homeless while controlling for other variables (Table 19). A scale composed on six variables focusing on rights is used. This scale is moderately reliable although a factor analysis conducted by the original researchers shows that all the scale items load on one factor.

Table 19. Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for Multiple Regression Analysis with the Dependent Variable Perceived Dangerousness of Homeless – Rights Scale Added

Independent Variable	1		2		3		4	
% Black	.13***	(.00)	.09**	(.00)	.06*	(.00)	.07**	(.00)
% Hispanic			.09***	(.00)	.06*	(.00)	.07**	(.00)
% Men			.06*	(.00)	.09***	(.00)	.04	(.00)
Sampling Strata					-.04	(.03)	-.05*	(.03)
Race/ethnicity					.04	(.04)	.08**	(.03)
Gender					.01	(.03)	.03	(.02)
Age					.06*	(.00)	.09***	(.00)
Education					-.14***	(.01)	-.19***	(.01)
Family Income					-.03	(.01)	-.06*	(.01)
Political Orientation					-.14***	(.01)	-.08***	(.01)
Structural Causes							-.04	(.02)
Social Desirability							-.23***	(.05)
Rights							-.24***	(.02)
Intercept	2.14***	(.03)	2.01***	(.05)	2.38***	(.10)	3.42***	(.12)
R2	.02		.03***		.08***		.21***	

In the final model, several variables are significant. Positively correlated variables are the perceived percentages of blacks and Hispanics in the homeless population, the age and the race of the respondent (meaning minorities were more likely to assess the homeless as dangerous). Education, income and political orientation were again negatively correlated as were city size, social desirability score and the rights scale. A lack of support for the rights of the homeless was the strongest predicting variable in the model. Therefore, people that do not support the rights of the homeless are much more likely to also believe they are dangerous. The addition of a belief in structural causes (which was not significant), social desirability scores, and the rights scale resulted in a significant increase in the  $r^2$  from the previous model (.08 to .21,  $p < .000$ ).

The analyses in this chapter provide a lot of information regarding the relationship between perceived dangerousness of homeless people and factors that can affect these perceptions, specifically the influence of racial and gender views, the effects of the media and beliefs associated with the homeless and rights to public space. White's

assessment of the percentage of the homeless population comprised of blacks was a significant indicator while black respondent's assessment of the percentage of men was significant.

When analyzing the entire sample, no consistent pattern between media exposure and perceptions of the homeless as dangerous surfaced. In the regression model, neither media variable that was included was significant. There was a strong, coherent pattern between support for the rights of homeless and the belief that they are not dangerous. This variable was the most significant indicator in the final regression model. All of these findings will be discussed in depth in chapter six. However first, actual levels of perpetration will be explored to allow for a fuller discussion of the findings in the concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

As discussed in the previous chapters, the homeless are often viewed to be dangerous and to be criminals. Widespread or not, are these perceptions accurate? I answer this question by trying to determine the actual level of criminality among the homeless population. Is there a legitimate reason for domiciled people to be fearful, or are these fears irrational and based on stereotypes? To answer the question, data from the NSHAPC are analyzed. As stated previously, this survey contains responses from respondents that are currently homeless, never homeless and formerly homeless (Table 20). The analysis compares levels of criminal perpetration among these three groups.

Table 20. Homeless Status of Sample

Homeless status	Number	Percentage
Currently homeless	2252	51%
Formerly homeless	936	21%
Never homeless	1245	28%
Total	4433	100%

The majority of the sample consists of currently homeless individuals (51%). In terms of gender, the total sample is 56% male and 44% female. Other demographic information for the sample is not presented here because it is not of primary focus in the current study. Formerly homeless and never homeless are included in the sample because the survey was of homeless assistance providers and their clients. The formerly and never homeless are clients of agencies such as soup kitchens. To begin the analysis of criminality among the homeless, all respondents were asked if in their lifetime, they had ever spent more than 5 days in state or county jail, military lock-up, state or

federal prison or in a juvenile detention center before they were 18 years old. While not a direct indicator of criminal involvement, incarceration is a reliable proxy variable to examine and one of the only variables that is available in the data. The majority of the total sample responded no to all four of these questions (Table 21).

Table 21. Percent of Respondents That Responded Yes to the Following.

Spent more than 5 days in city or county jail	37
Spent more than 5 days in military jail or lock-up	3
Served time in federal or state prison	12
Spent time in juvenile detention before you were 18 years old?	11

The most common incarceration experience was in county or state jail (37%), with 12% of the sample having spent time in prison and 11% in a juvenile detention facility. Because a person could have answered yes to more than one of these categories, a scale was created by the researchers to assess the multiple sources of incarceration that a respondent could have had (Table 22). Experience in a military lock-up was not included in this scale presumably because the numbers were so small. Sixty percent of the sample had never been incarcerated in jail, prison or in a juvenile detention center.

Table 22. Client has Been Incarcerated in at Least one of the Following- Jail for More than Five Days, State/ Federal Prison, a Juvenile Detention Center.

None of the above	60
One of the above	24
Two of the above	13
Three of the above	3

Only three percent of the total sample had been incarcerated in all three potential sites. These analyses show that time in a city or county jail is the most common experi-

ence respondents have had with incarceration. It is important to stress however that the majority of the sample has had no incarceration experience. The focus of this project is on homeless people. Therefore it is important to distinguish among the three categories of homeless status that are present in these data. Table 23 shows the percent of people that have incarceration experience based on their current homeless status.

Table 23. Crosstabulation Between Homeless Status and Incarceration History

Homeless Status	Jail	Military lock-up	Prison
Currently homeless	48	4	18
Formerly homeless	44	3	10
Never homeless	10	2	3

Nearly half (48%) of the currently homeless respondents have spent in their lifetimes at least five days in city or county jail ( $\chi^2 = 5.35E2, p<.000$ ). Formerly homeless clients have similar results, while only 10% of the never homeless clients have ever spent five or more days in jail. The percent of all respondents that have spent time in military lock-up is low, however the currently homeless still have the highest percentage ( $\chi^2 = 12.58, p<.05$ ). The differences are most pronounced when looking at time spent in prison. Eighteen percent of the currently homeless people have spent time in prison, compared to 10% of the formerly homeless and 3% of the never homeless ( $\chi^2 = 1.72E2, p<.000$ ).

Because these figures are based on lifetime experiences, it is not possible to know whether this time incarcerated led to homelessness or if they committed crimes while homeless which led to incarceration. However it is known that only 3% (78 people) of the currently homeless left the last place they were last living because they went to

jail or prison (table not shown). This compares to 14% who became homeless because they could no longer afford to pay the rent. These data can also not speak to the severity of the crimes that were committed. It is logical however to assume that crimes that resulted in prison time were typically more serious than the crimes that resulted in jail time. Finally, the differences between those that are currently or formerly homeless as compared to those that were never homeless are striking. However, it is important to note that the never homeless that are utilizing these programs are comprised mainly of elderly clients of soup kitchens. Again, this finding raises more questions about causal relationships between crime and homelessness than it answers.

Because gender has been an important theme in the literature presented as well as the national crime statistics, the same analyses are now done breaking down incarceration experience by gender. Table 24 shows the breakdown for the entire sample.

Table 24. Incarceration Histories by Gender

Gender	Jail	Military lock-up	Prison
Male	53	5	19
Female	16	0	3

As expected, the men in the sample have much higher levels of incarceration experience. While over half of the men in the sample have spent time in jail, only 16% of the women have ( $\chi^2 = 6.499E2, p < .000$ ). Time spent in military lock-up is dominated by men ( $\chi^2 = 1.06E2, p < .000$ ), which may be more of a reflection of the gender make-up of the military than anything else. The differences in terms of prison time are the most pronounced ( $\chi^2 = 2.55E2, p < .000$ ). Men have experience in prison at a rate which is over

six times greater than the women in the sample have. Because the levels of incarceration among the men in this sample are so much higher across all three types of facilities and based on what is known from the literature, it is important to focus on the incarceration experiences of the men based on homeless status (Table 25). This will allow for further distinctions to be made regarding criminal involvement.

Table 25. Homeless Status and Incarceration History Among Men

Homeless Status	Jail	Military lock-up	Prison
Currently homeless	61	5	24
Formerly homeless	57	4	15
Never homeless	19	6	7

The rates of having spent time in jail between the currently homeless (61%) and the formerly homeless (57%) are quite similar. However, the rates of the never homeless (19%) are three times less ( $\chi^2 = 2.63E2, p < .000$ ). Among the military lock-up there are no significant differences between the three groups of men. The differences between the currently and formerly homeless for prison time are markedly different with the currently homeless having the experience 1.5 times more often. Compared to the never homeless, the currently homeless have prison experience rate over three times as great ( $\chi^2 = 71.43, p < .000$ ). These data are reflective of incarceration history over the lifetime and do not explain if the incarceration resulted from criminal activity that took place while homeless.

To help clarify causal order, 24% of currently homeless men state that they have spent time in jail or prison since they left the last place where they had lived (i.e. since becoming homeless this time). Table 26 presents the amount of time that these men



spent incarcerated. The plurality of the currently homeless men that have spent time in jail or prison since becoming homeless (42%) spent less than one week incarcerated. Only 7% of these men were incarcerated for more than two years. Therefore, it appears that for the majority of homeless men that were incarcerated prior to their current spell of homelessness, the crimes for which they were arrested were not serious or never went to court.

Table 26. Length of Time Currently Homeless Men have Spent Incarcerated

Length of time	Percentage
Less than one week	42
1-3 weeks	3
1-6 months	28
7-12 months	12
13 – 24 months	8
More than 2 years	7

The length of time spent in jail may have more to do with ability to post bail than it does the criminality of the person. For the 15% that spent a year or more incarcerated, there is no way to determine what crimes led to their incarceration. It is therefore difficult to speak of the potential violence of the crimes or the violent nature of the people. The crimes could potentially range from minor drug charges to homicide.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, these data are used to provide basic knowledge about the criminal perpetration of homeless people. The findings show that the currently homeless have the highest levels of incarceration, followed by the formerly homeless and distantly by the never homeless. Unfortunately the data do not allow for conclusions to be made about the nature of the crimes committed, the role the inability

to post bail plays in incarceration levels, or the causal order of crime and homelessness. The NCH (2002) argues that homeless people are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators. There are four questions in the NSHAPC that allow for some inquiry into this assertion.

### Perpetration versus Victimization

The currently and formerly homeless were asked whether they, while homeless, had ever been victims of theft (2 types), physical assault, and sexual assault or rape (Table 27).

Table 27. While Homeless Did Anyone Ever...

Crime	Percentage
Steal money or things directly from you, while you were there?	36
Steal money or things from your bags, locker, etc., while you were gone?	39
Physically assault you, beat you up?	23
Sexually assault you, rape you?	7

The plurality of the sample (39%) had been a victim of theft while not present, while a comparable 36% had been a victim of theft while present. Nearly a quarter states that they have been a victim of physical assault while homeless. Seven percent stated they were sexually assaulted or raped. The rates of criminal victimization are high given what is known in the literature. There is obviously a lot of risk involved with being homeless, particularly in regards to theft.

In terms of gender, men appear to be at more risk of theft (Table 28). For both theft while present ( $\chi^2 = 25.16, p < .000$ ) and for theft while not present ( $\chi^2 = 23.26,$

p<.000), a greater percentage of men compared to women report having been victimized while homeless. The percentage of men (23%) as compared to women (23%) that have been a victim of physical assault are comparable.

Table 28. Gender and Criminal Victimization

Crime	Men	Women
Steal money or things directly from you, while you were there?	39	31
Steal money or things from your bags, locker, etc., while you were gone?	42	33
Physically assault you, beat you up?	23	23
Sexually assault you, rape you?	4	13

For sexual assault, a significantly greater number of women as compared to men report being victimized while homeless ( $\chi^2 = 75.38, p<.000$ ). While men report having been a victim of theft and physical assault at higher frequencies, more than one in ten women report being sexually assaulted or raped in their lifetime. This is the only category where women report more victimization than men. A study conducted in Florida provides more insight into this issue.

The Florida four-city survey focused on the victimization of homeless women. Seven hundred and thirty-seven (737) homeless women were surveyed as were 100 homeless men. The men serve as a control group for the study. In this study, men were more likely to be victims of physical assault during their lifetimes as compared to the women (87% vs. 72%). However, once other variables are statistically controlled for, there is no significant difference based on gender. Over half of the women (54%) report having been raped in their lifetime, compared to 14% of the men (Jasinski, Wesely, Mustaine, & Wright, 2005).

## Sheltered Men's Experience with Crime

The focus groups conducted with sheltered men at the Coalition for the Homeless' Men's Pavilion in Orlando can provide further insight into the role that crime plays in the lives of the homeless. In all, of the 26 men who participated, 90% were African American, 5% were white and 5% were Hispanic or Latino. These racial and ethnic demographics are representative of the Pavilion. The average age was 38.2 years. Approximately half had been homeless several times in their lives while the other half were experiencing their first homeless episode. The majority had substance abuse and alcohol problems and approximately half had previously been incarcerated in jails and prisons around the country, most having served time in Florida.

The public perception of the homeless shelters is that they are riddled with crime (Amster, 2003), and to a certain extent, this appears to be accurate. All of the men that participated in the focus groups stated that theft in the shelter was a definite problem. They spoke of sleeping on their shoes and wearing layers of clothes to prevent them from being stolen. They also counseled against acquiring a lot of "stuff" since their possessions, they believed, would eventually be stolen if they had too much. Nevertheless, most of the men had been a victim of theft at the shelter at least once. Surprisingly, the men were exceedingly calm in their response to these thefts when they did occur. Many expressed sentiments such as: Anyone who would steal food from homeless men "must have really been hungry," or that a man who would steal their shoes "must have needed them more than me." There was surprisingly no evident anger or even mild agitation about these crimes. They seemed, rather, to be accepted as an inevitable part of shelter life.

One man recounted an incident when another man tried to steal his shoes while he was sleeping. The man stated that these shoes were torn, old and ready to be thrown away. When the other man tried to take them, the participant said to him, “if you need them that bad, then just take them.” When telling this story in the focus group, the other men laughed that the thief would need such old and worn out shoes so badly, yet none of them expressed disdain that the man would attempt to steal them. Likewise, none of the men indicated that they had retaliated (or would retaliate) in response to these petty thefts, or resort to violence, even when they would see the perpetrator wearing the stolen clothing, which happened quite often.

While the theft of clothing and shoes elicited no serious response, the taking of one’s money was viewed as far more serious of an event. The week before the focus groups took place, an incident had occurred that involved an older, white man having his wallet stolen by a younger, black man. Brad<sup>2</sup> recounts, “You should have seen it! There were like 15 black guys tackling this one black guy to get this white guy’s wallet back.” He was very happy that the men intervened to retrieve the wallet and did not side with the perpetrator because he shared the same racial background. In a later session, another man recounted how proud he was to see all of the men attacking the perpetrator to get the older man’s wallet back. “There are a lot of good people [here] and they know the difference between right and wrong.”

Elijah Anderson (1993) has written about “The Code of the Street.” There is, likewise, an apparent “code of the shelter,” or at least a code at this particular shelter, that says theft is acceptable when a person is desperate and taking things needed to

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<sup>2</sup> All names have been changed to protect the identity of focus group participants.

survive but not to be tolerated when it is stealing just to steal or because the person whose stuff you are taking is in no position to prevent it, such as a person who is handicapped or elderly. As one man said, “how can you steal money from a homeless man, what’s lower than that?” While they are willing to “share” food and clothing, money is considered off limits.

Despite the prevalence of theft and other property and even occasionally violent crimes at the shelter, most of the men think they are safer in the shelter than they would be living on the streets or in the various homeless “camps” that exist in the Orlando metropolitan area. All of the men expressed a firm belief that homeless people were “easy targets” out on the streets and practically all were familiar with assaults on homeless people in the Central Florida area. Some men said that they avoided being downtown just to reduce the odds of being assaulted. Some said they would try to “not look homeless” by wearing their best clothes and not carrying belongings with them when they were on the streets. One man went as far as to carry a hard hat and wear work boots with the thinking that a person can look dirty and be in old clothes but be considered a construction worker if they have the right accessories. Some of the men expressed a belief that only specific types of homeless are targeted for assault, i.e. those that are high, look as if they have drugs, or are not mentally stable. Most men knew someone personally who had been assaulted while on the streets and several had been assaulted themselves.

Hate crimes against homeless people have burgeoned in recent years and have become a nation-wide problem. Since 1999, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has issued an annual report on these trends. The most recent in the series is

*Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA* (2007). According to this report, “over the past seven years (1999-2005), advocates and homeless shelter workers from around the country have seen an alarming, nationwide epidemic in reports of homeless men, women and even children being killed, beaten, and harassed.” 472 violent hate-crime attacks against the homeless were documented in the report, resulting in 169 deaths. In 2005, Florida led the list of states in the total number of attacks. This trend continued in 2006, with Florida having more than twice as many homeless hate crimes as the next closest state (California).

One of the participants in this group was a victim of what can only be categorized as a hate crime based on homeless status. By this man’s account, he was asleep on a park bench near the bus station in the middle of the day when he was set upon by a group of teenagers who beat him across the chest with a chain. They did not attempt to rob him. “They just beat me up real good, laughed, and left.” When asked if he had called the police he responded that he had not, stating “It would be pointless.” Similar stories were related by many of the other participants. Even if they had not personally been victimized, they were very aware of incidents that had occurred locally and most took measures to prevent being attacked.

Interestingly, the reaction of the other men in the focus group to hearing the man’s account of being attacked was to ask him what he was doing “out there” by himself. Most expressed some sentiment to the effect, “You should know you cannot do such a thing, it is simply too dangerous.” Participants in subsequent sessions were told about the attack and they too believed that he had put himself in danger and should have known better. One man said “you can’t be out there by yourself like that” while an-

other stated “if you don’t get beat up, they’ll arrest you for doing that” (sleeping on a bench).

When asked about violence at the shelter itself, many responded, “it happens every day. It’s a way of life!” But further discussion revealed that the vast majority of this so-called “violence” is nothing more serious or threatening than verbal altercations that rarely turn physical. Granted, verbal altercations are a constant feature of shelter life. The men there are constantly “getting in one another’s face” about all matters large and small. Mostly, these seem to be issues of “respect,” such as stepping on someone’s foot and not saying “excuse me” or making disparaging comments about another’s aroma or physical appearance. Minor “dissing” often escalates quickly to a verbal altercation but these only rarely become truly violent. Many shelter men are simply not capable of representing a real physical threat. Others that are, according to the manager of the Pavilion, know that if they get involved in a physical altercation on shelter property they will be trespassed and no longer able to sleep or eat there. Since the pavilion is the shelter of last resort, this is not something that the majority of the men can afford to let happen.

This is not to say that truly violent episodes never happen. Men in every focus group took pains to mention a fatal stabbing that happened in 2006, this resulting from a dispute over a donut. This incident clearly scared many of the men in the focus groups, although they were not comfortable saying so in so many words. It is a telling observation that none of the men in the focus groups were present during this incident but all without exception knew about it in details. It has become a lesson that violence can oc-



cur at any moment and that it is important to always be aware of what is going on around you.

The “donut killing,” incidentally, is only the most infamous of a number of violent altercations that have occurred over the past few years. The police are sometimes called (mainly by staff, rarely if ever by clients) to the Pavilion to break up fights or to intervene in altercations before they escalate into serious incidents. Indeed, police or other emergency presence at the site averages approximately one visit a day, but this count is inflated by a large number of medical emergency calls. Many of the incidents that result in a call for police service involve the drug dealers and hangers-on who frequent the shelter premises despite the best efforts of management to keep them away. So violence is a threat and in extreme cases a very serious one. On the other hand, men who mind their manners, respect the rights and space of other men, and stay out of peoples’ faces are at no serious risk. Like many of life’s risks, this risk can be managed, and most residents do so successfully. As one man said, “all you have to do is mind your own business.”

In terms of their own criminal backgrounds, nearly half of the participants in our focus groups admitted to incarceration histories. The vast majority of the crimes that precipitated these arrests were drug related. However, one man had served time for attempted manslaughter, the result of a bar fight. Nevertheless, the majority of the crimes were related to possession of narcotics (some with possession with intent to distribute). Therefore the majority of these crimes were not of a violent nature, but have resulted in felony convictions for many of the men.

Most men in the focus groups and in the Pavilion at large have or have had an addiction to drugs. Drugs are readily available in the surrounding area and many of the men spoke of seeing drug use, sales, and paraphernalia on the shelter grounds. Those who are actively involved in drug use did not see this to be a problem. Others – those who have never used or are now in recovery – find the drug presence in and around the shelter to be very detrimental. Crack cocaine is the drug of choice (not including alcohol) and crack deals are the most visible drug transactions. The manager spoke of “neighborhood drug-dealing thugs” coming on to the shelter property to sell crack to what he considered to be a vulnerable population. He stated, “Periodically, once I know that a guy is a drug dealer, I’ll say, ‘hey, man, you know you can’t do that here on the property.’ A lot of times I don’t see them exchanging anything but after awhile when you are in an area you can pretty much tell who is who, based on how our guys gravitate to this one person. You can tell what’s going on.” When the manager witnesses drug transactions, he takes them very seriously but explains, “I can’t run up on a drug dealer. I don’t have a weapon. I can’t just grab some guy so I have to be very mindful of what I say or do when there is no police presence. It’s more outside, though, than on the property. And a lot of them [the dealers] don’t even live here.” When asked if he calls the police when he sees such occurrences, he said that he used to when he first took over position of manager, but that he quickly realized that the shelter’s drug problem was not a priority. The police took a very long time to show up on the occasions that he did call and therefore he no longer does so, choosing instead to try to handle it informally.

The public perception of the Men's Pavilion in Orlando is that it is drug-infested and that drug deals are openly done along the adjacent streets. To a certain extent, this is true. At all hours of the day and night, there are suspicious looking men just hanging out across the street from the Pavilion's main gate, and they are certainly not there doing ethnographies of shelter life. Although there is an Orlando Police Department sub-station less than two blocks away, the police rarely come through to shake down the dealers, make arrests, or tell these men to move on. As the manager took pains to stress, these dealers are not homeless men and not Pavilion residents. They are there to prey on the Pavilion population and do so successfully.

Substance abuse has a major effect on the men's ability to escape homelessness. For those with an active drug problem, the reasons are clear. But even for those who are now sober, a conviction history makes securing housing or employment very difficult. The men talked of the difficulty of filling out a job application even for a low-skill job when they have no address other than the Coalition's and have to check the box stating that they have been convicted of a felony. Those that have done so have had very little success in securing employment and thus day labor remains the most popular option to earn money.

### Unsheltered Homeless

The participants in the unsheltered focus groups provided more insight into the role that crime and violence plays in the lives of homeless individuals. Participants in these focus groups were comprised of 11 women (28%) and 28 men (72%). Most were white; 18% were Hispanic; only one was African-American. Average age was 46 years.

According to the Hope Team, these results are probably characteristic of the demographic composition of the unsheltered homeless in East Orange County. On average, the participants had been living in the woods for approximately 5.2 years. The most common prior living arrangement was to have been living in their own rented room or apartment (47%) followed by living in a house they owned (16%). Eight percent were incarcerated in jail or prison prior to living in the woods, this compares to 3% from the national sample of service utilizing homeless (Burt et al, 2001).

Participants were asked if they had ever been told by a doctor, social worker, case manager or other professional person that they had a mental health problem, an alcohol problem, a drug problem, or a physical disability. Nearly half (45%) reported a previous mental health diagnosis; 56% said they had a drinking problem; 37% stated they had a previous drug problem; and 42% reported being physically disabled. Based on observations by the researchers present at the focus groups, all of these, particularly the first three, are under-estimates. All together, over 70% admitted to one or more of these diagnoses.

Most of the people that participated in the groups admitted to panhandling at least occasionally and a sizably large fraction do so regularly (i.e., daily). This was very different from the men in the sheltered groups, where only a small fraction stated they ever panhandled. This is possibly a result of the locations of the people, as the sheltered homeless are in the area of town where the majority of the social service providers are located and where panhandling is more strongly discouraged.

Among the unsheltered, panhandling takes two general forms: normal panhandling, where people are approached as they enter or exit various business establish-

ments or in other public places and asked for spare change or a few dollars; and “flying a sign,” where people stand or sit by the sides of the roads or in the medians displaying signs (such as “Will work for food,” “Homeless veteran”) in the hopes that motorists will give them some money. The latter is by far the most common among this group, with several stating they did not panhandle they only flew a sign, as panhandling was viewed as a totally separate activity. The downsides of panhandling as expressed by many participants were those that were expected: people treat you with scorn and sometimes worse (a few participants recounted tales of physical assault because of their beggary), and there is always the possibility of being arrested for “soliciting without a permit,” “obstructing traffic on a public right of way,” etc. These arrests can become very costly.

While many of the participants reported having been downtown once or twice either to eat at a soup kitchen or at the Coalition or to seek shelter at one of the downtown facilities, all of them, without exception, described their experiences with downtown and downtown services negatively. When asked if they would go back downtown to secure any services in the future they were unanimous that they would not for any reason go back downtown. They believe that downtown Orlando is a dangerous place. Many mentioned the crime rate (which has received a lot of media attention in the past months), the recent increase in murders, and the thugs and “druggies” as their main reasons for avoiding the area. As mostly white people, “we stick out like a sore thumb” in the neighborhoods where most services are located. As one young guy put it, “there ain’t no woods downtown – I’d have no place to hide.” Virtually all of the respondents stated that they felt much safer in the East Orlando woods than they would ever feel downtown, even though downtown they could be in shelter. It was theorized among the

researchers conducting these groups that racial views may influence this decision as well. An African-American member of the Hope Team was asked if, in his opinion, racism had anything important to do with their avoidance of downtown, he said, “They don’t hate blacks, they hate cities.” (At the same time, the near-total absence of African Americans from these focus groups and the heavy preponderance of African Americans in the downtown shelters make it hard to deny some degree of racial self-segregation as an explanatory factor for the pattern.)

Other reasons for avoiding downtown focused more around law enforcement and crime. Several expressed fear of being harassed by law enforcement in the downtown neighborhoods. Others had prior experiences of being victimized by theft or assault when they were downtown. One said he had to avoid the area to not give in to the temptations of drugs and alcohol that are ubiquitous in many downtown neighborhoods. For many it was a simple fear of violence. Many participants had stayed downtown at one of the local shelters at least once. However, they currently avoid the shelters and downtown Orlando altogether. Some participants recounted being robbed or victimized while staying in a shelter. Others said they are dangerous and drug-infested places. Therefore while life in the woods is not without its dangers, these participants believed they were safer away from the shelters and therefore the services available to them downtown.

While one focus group was fairly positive about their interactions with law enforcement, the other groups voiced strongly negative reactions to their past interactions. One officer in particular was mentioned repeatedly as “hating homeless people” and taking every opportunity to harass and intimidate them. According to several partici-

pants in different sessions he tells homeless people his mission in life is to make their lives miserable. All participants gave the same name of the officer when asked. Most participants complained of arrests on what they felt were comparatively trivial grounds: “molesting a dumpster” (dumpster diving), “impeding the flow of foot traffic on a public sidewalk” (sitting on a sidewalk), or “solicitation of funds without a permit” (panhandling). Some described city police as “vicious” in comparison to county law enforcement and cited this as a reason they avoided going downtown if at all possible. Virtually all our participants reported numerous arrests, averaging as many as one arrest a month in many cases.

Most of the participants believed that their arrests and re-arrests are one of the causes of their continuing homelessness. Said one, “We wouldn’t be on the streets if the police stopped putting [us] in jail.” First, these arrests generate police records that surface in police background checks; this then becomes a barrier to both employment and housing. Felony arrests linger in the record even longer than misdemeanors and a federal felony (a federal “number”) stays on the record forever. Several men believed ardently that their federal “number” would keep them homeless and unemployed for the rest of their lives and many others looked on their criminal records as significant barriers to successful reintegration.

More significantly, the arrests for nuisance crimes typically result in incarceration for a night or two in the county jail and assessed court costs of over \$250. If the fine is not paid within a certain number of days, a bench warrant is issued, the offender is re-arrested, and another fine is assessed. The participants are then caught in a circle where they can be arrested for panhandling and as one woman said, “the only way to

pay your cost costs is to go panhandle.” Many of the participants had accrued debts to Orange County amounting to hundreds and even thousands of dollars. Not only are they in debt, but their criminal background continues to grow and many consistently have active bench warrants. Several people thought that they would never be able to get out of this cycle and could potentially be homeless forever.

While some of the participants had criminal backgrounds for serious crimes the majority did not. One man served time in federal prison over twenty-five years ago. He and his wife became homeless three years ago when their home was destroyed in a hurricane and they were not insured. That conviction has prevented him from applying for public housing and therefore he and his wife live in the woods. For those that actively engage in crime currently, the main violation is drug use. Some of the men stated that they live in the woods in order to openly engage in drug use. In the case of one camp, the drug of choice was heroin. These men had yet to be arrested for these crimes and one was actively seeking treatment options although he had been denied admittance to programs over five times. The majority of the participants however were currently guilty only of engaging in nuisance crimes, crimes that are arguably not crimes at all, but merely consequences of being homeless.

Both groups of homeless people have significant backgrounds in criminal perpetration, however for the majority the crimes are drug related or are crimes that are considered as nuisance crimes. Interestingly, the unsheltered homeless thought that those living in the shelters were in greater danger than they were and vice versa. Both groups of homeless people are negatively impacted by their incarceration histories and participants from both series of sessions believe that it is one of the main reasons they are still



homeless. While incarceration histories and drug use rates appear much higher as compared to the general population, the majority of participants from both series have not been convicted of violent crimes. The data presented in chapters four and five will be discussed in the larger context of public policy in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

Data has been presented focusing on the role of demographic characteristics of respondents in the perception of homeless people as dangerous. The potential role that the media plays in these attitudes has also been explored. As a proxy for space, variables assessing the rights of the homeless have been analyzed. To ascertain the actual criminality of homeless people, incarceration rates and time spent incarcerated were presented. Finally, qualitative data focusing on the role crime plays in the lives of the homeless was analyzed. These analyses have produced several noteworthy findings.

### Findings

The plurality of respondents to the Link, et al (1989) survey stated that it is probably false that homeless people can be dangerous (42%). However, almost as many (39%) stated that this is probably true. The majority of respondents (60%) stated that it is probably false that homeless people commit more violent crimes than others, but again, 23% thought this was probably true. While slightly more than half (54%) stated that it is probably true that homeless people are not more dangerous than others, 26% thought it was probably false. These numbers seem to indicate pretty close splits on the issue as a whole, i.e., for every person who thinks the homeless are not dangerous; another person thinks that they are.

How much of what we have observed is real and how much is a result of people giving socially desirable answers? Social desirability refers to respondents giving answers they think are the “correct” answers as opposed to those that accurately reflect

the way they think about an issue (Nardi, 2006; Groves, et al, 2004). This can be particularly problematic when dealing with controversial issues such as homelessness (Nardi, 2006). To attempt to control for this, my analyses included a social desirability scale that was used to mitigate this possible bias. This scale was used in all regression models to control statistically for respondent's tendency to give socially desirable responses.

In all four regression models, the scale was statistically significant. In three of the four models presented, social desirability was the strongest predicting variable in the assessment of homeless as dangerous. Only in the analysis which included the rights scale was social desirability not the strongest predictor variable (however, in this model it was second). Therefore, those that score low on social desirability are much more likely to state that the homeless are dangerous. What does this say about those that score high in social desirability? Are these people more sympathetic and less fearful of the homeless or are they giving responses that do not reflect their true beliefs but are socially acceptable? It is probably a bit of both; however, as is characteristic of telephone surveys, the degree to which this is true cannot be accurately determined. Nevertheless, social desirability was statistically controlled for and other important factors surfaced.

Whaley and Link's (1994) article assessing the factors that influence white's views of the homeless as dangerous provided the impetus for this project. Among whites, they found that the perceived percentage of blacks among the homeless population was significantly and positively correlated with the perception that the homeless are dangerous. When this analysis was recreated using the black sub-sample, the per-

ceived percentage of blacks among the homeless was not a significant indicator. Instead, gender surfaced as a significant factor, namely the perceived percentage of men in the homeless population, as did education levels, political affiliation and social desirability.

It was hypothesized that those in lower economic classes would be more amicable towards the homeless and less fearful because they may have a better understanding of the economic and structural causes behind the homeless problem. Education is often used as a proxy variable for class. While family income is not significant in the model as hypothesized, lower education level is; specifically, less educated people were more likely to perceive the homeless as dangerous. This gives some credence to the idea that education dispels stereotypes. On the other hand, the effect was not very strong. However, there was no support for the hypothesis that lower-income people would be more empathetic.

Therefore, among blacks it may be stereotypes or perceptions about gender and not about race that are most influential as the percentage of blacks or Hispanics in the homeless population was not significant in any of the models. Men do account for the majority of the homeless population (Burt et al, 2001). However, it is the perceived make-up of the homeless population that is being measured here. The mean perceived percentage of men was actually lower for blacks (55.99) than it was for whites (59.21) and yet the percentage of men was not significant in the final model for the white subsample. Interestingly, the gender of the respondent was significant among whites, with women being more likely to state that homeless are dangerous, but not among the black sample.

Gans (1995) states that people fear the homeless because of the images of crime portrayed by the media. The media focuses on crimes committed by black men. These images translate to a fear of the homeless because the most visible members are typically black men. This analysis shows that for whites, it is race, not gender that matters. For blacks, it is gender, not race that matters. While no consistent demographic factors emerged between whites and blacks in the perception of the homeless as dangerous, the fact that certain traits among the homeless were influential is important. Regardless of the trait in question, it is its stereotypes that are associated with this trait that are influencing views of the homeless as dangerous. For whites, it is the perception of the dangerousness of blacks that is a factor. For blacks, it is the perception of men as dangerous. These perceptions influence how the homeless as a group are viewed.

### Media Findings

Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that greater exposure to the media would be positively correlated with the perception of homeless as dangerous. The analyses performed did not support this hypothesis. No coherent pattern of findings was evident from the crosstabulations that were performed. In some cases, greater exposure to the media was correlated with the perception that the homeless are dangerous; in others the opposite was true. In the regression model neither of the two media variables that were included were statistically significant. While the literature on fear of crime and the media states that the media can potentially influence viewers and readers (Entman, 1994; Kendall, 2005), others have placed less emphasis on the role the media can play in the formation of attitudes.

In 1960, Klapper wrote, "...mass communication functions far more frequently as an agent of reinforcement than as an agent of change" (pg.15). If this assertion is correct, then the amount of exposure would not have an effect on the perceptions of homeless. The perceptions that are already present would simply be confirmed. While this process cannot be tested with the available data, because media exposure was not significant, it is a plausible theory. Although Klapper wrote this in 1960, the statement can be even more relevant now. With the proliferation of media sources, readers or viewers can seek out those outlets that best reflect their pre-existing beliefs. While it is disconcerting that studies have shown that the media inaccurately represents racial or economic groups as it pertains to criminal perpetration (Kendall, 2005; Greenberg, Mastro & Brand, 2002; Entman, 1994; Gerbner et al, 2002), the effect may not be to change the beliefs of the viewers or readers but rather to reinforce those beliefs that are already held (Klapper, 1960). The survey did not include questions regarding the content of the homeless stories that respondents read or viewed. Therefore it is not possible to determine the type of coverage to which that respondents have been exposed.

### Space Findings

The first analysis in this section examined views towards panhandling. It bears mentioning again that although panhandling and homelessness are often equated, many homeless people do not panhandle and many panhandlers are not homeless (Lee & Farrell, 2003; Scott, 2002). However, this distinction is not often made among the general public. The analysis showed that there is little support for the idea that the homeless have the right to panhandle (an opinion which the US Supreme Court does

not share). The plurality stated that the homeless definitely do not have the right to panhandle (35%) and another 34% said they probably do not. For most Americans, panhandling “represents the most tangible expression of contemporary homelessness” (Lee & Farrell, 2003: 299).

Ordinances attempting to ban or regulate panhandling are often viewed as a way of removing the homeless from public view. As one commentator (Scheidegger, 1993) has put it, the intended purpose of anti-panhandling ordinances “...is to permit people to use streets, sidewalks, and public transportation free from the borderline robbery and pervasive fraud which characterize so much of today's panhandling.”

(<http://www.cjlf.org/publctns/Panhandling/PI-text.htm#D>). At least in this instance, panhandling itself is viewed as a dangerous crime which harkens to Gans (1995) sentiment that panhandling is viewed as an invasion of personal space, itself viewed as a criminal act.

Panhandling has been ruled by the United States Supreme Court to be legally protected behavior under the First Amendment, therefore the manner in which panhandling can be undertaken is often targeted in ordinances and not the behavior per se. Of these, the most common are laws prohibiting “aggressive panhandling.” Most panhandling is in fact passive, not aggressive (Scott, 2002; Lee and Farrell, 2003), and the definition of what constitutes “aggressive” panhandling remains unclear. These points have not deterred cities from targeting this specific form of panhandling or prevented “no aggressive panhandling” ordinances from being enacted all across the country (National Coalition for the Homeless and National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2006).

Respondents were more likely to state that the homeless had the right to sleep in public places than they were to say they had the right to panhandle. Exactly half of the respondents said that the homeless definitely or probably had the right to do so. This is possibly due to the fact that sleeping is a necessary function while panhandling is not considered in the same way. In terms of perceived dangerousness of the homeless, there was a definite pattern observed: people who felt that the homeless have a right to lie down in public places did NOT view them as intrinsically dangerous, whereas others did.

This issue is related to (and often enforced concomitantly) with anti-panhandling laws. These ordinances typically come in the form of “anti-sitting” laws or laws regulating where a person can sit or lie down (NCH & NLCHP, 2005). In Olympia, Washington, the panhandling and anti-sitting laws are subsumed under the same city ordinance, entitled “pedestrian interference.” Under this ordinance “a person is guilty of pedestrian interference if, in a public place, he or she...obstructs pedestrian or vehicular traffic... in a pedestrian walking lane,” the latter meaning that “portion of any sidewalk, street or alley located within the downtown area and: (a) within six (6) feet of the edge of any building or structure located immediately adjacent to the sidewalk or alley, or the edge of the right-of-way, if no building or structure exists” (Olympia Municipal Code, Available at: <http://olympiamunicipalcode.org/>).

The National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty annually rank U.S. cities in terms of their “meanness” towards the homeless, based upon many factors including the number and enforcement of anti-homeless laws, the severity of penalties for violating those laws, and the existence of



pending or recently enacted criminalization measures in the city. In 2005, Sarasota, Florida, was named the meanest city in America mainly due to the Sarasota ordinance that banned, among other things, sleeping “without permission on city or private property, either in a tent or makeshift shelter, or while atop or covered by materials” (National Coalition for the Homeless and National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2005).

In the previously cited report, *Illegal to be Homeless*, 28% of the 224 surveyed cities prohibit “camping” in certain public places and 16% had citywide bans on “camping.” Twenty-seven per cent of the surveyed cities prohibit sitting or lying down in some public places. Thirty-nine per cent prohibit loitering in specific public areas and 16% prohibit loitering anywhere in the city. Although having laws against loitering is not new, it is the selective enforcement of such laws that portend criminalization. This selectivity implies that the simple fact of being homeless has been operationally defined as a criminal act (NCH, 2005).

### Criminality among the Homeless

In the initial planning stages of this dissertation, it was decided that the actual levels of perpetration would be ascertained to allow for distinctions between perception and reality to be made. To do this, I contacted the data manager at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street Jail in Orlando, Florida. 33<sup>rd</sup> Street Jail is among the 12 largest jails in America and has a typical daily inmate count of approximately 3,500 (men). I explained to the data manager that I was in need of data that would allow me to determine levels of criminal perpetration among the homeless. He informed me that this request would be impossible to

grant given the current intake system. As he stated, “once they are here they are inmates, we don’t care if they are homeless.”

Because of this, data from the NSHAPC were analyzed instead. While not an ideal data set for this topic, it was the best source that could be located. This analysis showed that the currently and formerly homeless had higher rates of incarceration as compared to the never homeless in the sample. Among the currently homeless, 48% have spent at least 5 days incarcerated in a county or city jail. Among currently homeless men, 60% have done so. Twenty-four percent of the currently homeless men state they have been incarcerated in jail or prison since becoming homeless this time. Upon initial inspection this percentage seems shockingly high.

However, once the length of time spent incarcerated is analyzed, it begins to appear that the crimes that the homeless are incarcerated for are not of a serious nature. Only 7% of the currently homeless men spent more than two years incarcerated. Among that seven percent, it is not known whether the men spent two years and a few days or twenty years. Therefore, even among this group, attempting to discern the seriousness of their crimes is very difficult. Nearly three-quarters (73%) had spent less than six months incarcerated.

While the length of time spent incarcerated leads to the belief that the crimes were not serious in nature, this cannot be definitively addressed using these data. Insight from the qualitative studies, however, adds to the validity of the conclusion that most crimes committed by homeless men are minor. The accounts from the sheltered and unsheltered homeless in these samples demonstrated that the majority of crimes that they were arrested for while homeless are what are considered “nuisance crimes.”

Common crimes resulting in arrest included panhandling and various charges resulting from loitering.

### Victimization

Cities all over the country are enacting measures to “clean up the streets” by implementing measures, or more stringently enforcing existing measures, as a means of lessening the visible homeless in particular areas. These measures do not address the causes of homelessness or the problems that the homeless contend with on a daily basis. Michael Stoops, director of the National Coalition for the Homeless (2005), argues that one notable consequence of the effort to criminalize homeless people and their behaviors has been to foster a generalized disregard for the civil rights of the homeless and that, Stoops argues, has had a direct effect on their victimization and on the stunning increase in what can only be described as hate crimes perpetrated against them by domiciled people.

Between 1999 and 2005, 472 violent hate-crime attacks against the homeless were documented, resulting in 169 deaths. Incidents have been recorded in 165 cities in 42 states and Puerto Rico. In 2006, Florida experienced the greatest number of attacks with forty-seven incidents, with Arizona second with sixteen. Often it is assumed that Florida simply has more homeless people, which accounts for the higher number of attacks. However, this is not the case. California has nearly three times the number of homeless persons as compared to Florida and nowhere near as many assaults (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007). Victims range from four-month-old babies

to elderly people in their seventies. Most perpetrators are young males age 14-19 (Fantz, 2007).

Although no one knows for sure why these attacks are increasing, advocates for the homeless believe that as a society, America is sending the message that homeless people do not matter. The NCH report notes, “The term ‘hate crime’ generally conjures up images of cross burnings and lynchings, swastikas on Jewish synagogues, and horrific murders of gays and lesbians.” Interestingly, homelessness is not included in the federal definition of a hate crime. Attacks on people because of their religion, race, ethnicity, beliefs, or sexual orientation can be prosecuted as hate crimes and the penalties are more severe. Homelessness does not enjoy the same legal protection. In 2008, Florida proposed legislation that would include homeless status in the state hate crime law. This bill was not passed.

The majority of the sheltered, homeless participants in the study discussed here agreed with Stoops, that the message is being sent that homeless people do not matter. One participant had been attacked himself, while the others knew people that had been victimized. A majority of the men avoided being alone at night or off the Coalition property. Others avoided the central business district at all times. While the men were not openly fearful of such an attack, most discussed ways in which they tried to avoid becoming a victim. Overwhelmingly they expressed their belief that the homeless are viewed in America as unworthy of sympathy or compassion.

## Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study. The Link, et al (1989) survey, while incredibly insightful, is nearly twenty years old. Opinions regarding dangerousness and race could have potentially changed over this time period. This is also a concern regarding the NSHAPC data. It is the most current survey of homeless people in America, however it too is dated. Just as opinions regarding the homeless may have changed, so too could the homeless themselves. Although these are serious concerns, to date there are no superior sources of data of these types available.

Another limitation is that incarceration rates had to be used in lieu of more detailed arrest or conviction data. While incarceration rates are informative, it would be more advantageous to be able to determine the actual crimes for which homeless people are charged or convicted for. Homeless people could report incarceration time and never have actually been convicted if they were held awaiting trial because they could not post bail. Relying on incarceration rates can potentially distort the actual level of criminal perpetration.

A related limitation is that causal order is difficult to determine from the available data. Although one analysis looked at incarceration as a pathway to homelessness, it was limited to the current homeless spell. Therefore, the order of initial criminality and homelessness cannot be determined. These data are also self-reported, and errors could result by using this method.

The qualitative studies share limiting factors. The first is that neither of these studies was designed to examine the topic of interest here. They were used because pertinent data was collected, however even richer data could be collected if the focus was

solely on criminality. Both of these studies were conducted in the same area. While qualitative data is not meant to generalize (Park & Tritter, 2006; Lofland et al, 2006), research in different areas would be advantageous. While women were included in the study of the unsheltered homeless, they were not included in the study of the sheltered homeless. Sheltered women could potentially have very different experiences from homeless men because they are on the streets less, as their residential facilities are open during the day. The aforementioned study focusing on victimization among Florida's homeless provides evidence that there are very significant differences in the victimization between men and women. In their study, homeless women were more likely to be victimized by an intimate partner or to be stalked as compared to the homeless men. However, homeless men were more likely to victims of physical assault and over three times more likely to report having had a gun pulled on them (Jasinski, Wesely, Mustaine, & Wright, 2005).

### Some Possible Solutions

Because of dissatisfaction with the results obtained in efforts to ban aggressive panhandling, many cities across the country have begun to experiment with solutions that attempt to control the behavior of the givers, not the behavior of the panhandlers themselves. The implementation of such measures entails public education to discourage giving money directly to individuals and instead encouraging people to donate their spare change to area service providers. In Scott's (2002) view, this can be part of "an effective and comprehensive response" to the panhandling problem. In Baltimore, the "Make a Change" campaign provides collection boxes inside area hotels and busi-

nesses for people to deposit money that would have otherwise gone to panhandlers (godowntownbaltimore.com). Similarly, in Athens, Georgia among other places, parking meters have been converted into donation kiosks, where people can deposit spare change that is then given to local homeless service providers (NCH, 2004).

Savannah's version involves posting signs in high-traffic areas that read, "Help discourage panhandling in Savannah by refusing those who ask for change on the street. By doing this you will foster a better environment for all. Avoid supporting what is, in many cases, an alcoholic and destructive lifestyle. Numerous resources are available through support agencies for those who wish to utilize them. Please help curtail the harassment of visitors by refusing to give money to panhandlers." Other cities post signs encouraging citizens to report panhandling to the police or urging people not to feel guilty for saying no (NCH, 2004).

In almost all cases, these Do Not Give campaigns have stirred up some resentment among local homeless advocates and no city has managed to eliminate nuisance panhandling by employing any of these means. But most cities report some modest successes in reducing the most abusive cases. In Evanston, for example, there was a documented reduction in the number of panhandlers working the streets, a reduction in the number of citizen complaints, and quantitative survey results documenting an upturn in citizen perception of the downtown area as a safe place to shop and work (NCH, 2004).

It is interesting that the reduction in the number of panhandlers equated to a safer feeling among citizens. This gives more credence to the belief that is the visibility of apparent homeless people that makes people uncomfortable. Whether crime rates are

impacted positively does not seem to be the concern, instead it is the visibility of a group that is perceived to be dangerous, whether they in fact are or are not. This notwithstanding, programs such as these do not criminalize panhandling and are a seemingly pro-active way to address panhandling and its effects on businesses and citizens.

### Policy Implications

This study has demonstrated the damaging effects a criminal background can have on homeless people. A criminal record makes exiting homelessness very difficult for many as it often excludes people from many assistance programs, most notably those that provide housing. Some cities in America have begun to realize that arresting and convicting homeless people for nuisance crimes is not beneficial to anyone and are now instituting programs that can prevent homeless people from suffering the negative consequences of a criminal background.

One example of such a program that has been instituted is a “homeless court.” The first homeless court in America was formed in San Diego, CA in 1989 in response to a survey that found that one in five homeless veterans was requesting help in dealing with the criminal justice system. This San Diego homeless court is held at a local homeless shelter. Defendants are eligible if they have outstanding misdemeanor charges and meet other criteria such as being drug-free or in drug treatment and having secured the recommendation of a representative from one of the cooperating homeless assistance agencies. The court employs alternative sentencing which replaces fines and incarceration with activities like life-skill training or community service (American Bar Association, 2008).



Courts like this are becoming more common. Most are currently in place on the west coast of the country (ABA, 2008); however, they are starting to be established across the nation. Programs such as these can prevent non-violent, homeless people from entering the cycle that was described in detail by the participants in the unsheltered homeless study. By offering alternative sentences, homeless charged with misdemeanors will not accrue fines and, when these fines are not paid, bench warrants for their arrest. These courts are designed to assist those people that already have pre-existing charges.

What the courts cannot contend with is the charging of homeless people with nuisance crimes in the first place. Some cities are addressing this issue as well. In Minneapolis, a number of anti-homeless ordinances have been repealed, the police have been trained in how to connect homeless people to the services they need as opposed to arresting them. A Decriminalization Task Force was created to review all the local laws and practices whose effect, if not intent, was to criminalize homelessness, and an aggressive long-term effort to address the housing needs of homeless people was undertaken. In Philadelphia, police officers who encounter homeless people are required to contact social workers who respond within 20 minutes and homeless people who are sleeping outside (in violation of local ordinances) are referred to local shelters and transitional housing services rather than being fined or arrested. In Ft. Lauderdale, police and city officials have created outreach teams comprised of police officers and formerly homeless people to encounter and assess individuals on the street and make appropriate referrals (NCH, 2005). Programs such as these are potentially most promising as

they focus on the core problems of homelessness, prevent the homeless from being involved with the criminal justice system needlessly and provide education and outreach.

The research presented here could have specific policy implications at the local level. As discussed in the analysis of the qualitative data, there are homeless people in the Orlando area that have accrued significant amounts of fines from being convicted of nuisance crimes. Among the sheltered homeless, the men discussed being fearful of traveling to the central business district because they thought they could be easily arrested for loitering. On the other side, limits have been placed on the ability of activist groups to feed homeless people in public parks. It seems that Orlando could benefit from a change in the homeless policies it currently enforces.

This would first require that a homeless court be established. This is planned however, because of state-wide budget cuts, its future is uncertain. This court is essential however to allow some homeless people to clear their criminal histories and move forward with their lives more easily. Secondly, it is important that more day opportunities be available to homeless men in the area. There are no day shelters for homeless men which results in their visibility on the streets and at times, their arrest. If homeless men had a place to go, they would be safer and businesses in the downtown area may see fewer homeless people around their businesses. Therefore, it may be beneficial for the city, local homeless activists, and local businesses to work together to establish such a place for men to go. While there are many more things that could be done in the area, such as providing more affordable housing, the two items discussed above would be a great start in addressing the problems that homeless people face in the Orlando area as it relates to crime.

## Future Research

The area of research focusing on the perceptions of homeless as dangerous is an important area to study. Because the most useful study is nearly twenty years old, it would be very beneficial to conduct a similar but more recent study. Not only have the demographics of the country changed, but so too has the make-up of the homeless population. Potentially influential is also the increased gentrification that has occurred and is occurring in major American cities. These changes could affect the way that people perceive the homeless.

Likewise, the study of the perception of homeless people could benefit from qualitative inquiry. The ways that opinions are formed should be more fully explored. The conclusion regarding the media as a reinforcement agent could be analyzed and the nature of the stories that people have been exposed to could be determined. The reasons behind people's perceptions could be explored in depth which could inform possible educational programs. While understanding the way homeless people are perceived is important, potentially more informative is understanding why people hold the perceptions that they do.

Another worthwhile research endeavor would be to undertake a systematic assessment of the criminal histories of the homeless. Current studies, including this one, often must rely on incarceration rates as these are the data available. However, as established, incarceration rates can potentially be misleading in the examination of dangerousness. In order to examine arrest rates effectively, housing status would need to be added to incarceration facilities intake forms. This could allow for analysis of the nature of charges to be determined. Although such an indicator would not be flawless, as

record keeping mistakes surely could be made, it would be an improvement in better understanding what crimes homeless people are arrested for. This would allow for a definitive designation between serious, violent crimes and petty or nuisance crimes to be determined.

Finally, the qualitative studies presented here should both be expanded to include larger samples and more diverse groups of homeless people. Future research could focus on women and the affects of nuisance crimes arrest in their lives. Such a study could be undertaken with homeless people that are currently incarcerated which could potentially allow for access to criminal histories. Community reintegration programs are becoming more common in prisons around the country. This type of study could be very useful in designing the most effective reintegration programs possible.

### Conclusion

It is clear that many factors contribute to the perception that homeless people are dangerous. A cursory examination of incarceration rates could lend credence to this belief. However, a deeper analysis shows that many of the crimes that homeless people are arrested for are arguably consequences of homelessness. There are positive steps being in made in some cities that can serve as examples to others. These cities are focusing on the problems of homelessness instead of punishing associated behaviors. Programs like these are having the possibly unintended consequence of making people feel safer. This can in turn affect how people perceive the homeless. The most recent outbreak of homelessness has been a major problem in America for well over three decades (Burt et al, 2001; Donley & Wright, 2008; Allgood & Warren, 2003). Attempts to

criminalize the behavior are not changing the situation; a situation that is feared could worsen. The new policies presented above provide hope that the trend in criminalizing the behavior is changing. It will not have to be seen whether these policy changes can influence the perception and treatment of the homeless in America.

## **APPENDIX A: UNSHELTERED STUDY CONSENT FORM**

## Orange County Encampments: A Focus Group Study

Dr. James Wright, Principal Investigator

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This research focuses on the life and experiences of people living in encampments in East Orange County, Florida. Your participation in this study will allow the views of unsheltered homeless people to be heard in the discussion of what life is like living in the woods.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

The questions you will be asked concern the things you do during an average day, where you eat, how you get around, your background, where you used to live, and what experiences you have had while living in the woods. You are free not to answer any question that is painful or embarrassing to you.

You may stop answering questions at any time, choose not to answer any particular question, or leave the discussion at any time. If you stop answering questions, choose not to answer a particular question, or leave altogether, you will not be penalized in any way and your status with the HOPE team will not be threatened in any way. Your participation in the project is completely voluntary.

The discussion will be held in a group format so your answers will be known by other participants. None of the researchers will divulge any information that can be linked to a specific participant in this group.

Your agreement to participate in this focus group is also your agreement to honor the privacy of other participants. It is very important that all focus group members keep the information shared at the session confidential. However, we cannot guarantee that privacy will in fact be honored by every participant. Your agreement to participate in this focus group is also an acknowledgment that you understand that your privacy may be violated by other focus group members and that you agree to participate anyway.

Research done by UCF faculty and students is reviewed by an Institutional Review Board that prohibits researchers from disclosing any individual information that arises in the discussion to any outside party. No researcher will divulge any information that can be linked directly to you. We can guarantee that everything you say today will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers. We will not create any record associating your name with any research data collected by us.

The session is not being tape-recorded but researchers will be people taking notes. Your real name will not be used anywhere in the notes. Upon completion of today's session, you will be paid \$10 for your efforts. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this project.

**Questions:**

Please feel free to ask any questions before the discussion begins or at any time during the discussion. Please contact Dr. James Wright at (407) 823-5083 if you have any questions.

**Your consent:**

I understand the basic procedure of this study and am aware that I may discontinue participation at any time. I agree not to discuss or divulge what is said in the session to outside parties. I also understand that my privacy rights may be violated by other focus group members. I agree to participate despite these understandings. I hereby consent to participation as a research subject.

If you believe you have been injured during participation in this research project, you may file a claim with UCF Environmental Health & Safety, Risk and Insurance Office, P.O. Box 163500, Orlando, FL 32816-3500 (407) 823-6300. The University of Central Florida is an agency of the State of Florida for purposes of sovereign immunity and the university's and the state's liability for personal injury or property damage is extremely limited under Florida law. Accordingly, the university's and the state's ability to compensate you for any personal injury or property damage suffered during this research project is very limited.

Information regarding your rights as a research volunteer may be obtained from:

IRB Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
University of Central Florida (UCF)  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: (407) 823-2901

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participants Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have personally discussed the research procedure and any possible risks with the above named individual. I am satisfied that he or she appears to understand the information provided.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## **APPENDIX B: UNSHELTERED STUDY GUIDING QUESTIONS**

## Unsheltered Homeless in Orange County Guiding Questions

### I. WHO ARE THEY?: GENERAL DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

- How long have you lived in Florida? How long in this part of FL? Where did you live before here? How long have you lived where you live now?
- What is your normal day-to-day routine like?
- How far did you go in school? What kind of jobs/careers did you have before now?
- Do you have family/friends you can count on if you really needed to in an emergency?
- Anyone have children? How many? What ages? Do they know how to find you? If no, why not (i.e., they live in a different state...)?
- Do you live with other people in your “camp”? Who are they? Family? Friends? If friends, how did you meet them?
- What do you think is the main reason you live the way you do today?

### II. DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE DETAILED INFORMATION

- How do you get around town each day? Bus? Car? Bike? Someone takes you?
- How do you get food each day? How often do you eat each day? Do you ever go without food/skip meals? What’s longest went without food? Why?
- Do you ever go to the Daily Bread or other agencies for food? Which meals? What about the Coalition for the homeless—ever go there for food? Why/Why not?
- Have you used services from any other agencies? What agencies? What services? Why/Why not?
- If you knew of other agencies who can help you with housing, food, etc., would you use them or prefer to stay where you are? Why/Why not?
- Do you have to any daily appointments that you have to make (i.e. doctor, social service, re-hab)? What happens if you miss these appts?
- Do you ever take other drugs, like street drugs? How often? Why? How do you get them (buy it, friends/family...)
- Do you think that you could benefit from any type of service for alcohol or drug treatment or mental health treatment?

- Which type of treatment? Have you ever had treatment for any of these issues? Do you think treatment is currently available? If yes, are you planning to take advantage of these options?

### III. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- How do you financially support yourself? Day labor? Family/friends help? Disability? Medicaid? Panhandle?
- Do you have friends that live where you do that work? What do they do? How do they get there?

### IV. PERSONAL SAFETY

- Are you ever concerned about your personal safety?
- What makes you most concerned?
- How do you protect yourself from this danger to your personal safety?
- What about traffic safety?

### V. HOUSING ALTERNATIVES

- On really cold or hot days/nights what do you do for shelter? Do you ever go to the Coalition for the Homeless on these types of days? Why/Why not?
- What about during severe weather, like when there is a hurricane coming—what do you do then? Do you ever go to the Coalition then? Some other agency? Just toughen it out right in the camps? Why/why not?
- If you knew of other housing alternatives would you use them? If not, why not? What would it take for you to use them?
- Do you consider yourself homeless? What does being homeless mean to you? How do you refer to yourself?
- Are you homeless/or (however you refer to yourself) because you prefer it over other alternatives?
- Do you consider yourself a survivalist? What does this mean to you (i.e. being a self-sufficient, rugged, individualist...)?
- Do you ever wish life in Florida today was the way it used to be when you were growing up here (for those who have been life-long Floridians)? Does living in the woods remind you of those times? Is this a reason why you live in the woods or have nothing to do with why you live there?

- Do you want help from people/agencies or do you prefer to have everyone to just leave you alone to live the way you want to live?

## VI. WRAP-UP QUESTION

Is there anything you'd like to add about why you live as you do or what you need that we haven't talked about?

**APPENDIX C: UNSHELTERED STUDY DEMOGRAPHIC FORM**

## Unsheltered Homeless Focus Groups Participant Questionnaire

We have just a few final questions to ask each person individually, just to make sure we have all the correct background information on all our participants.

First, I need your full first name and the first three letters of your last name:

\_\_\_\_\_

FIRST NAME

\_\_\_\_\_

3 LETTERS OF LAST NAME

And your date of birth please: [ ] [ ] / [ ] [ ] / [ ] [ ]  
Month Day Year

RECORD GENDER: Male Female

About how long have you been sleeping out of doors in these camps in Orange County?

\_\_\_\_\_ Days OR \_\_\_\_\_ Weeks OR \_\_\_\_\_ Months Or \_\_\_\_\_ Years

What was your living arrangement before you started sleeping out of doors?

- 1  Emergency shelter, include motel, voucher
- 2  Transitional housing for Homeless
- 3  Permanent housing for homeless
- 4  Psychiatric facility
- 5  Substance abuse treatment facility
- 6  Hospital
- 7  Jail, prison, detention facility
- 8  Don't know
- 9  Refused
- 10  Room, apartment, house rented
- 11  Apartment or house owned
- 12  Stay with family member
- 13  Stay with friend
- 14  Hotel/motel paid for by self
- 15  Foster care home
- 16  Place not meant for habitation (car, street, boat)
- 17  Other \_\_\_\_\_

About how long have you lived in the Orlando area?

\_\_\_\_\_ Days OR \_\_\_\_\_ Weeks OR \_\_\_\_\_ Months Or \_\_\_\_\_ Years

Where did you live before you came to Orlando?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you Hispanic or Latino? 1  Yes 0  No

What is your race?

- 1  American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 2  Asian
- 3  Black/African American
- 4  Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- 5  White
- 6  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. military?

- 1  Yes
- 0  No

Are you currently single, married, divorced, separated, or what?

- 1 Single
- 2 Married
- 3 Divorced
- 4 Separated
- 5 Widowed
- 6 Other

Do you have any family members who are homeless with you right now?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes → How many adults? \_\_\_\_\_ How many children? \_\_\_\_\_

Has a doctor, social worker, case manager or other professional person ever told you that you:

- a. Have a psychological, emotional or mental health problem?      0  No      1  Yes
- b. Have a drinking problem?      0  No      1  Yes
- c. Have a drug problem?      0  No      1  Yes
- d. Have a physical disability?      0  No      1  Yes
- e. Have HIV or AIDS?      0  No      1  Yes

Were you ever in the foster care system?

- 1 Yes
- 0 No

In your opinion, what is the number one reason why you are homeless right now?

- a.  employment/financial reasons
- b.  alcohol usage
- c.  drug usage
- d.  mental illness
- e.  medical/disability problems
- f.  just released from jail
- g.  just released from treatment
- h.  housing issues
- i.  forced to relocate from home
- j.  family problems
- k.  domestic violence
- l.  natural/other disasters
- m.  recent immigration
- n. Some other reason: Record verbatim below!

**APPENDIX D: SHELTER LIFE CONSENT FORM**



## Shelter Life: A Focus Group Study

Dr. James Wright, Principal Investigator  
Amy Donley, M.A., Co-Investigator

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This research focuses on the life and experiences of men utilizing the Coalition for the Homeless Men's Pavilion night shelter. Your participation in this study will allow the views of homeless men themselves to be heard in the discussion of what life is like in a shelter.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

The questions you will be asked concern the things you do during an average day, where you eat, how you get around, your background, where you used to live, and what experiences you have had while staying at the shelter. You are free not to answer any question that is painful or embarrassing to you.

You may stop answering questions at any time, choose not to answer any particular question, or leave the discussion at any time. If you stop answering questions, choose not to answer a particular question, or leave altogether, you will not be penalized in any way and your status with the Coalition for the Homeless will not be threatened in any way. Your participation in the project is completely voluntary.

The discussion will be held in a group format so your answers will be known by other participants. None of the researchers will divulge any information that can be linked to a specific participant in this group.

Your agreement to participate in this focus group is also your agreement to honor the privacy of other participants. It is very important that all focus group members keep the information shared at the session confidential. However, we cannot guarantee that privacy will in fact be honored by every participant. Your agreement to participate in this focus group is also an acknowledgment that you understand that your privacy may be violated by other focus group members and that you agree to participate anyway.

Research done by UCF faculty and students is reviewed by an Institutional Review Board that prohibits researchers from disclosing any individual information that arises in the discussion to any outside party. No researcher will divulge any information that can be linked directly to you. We can guarantee that everything you say today will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers. We will not create any record associating your name with any research data collected by us.

The session is being tape-recorded. These tapes will be destroyed after the notes have been transcribed. Your real name will not be used anywhere in the transcription. Upon completion of tonight's session, you will be paid \$5 for your efforts. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this project.

**Questions:**

Please feel free to ask any questions before the discussion begins or at any time during the discussion. Feel free to contact Dr. James Wright at (407) 823-5083 or Amy Donley at (407) 823-0223 if you have any questions.

**Your consent:**

I understand the basic procedure of this study and am aware that I may discontinue participation at any time. I agree not to discuss or divulge what is said in the session to outside parties. I also understand that my privacy rights may be violated by other focus group members. I agree to participate despite these understandings. I hereby consent to participation as a research subject.

If you believe you have been injured during participation in this research project, you may file a claim with UCF Environmental Health & Safety, Risk and Insurance Office, P.O. Box 163500, Orlando, FL 32816-3500 (407) 823-6300. The University of Central Florida is an agency of the State of Florida for purposes of sovereign immunity and the university's and the state's liability for personal injury or property damage is extremely limited under Florida law. Accordingly, the university's and the state's ability to compensate you for any personal injury or property damage suffered during this research project is very limited.

Information regarding your rights as a research volunteer may be obtained from:

IRB Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
University of Central Florida (UCF)  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: (407) 823-2901

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participants Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have personally discussed the research procedure and any possible risks with the above named individual. I am satisfied that he or she appears to understand the information provided.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX E: SHELTER LIFE GUIDING QUESTIONS**

## Shelter Life Guiding Questions

- How long have you been in Orlando?
- How long have you been homeless?  
Have you been homeless before? How many times?
- How long have you been staying at the Coalition?
- What is life like in the shelter?
- Have you made friends here? Any job contacts?
- In your opinion is there a “core” group of regulars, ie guys you see all the time.
- Do you worry about diseases?
- What about theft?
- What about being a victim of another type of crime in the shelter?  
If so what type of crime?
- What about the presence of drugs and alcohol in the shelter or on the grounds?  
Or those that are intoxicated or high?
- Do you ever sleep outdoors to avoid the shelter?  
Try to stay with someone else sometimes? Rent a motel room?
- What about racial issues?  
Is there any strife between people of different races?  
Do you think people tend to stay with people that have the same background as them?  
Do people segregate when choosing where to put their mat?  
If there is no segregation, why do you think that’s the case?
- What would you do if there was no shelter?
- Do you think that by having a shelter available it affects people’s motivation to try and improve their situation?

Victimization

Now I want to talk about things that may have happened when you have been homeless. These things do not have to have occurred here at the shelter, they may have occurred anywhere but I am only interested in events that occurred while you were homeless.

While homeless, have you been a victim of crime?

What type? What happened? Were the police involved? What was the outcome?

Do you think that homeless people are targeted for assault?

If yes, by who?

Do you know any other homeless people that have been victimized? Explain.

Do you think that you yourself are a target b/c you are homeless?

If yes, do you alter your routine to avoid being attacked? Avoid certain places?

Criminalization

Now I want to talk about society and law enforcement's view of homeless individuals.

Do you feel that you are targeted by law enforcement b/c you are homeless?

If so, how and why?

Have you been arrested for "homeless" crimes that is loitering, panhandling, trespassing, etc?

If yes, how many times? Were you taken to jail? Court costs?

If no incidents of criminalization....

Do you ever engage in panhandling?

Loitering?

If you have not been criminalized do you know other homeless that have been? What were those circumstances?

## **APPENDIX F: SHELTER LIFE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Shelter Life Demographic Questionnaire

Focus Groups at the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida

We have just a few questions to ask each person individually, just to make sure we have all the correct background information on all our participants.

First, I need your full first name and the first three letters of your last name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRST NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
3 LETTERS OF LAST NAME

And your date of birth please: [ ] [ ] / [ ] [ ] / [ ] [ ] [ ]  
Month Day Year

Are you Hispanic or Latino?  Yes  No

What is your race? (you may name more than one race)

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. military?

- Yes  No

What was your living arrangement prior to coming to the Coalition?

- Emergency shelter, include motel voucher
- Transitional housing for Homeless
- Permanent housing for homeless
- Psychiatric facility
- Substance abuse treatment facility
- Hospital
- Jail, prison, detention facility
- Don't know
- Refused
- Room, apartment, house rented

- Stay with friend
- Stay with family member
- Place not meant for habitation (car, street, boat)
- Apartment or house owned
- Hotel/motel paid for by self
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Foster care home

Are you:

- Single
- Married
- Divorced, separated, widowed

Do you have any family members who are homeless and with you now

- Yes    No

If YES, including yourself, how many adults are homeless now? \_\_\_\_\_  
 And how many children are homeless now with you ? \_\_\_\_\_

How many separate periods of time in the past 3 years have you been without a regular place to stay (including right now)? Record number of times: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in the Orlando area?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ days OR \_\_\_\_\_ weeks OR \_\_\_\_\_ months OR \_\_\_\_\_ years

Where did you live before you came to Orlando?

Which of the following is the MAIN reason why you are homeless right now?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> employment/financial reasons | h. <input type="checkbox"/> housing issues               |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> alcohol usage                | i. <input type="checkbox"/> forced to relocate from home |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> drug usage                   | j. <input type="checkbox"/> family problems              |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> mental illness               | k. <input type="checkbox"/> domestic violence            |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/> medical/disability problems  | l. <input type="checkbox"/> natural/other disasters      |
| f. <input type="checkbox"/> just released from jail      | m. <input type="checkbox"/> recent immigration           |
| g. <input type="checkbox"/> just released from treatment |  |

Has a doctor, social worker, case manager or other professional person ever told you that you:

- a. Have a psychological, emotional or mental health problem?    No    Yes
- b. Have a drinking problem?    No    Yes
- c. Have a drug problem?    No    Yes
- d. Have a physical disability?    No    Yes
- e. Have HIV or AIDS?    No    Yes



## **APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## Interview Questions

How long have you worked at the Coalition? What brought you here to work initially? Are you from the area? Have you ever been homeless? Has anyone in your family?

How long have you been the manager of the Pavilion specifically? What is your day to day role? How many people work for you? Do you think more staff is needed at the Pavilion?

What is the main reason you work at the Pavilion? How long do you see yourself staying with this organization?

What is your overall impression of the clientele? Do you feel empathy for them? What about the regulars? The men in First Steps? How do you deal with intoxicated, high or mentally ill clients? Clients that have just been released from jail?

In your time at the shelter how has the demographic changed (if it has)?

Do you believe that theft is a problem at the Pavilion? What about fights? Drug use? How do you deal with criminal wrongdoings that you see occurring?

How do you deal with men you consider “trouble makers”? Do you ever have to call the police? How often? In what instances do you call them? In what instances do you handle the situation yourself?

Does the fact that the Pavilion accepts men in all conditions at all hours of the night make your job more difficult? How so?

What do you think these men need? Or, if you could redesign the shelter how would you like it to be? Do you think it is possible to help these men to not be homeless? What would it take?

**APPENDIX H: IRB APPROVAL LETTER NUMBER ONE**

## IRB Approval Letter Number One



Office of Research & Commercialization

December 20, 2006

James Wright, Ph.D.  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Sociology  
PH 403Q  
Orlando, FL 32816-1360

Dear Dr. Wright:

The University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your protocol IRB #06-4055 entitled, "Living Rough: A Qualitative Study of Homeless People in Outdoor Camps in East Orange County, Florida." The IRB Chair reviewed the study on 12/19/2006 and did not have any concerns with the proposed project. The Chair has indicated that under federal regulations (Category #2, research involving the use of educational tests, survey or interview procedures, or the observation of public behavior, so long as confidentiality is maintained) this research is **exempt** from further review by our IRB, so an approval is not applicable and a renewal within one year is not required.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Cordially,

  
Joanne Muratori  
(FWA00000351 Exp. 5/13/07, IRB00001138)

Copies: IRB File

JM:jt



THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

*IRB Committee Approval Form*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S): James Wright, Ph.D. #06-4055

PROJECT TITLE: Living Rough: A Qualitative Study of Homeless People in Outdoor Camps in East Orange County, Florida

- New project submission
- Continuing review of lapsed project # \_\_\_\_\_
- Study expires
- Initial submission was approved by full board review but continuing review can be expedited
- Suspension of enrollment email sent to PI, entered on spreadsheet, administration notified \_\_\_\_\_
- Resubmission of lapsed project # \_\_\_\_\_
- Continuing review of # \_\_\_\_\_
- Initial submission was approved by expedited review

**Chair**

Expedited Approval

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cite how qualifies for expedited review: minimal risk and \_\_\_\_\_

Exempt

Dated: 12/11/06  
Cite how qualifies for exempt status: minimal risk and # 2

Expiration  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Reviewers:**

Signed: Tracy Dietz  
Dr. Tracy Dietz, Chair

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Craig Van Slyke, Vice-Chair

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Sophia Dziegielewski, Vice-Chair

Complete reverse side of expedited or exempt form

- Waiver of documentation of consent approved
- Waiver of consent approved
- Waiver of HIPAA Authorization approved

NOTES FROM IRB CHAIR (IF APPLICABLE):

Waiting Individual Investigators  
Agreement from HOPE Center

**APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL LETTER NUMBER TWO**

## IRB Approval Letter Number Two



Office of Research & Commercialization

February 19, 2007

James D. Wright, Ph.D.  
Amy Donley  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Sociology  
PH 403Q  
Orlando, FL 32816-1360

Dear Dr. Wright and Ms. Donley:

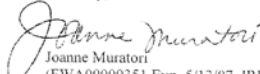
With reference to your protocol #07-4212 entitled, "Shelter Life: An Investigation of Male Client's Opinions towards Shelter Utilization" I am enclosing for your records the approved, expedited document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office. **This study was approved on 2/15/2007. The expiration date for this study will be 2/14/2008.** Should there be a need to extend this study, a Continuing Review form must be submitted to the IRB Office for review by the Chairman or full IRB at least one month prior to the expiration date. This is the responsibility of the investigator.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board through use of the Addendum/Modification Request form. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

  
Joanne Muratori  
(FWA00000351 Exp. 5/13/07, IRB00001138)

Copies: IRB File

JMjt

12201 Research Parkway • Suite 501 • Orlando, FL 32826-3246 • 407-823-3778 • Fax 407-823-3299

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

*IRB Committee Approval Form*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S): James Wright, Ph.D. and  
Amy Donley

07-4212

PROJECT TITLE: Shelter Life: An investigation of male client's opinions towards shelter utilization

- New project submission
- Continuing review of lapsed project # \_\_\_\_\_
- Study expires
- Initial submission was approved by full board review but continuing review can be expedited
- Suspension of enrollment email sent to PI, entered on spreadsheet, administration notified \_\_\_\_\_
- Resubmission of lapsed project # \_\_\_\_\_
- Continuing review of # \_\_\_\_\_
- Initial submission was approved by expedited review

**Chair**

Expedited Approval

Dated: 2/15/07  
Cite how qualifies for expedited review: minimal risk and # 7

Exempt

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cite how qualifies for exempt status: minimal risk and \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration  
Date: 2/14/08

**IRB Reviewers:**

Signed: Tracy Dietz  
Dr. Tracy Dietz, Chair

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Craig Van Slyke, Vice-Chair

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Sophia Dziegielewski, Vice-Chair

**Complete reverse side of expedited or exempt form**

- Waiver of documentation of consent approved
- Waiver of consent approved
- Waiver of HIPAA Authorization approved

NOTES FROM IRB CHAIR (IF APPLICABLE): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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