

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA at ASHEVILLE

REPRESENTING HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA: PORTRAYALS OF HOMELESSNESS
IN POPULAR CULTURE AND THE STORIES HOMELESS PEOPLE TELL ABOUT
THEMSELVES

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN CANDIDACY

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS

BY

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ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

NOVEMBER, 2011

The Final Project

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is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Liberal Arts degree at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville.

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Heartfelt thanks are due to Professor John Wood and Professor Deborah James, whose guidance and attention made this study possible. Great thanks are also due to Keith, Mark, Arthur, John, Christopher, Tony, Bill, Jan, James, and Matt. Their example can serve as a reminder to others of the fruits of giving voice to their experiences. Thanks are also due to the staff of Ahope Day Center, both for the essential work they do every day, and for their assistance with this project. Finally, thanks to my wonderful wife Megan and our children. Your patience and support throughout this process has truly made it all possible.

Josiah Ramsay Johnston, November 2011

Introduction

Portrayals of American homelessness and its causes issue from different parts of society, from popular culture in the form of films and newspaper articles to the views of homeless individuals themselves. While the former media reach broad audiences and may influence cultural conceptions of homelessness, the latter are rarely broadcast so widely. Unlike the 'external' representations of homelessness created for entertainment and the dissemination of information, 'internal' depictions of indigency from those experiencing it are complex, idiosyncratic stories about individual cases of homelessness. These different kinds of portrayals are created for decidedly different purposes, yet it is an assumption of this paper that each type of depiction has an influence on the broader cultural conception of homelessness in the U.S.A. Thus each will be examined for the way homelessness is presented, rather than the reason it is presented. The stories of the indigent are arguably the most important source of information for understanding the current nature of homelessness in America, yet the general public is often most-informed on the 'social problem' of homelessness through the aforementioned media. How do these two types of stories about homelessness differ, and to what effect? It is the aim of this study to investigate and compare some of the different kinds of stories told about homelessness in America.

Much of the academic literature on the houseless, such as the work of Rokach examined below, focuses on perspectives and the way they affect and in some cases perpetuate homelessness in America. Portrayals of homelessness and homeless individuals in popular culture tend to dichotomize the homeless experience into the wayward, freewheeling hero or the lost genius on the one hand, and the outcast social miscreant or hopeless bum on the other.

While an understanding of the academic study of homelessness as well as the various film and newspaper portrayals will aid in compiling a few general social perspectives on the issue, it is essential to record the ‘internal’ stories of people currently experiencing homelessness in America for information to compare and contrast to these ‘external’ portrayals.

As with other populations on the margins of powerful societies, simplistic and biased representations of the marginalized in America have obfuscated current issues related to homelessness while also strengthening the social stigma associated with being indigent. Giving voice to those ‘living on the streets’, it is believed, will aid in the development of greater social understanding of the experiences of people who become homeless – which could increase contact amongst the public and the homeless and provide opportunities for affiliation and social mobility. These opportunities could come in the form of a helping hand, a willing ear, or assistance with employment, shelter, or other necessities. Anthropology is a useful tool in the elaboration of the experiences of the homeless as it “...allows for the exploration of the meanings and interpretations that people assign to events in their lives...” (Glasser 1999: 7). Such meanings and interpretations of living on the streets could collate into a powerful literature to compare to the popularized stories of homelessness in the U.S.A.

This study is based on recognition of the harmful effect that negative perceptions held by the general public toward homeless individuals – stigmatization – have on the chances of the homeless to climb out of homelessness. This recognition begs for research into the roles popular culture and news representations play in this stigmatization. Seeking the autobiographies of people who are houseless may shed light on some unsung causes of homelessness while also standing as a group of narratives against which to compare the popular culture portrayals being explored. By investigating local representations of homelessness in the Asheville Citizen-Times

and comparing them with the experiences of homeless people living in Asheville, the study will provide an examination of homelessness from two perspectives within a single town.

Academic Literature

This section will introduce the reader to the anthropological study of homelessness in America as a foundation from which to proceed to the investigation of portrayals of indigency in the media. When looking at the rising awareness of the seriousness of homelessness in America in the 1980's and the subsequent evolution of the anthropological research associated with it, a few figures from a paper written in 1992 (McDonell 2) reveal the growth of the issue's pervasiveness. In a literature search related to homelessness that included five large newspapers and more than four hundred periodicals, the authors found 32 related articles in 1980, 338 in 1984, and 809 in 1988. Similarly, a search for homelessness-related abstracts of scholarly articles revealed a parallel trend to McDonell: 4 articles in 1980, 20 in 1984, 46 in 1988, 175 in 1989, and 265 in 1990.

This dramatic upsurge in interest in homelessness, both public and academic, heralded a time when the study of the issue had to be organized. This involved various studies of subgroups within the homeless population such as veterans, the mentally and physically disabled, women, families, and others. Increased scholarship also involved the development of operational definitions by which one could define various degrees of homelessness and near homelessness, including the term "chronically homeless". This term, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, is used to describe individuals who are either indigent for more than a year or for people who experience a minimum of four episodes of living on the streets within a three year period. Many facets of culture affecting the cycle of homelessness were also explored – most

particularly myths, misperceptions, and the stigma of homelessness – all of which will be examined below.

The first pertinent article predates by over a decade the growth of interest in homelessness which took place in the 1980's. It is an early attempt by a scholar to debunk a pervasive perception of the time regarding homelessness: that large family size and/or coming from a 'broken home' leads to life on the streets. In "Family Size and Stability as Antecedents of Homelessness" Howard M. Bahr investigated two homeless populations and compared them to a lower-class control sample, finding that neither family size nor stability alone are "...significant factors in the etiology of homelessness..." (Bahr 1). But while Bahr's study is an interesting examination of homelessness comparing the results of life history interviews from three sites in and around New York City, it fails to consider the interconnected role of family size and stability *along with* the many other factors that often lead to homelessness. By isolating the homeless from the lower-class individuals who may have been, in modern terms, "tenuously-housed", Bahr does not connect being impoverished (i.e. almost homeless) and being homeless. This early scholarship suffers from an oversimplified view of homelessness. This is well supported by the more recent findings of Fitchen (1991), in which she traces the original departure of many teenage homeless from their homes to a parent's remarriage – thus depicting an oblique relationship of broken homes leading to homelessness that Bahr may have missed.

Similarly, in the article "The Myth of Pervasive Mental Illness among the Homeless" (Anderson 1986), the authors confront another popular conception – that most homeless people are mentally ill. The authors counter that the average homeless person suffers primarily from social obstacles such as cyclical low-paying jobs, ill treatment, and a lack of social affiliations with individuals from different walks of life, all of which conspire to keep them on the streets. In

other words, this article elucidates the way a stigma and the features of the stigmatized experience perpetuate indigency. The authors explain that popular media outlets such as the *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *People* magazines of the era represent homeless populations as "...too crazy to be dangerous" and that "...probably the greatest contributors to the homeless population...are the state mental hospitals." (Anderson 3). The authors blame this trend on a series of psychiatrically-oriented studies of homeless populations which tended to 'discover' more mental illness prevalence than general studies of homeless populations uncovered. The authors conclude that their findings suggest only 10% of the homeless population in Austin, Texas suffered from mental illness. This study represents another attempt by scholars to disabuse the public of their generalizations about the homeless. However, it fails in that it only includes adult, unattached males in the study, thus missing out on the large and growing homeless population of women and children. As will be explored, mental illness is still one of the primary foci of the study of homelessness.

Recognition of the need to delineate the composition of the homeless population came again in the 1988 article "The Changing Character of Homelessness in the United States" by Axelson. The author tried to pin down the ways homelessness in America was changing, by explaining subgroups within the population. He showed that despite popular conception, there was a large and growing percentage of homeless people who were women and children in single-parent families, dovetailing with the lack of recognition of the many ages and genders of the homeless in the methodology of the previously-discussed study. One can see the discipline growing and being refined in the second half of the 1980's.

Axelson posits the idea that subgroups exist in the homeless population, and it is presented with the intent of learning more about these different sectors, from people homeless

for the first time, to people chronically homeless, to people episodically homeless; and from runaway teenagers to single women to the “working poor”: by the authors’ findings, 25% of the homeless suffered from a mental illness and a third were addicted to something when they became homeless.

Soon after this discussion of subgroups among the homeless population in 1988, a study in 1989 sought to explore the differences among some of these subgroups in “Differences among Homeless Single Women, Women with Children, and Single Men.” (Burt 1989). In it, the author describes attempts to understand the differences between the subgroups in the title, finding that while just over half of homeless single men and women are non-white, 4 out of every 5 single-mother homeless families are non-white. Thus race is added as an important factor in understanding the rise in single-mother homeless families in America.

One can see among the articles so far examined a growing recognition of the complexity of the homeless demographic. This led to the idea that the homeless population is best helped when the various subgroups of which it consists are better understood, and also that an understanding of the social forces contributing to homelessness is essential. Thus, a series of studies on the mentally-ill subgroup, such as: “Depression amongst the Homeless” (Gory 1990); “Physical, Addictive, and Psychological Disorders Among Homeless Veterans and Nonveterans.” (Fleshin 1993); “‘The City is My Mother:’ Narratives of Schizophrenia and Homelessness.” (Lovell 1997); and “Private Lives in Public Places: Loneliness of the Homeless.” (Rokach 2005); has continued up to the present day, examining the many dimensions of that single subgroup and greatly expanding understanding of the mentally ill homeless. While the first of the above studies focuses on a mental illness that is often strengthened by the condition of homelessness, depression, the second article looks at the connections between the

veteran homeless and mental illnesses. This illustrates an ever-deepening investigation into the various causes and kinds of homelessness, making subgroups of the subgroup and refining the questions being asked in the field. In the Lovell article and further in the Rokach article, the trend continues even deeper, and individual lives are considered in the context of mental illness and its effect on the homelessness experience, mental illness as a progenitor of homelessness, and society's role in turning homelessness into a mental illness through stigmatization and resulting social isolation, loneliness, and depression. The mentally ill among the homeless are a source of confusion in the overall study of homelessness, as the percentages change from population to population, definitions of mental illness shift over time, and difficulties with obtaining the consent of the mentally ill make it hard to collect information from them.

Loneliness, which often leads to depression, is another facet of the homeless experience which has been well-investigated by Rokach.

In "The Lonely and Homeless: Causes and Consequences" (Rokach 2004) the author continues the scholarly trend established in the 1980's and '90's of examining a mental illness and its antecedents among the homeless. The author asked 266 homeless and 595 men and women from the general population 30 yes/no questions about the causes of loneliness. Of the five basic causes of loneliness outlined by Rokach – personal inadequacies, developmental deficits, unfulfilling intimate relationships, relocation/significant separations, and social marginality – the homeless people asked had more instances of each of those causes among married and unmarried men and women than the same subgroups among the general population. There was a particularly large gap between the homeless and the general population in the developmental deficits, relocation/significant separations, and social marginality categories, with homeless people experiencing far more instances of these than the general public.

In Rokach's "The Causes of Loneliness in Homeless Youth" (Rokach 2005) the author takes the approach from the above study and applies it to homeless youth. She distributed her 30 questions to 113 homeless people between the ages of 15 and 30, and 211 people of that age range from the general population. As in the above study (Rokach 2004) the homeless scored higher in each of the categories, though interestingly the personal inadequacies and relocation/significant separation categories were quite similar for both the homeless and the general population questioned. Rokach's overall conclusion in the articles included here is that the causes for loneliness in the homeless differ from the causes of loneliness in the general population.

Also in 1990, the examination of public beliefs about the homeless became common. In "Public Beliefs about the causes of Homelessness." (Lee 1990); "Homelessness and Affiliation" (Gory 1991); "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Knowledge about Homelessness: A Survey of the General Public" (McDonell 1992); "Blaming the Victim, Blaming Society, or Blaming the Discipline: Fixing Responsibility for Poverty and Homelessness." (Wright 1993); "Getting it together: Social and Institutional Obstacles to Getting Off the Streets." (Conley 1996); "The Stigma of Homelessness: The Impact of the Label 'Homeless' on Attitudes toward Poor Persons." (Phelan 1997); and "Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis: The Case of Public Exposure to Homelessness." (Lee 2004); the trend to focus on the way homeless people are perceived, the stigma the public has placed on the homeless, their resulting lack of social affiliations because passing friendships with the general public are thus harder to make, and the way these social impediments perpetuate the homeless experience is displayed in a neat trajectory of scholarly investigation, as described below.

The negative representation of the indigent becomes a social obstacle for the homeless individual, who thus designated as someone who has “failed” by social standards is stigmatized. Yet, contact between those who view the homeless this way and the homeless community dissolves such conceptions, as is illustrated in the last article listed above on the contact hypothesis.

The contact hypothesis, credited to Gordon W. Allport, states that contact and interaction between groups with preconceptions about each other will lead to greater understanding between the groups, and less stereotyping and prejudice toward the opposing group. The major challenges to this hypothesis, as enumerated in “The Contact Hypothesis Reconsidered: Interacting via the Internet” (Hamburger 2006), are the practicality of arranging such contact, the anxiety of the two groups making contact, and ‘generalization’, which recognizes that the contact is only between the members of the two groups involved in making contact, and not the larger populations they represent. These challenges do not argue the validity of the idea, but rather point out the difficulties in its implementation, offering the internet as a tool to lessen these difficulties.

An article important to the life history method being used in the study of homelessness, “Turning Points and Adaptations: One Man’s Journey into Chronic Homelessness.” (Pinder 1993) is included here for methodological purposes. Briefly, when using the life history method the interviewer should not ask “yes or no” questions, but rather get the subject to tell the story of his or her life in their own words. It is normal practice to begin with the interviewee’s early childhood and then proceed chronologically to the present. In the above article, Pinder explains the pros and cons of the life history method, ultimately suggesting that despite criticism of its ‘unscientific’ nature, the method allows researchers to consider the complex relationships that exist between the individual and society. Pinder cites Langness and Levine when explaining this

point, who said the life history method is “a dynamic means through which the articulation and interaction of the individual with his or her social context can be explored.” (Pinder 3).

Essentially, the life history method involves the researcher asking the individual to tell the story of their lives through a series of open-ended questions. As Gelya Frank states in his book review of two texts using the life history method (Frank 1995), “A healthy distrust has emerged of representing peoples, institutions, communities, and classes as coherent entities...essentialized representations obscure member’s diverse experiences, contested desires, and unequal resources...” (Frank 145). The generalization of a population is, in other words, quite misleading.

Another article pertinent to the planned exegesis of American cultural representations of homelessness comes from England. In “Television Characterizations of Homeless People in the United Kingdom”, the authors Hodgetts, Cullen, and Radley examine media representations of homeless people as installments in a broader ‘homelessness news narrative.’ They found that the overall message of the narrative was the idea of the homeless as needy victims and the maintenance of an estranged relationship between the viewing public and homeless people. Also of note, the “...exclusion of homeless people from public deliberations regarding their needs...” is discussed, and this lack is credited as being a primary factor in the inability of such a wealthy nation to deal with its homeless problem. There may be parallels to American homelessness both in the news characterizations and the significant lack of homeless inclusion in deliberations regarding homelessness, as will be examined below.

In more recent studies, a range of new issues has come to the fore, while the trends discussed above have also continued to be represented. In “The faces of dignity: rethinking the politics of homelessness and poverty in America” (Finley 2003) the author examines Dignity

Village, which is an “experiment in democratic self-government and independent living for homeless people” (Finley 1) near Portland, Oregon. It is a homeless camp run by homeless people. Finley looks at Dignity Village as an alternative to the cyclical arrests and pathologization that life on the streets entails for many houseless people. The author finds the village to be an exciting example of an indigent group mobilizing positively and in accord with the local authorities to better their own welfare. This example of research focused on a particular homeless population with unique circumstances is important. Yet the experiences of the majority of homeless people interacting with local authorities are rarely so positive from what this researcher has learned in conversations with local homeless people, as they are often arrested for various reasons, such as the need to perform acts of nature but the lack of a home to do so in. Finley’s article reflects the trend toward demystifying the public of its stereotypes and preconceptions regarding homelessness, through the explication of the impressive example of Dignity Village as an alternative to some negative representations of homeless people.

Finally, in “The Economics of Homelessness: The Evidence from North America” (Quigley 2001) Quigley and Raphael argue that broad social changes are not the only things affecting homelessness increases in America. They state that though it is often believed the increased incidence of homelessness in the U.S. resulted from the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill and the cocaine and crack epidemic of the 1980’s, when the authors tested a different hypothesis relating changes in the housing market, insufficient low-income housing, and changing income distribution to variations in the homeless population, this alternative seemed to fit into the rise of homelessness.

Overall, one can see in the scholarly literature from the 1980’s up to the present day a growing recognition of homelessness as a serious problem with many complexities, and of the

need to differentiate between different kinds of homelessness, different populations experiencing indigency, and differing perspectives on being houseless and the effects these have on the homeless' ability to escape life on the streets. This trend suggests that academic literature has begun paying attention to the importance of treating different forms of homelessness with different policies. Accepting this trend as indicative of the need to record the internal representations of homeless people motivates this study.

Elsewhere in the literature there seem to be discrepancies in studies related to the mentally-ill homeless, with varying percentages of the homeless population they are said to represent. The academic literature points to the need for individualized services for people experiencing homelessness, rather than the catch-all methods long in place. There is a precedent of collecting life histories of homeless people to further understand the causes and complexities of homelessness, as well as a precedent of studying a specific community of homeless people, which together ground the current study. Interestingly, this researcher has found little said about the gradual accumulation of social, physical, and mental obstacles that conspire to keep homeless people on the streets, which build up as people live through the difficulties of being homeless, and it is hoped this can be remedied with the current study. Finally, trends in the literature suggest that popular culture and other sources of negative representations of the homeless should be more responsible in the way they portray these individuals, as it may have negative repercussions on the social possibilities of those living on the streets. This will be explored further below.

Now that a foundational understanding of the route and growth of the anthropological study of homelessness in America has been laid, the depiction of homelessness in American popular culture will be investigated.

Popular Culture

Representations of homelessness in American popular culture stretch back for many scores of years, from Horatio Alger's *Tattered Tom; or, the Story of a Street Arab* (1871) to the works of Charles Dickens and, more recently, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; but the most relevant to this study have issued from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is with modern perceptions that this research is concerned. In general, these representations can be divided into two main groups, with those that romanticize or demonize the homeless individual and lifestyle on the one hand, and portrayals that describe individuals' homeless experiences on the other. The romanticize/demonize representations oversimplify the diverse population actually experiencing homelessness and the multifaceted causes of their lack of home. These types of misrepresentations make up what will be called the 'external' representations of homelessness, which are depictions of homelessness that seem based on stereotypes rather than individual experiences. Grouped opposite these oversimplified portrayals are what will be called 'internal' interpretations, in which the representations of homelessness therein consist of information gathered from the stories told by homeless people.

Romanticizing homelessness has been a popular trope of American culture since the earliest stage of cinema, as Charlie Chaplin's *The Tramp* indicates (Chaplin 1915). From children's films (*The Lady and the Tramp* 1955, *Oliver and Company* 1988) to films for mature audiences (*Rambo* 1982, *The Fisher King* 1991, *Hero* 1992, *Hard Target* 1993, *The Soloist* 2009), and from books to music in a range of genres ("Man on the Street" 1991, "Only a Hobo" 1991, "Another Day in Paradise" 1989, "Brothers under Bridges" 1983), American culture is replete with examples of the romanticizing of the homeless, many of which fall outside the scope of this study. This romanticizing trend, as exemplified in the children's films above, tends to

make light of the hardships and loneliness of homelessness, emphasizing the freedom and camaraderie that homeless individuals enjoy. Another way the indigent are romanticized comes in the form of the latter five films, in which homeless men are actually either geniuses, or ex-Special Forces heroes, persevering against all odds. That the homeless population is not entirely composed of virtuosos and Navy Seals seems apparent, yet this is one of the dominant messages popular culture sends, as will be discussed below.

The demonization of the homeless is the other side of their bipolar misrepresentation in American popular film. This way of representing houseless people has long been a standard feature of fiction, television, and movies. To attempt to cite every example would be exhaustive: one can simply think of a drug-crazed homeless person in an alley in a Batman episode. *August Rush* is a good example of a recent, popular film with negative and fantastical connotations on the homeless. While it was not one of the movies randomly selected for examination below, it features an adult homeless man using indigent children to support himself. *Pay It Forward*, which will not be discussed in depth below as it does not fit the criteria for the films under review, has varied depictions of indigent people abusing drugs and alcohol and serves as an example of the negative stereotyping of homelessness.

A more recent example of a negative representation of the indigent comes from the March 21, 2011 episode of *House* entitled “Falling from Grace”, in which a homeless person is discovered having received severe burns. The man has another problem that the doctors try to diagnose. It turns out to be an intestinal parasite, but by the time they figure this out, the homeless man has disappeared. Not long after that, the F.B.I. show up and question the doctors about the man, who it turns out is a serial killer and cannibal – hence the intestinal parasite. This representation of homelessness is fairly typical of the negative representations produced when

television shows use homeless people to fill bad-guy gaps. But what percentage of homeless people are actually serial killers and cannibals?

One must question the repercussions of such depictions on the social lives of the indigent. Furthermore, it seems relevant to this study to look deeper at some popular films portraying homelessness in America, to mine more information about the nature of these portrayals. What follows is an examination of the depiction of homelessness in popular American movies, in search of trends of representation. For the purposes of this study, a trend of representation will be defined as repeated depictions of homelessness and homeless people in a certain way or ways, within the media being examined. Subsequent to the establishment of these trends in popular films, this study will turn its focus to local representations of homelessness in Asheville, North Carolina.

Homelessness and the Movies

As with the academic articles examined above, the chronological rise of portrayals of homelessness in American popular film is best represented by a few numbers. In a search of Blockbuster.com for movies tagged with the keyword “homelessness”, the following results were obtained: the 1940’s saw the release of 3 films; the 1950’s, 2 films; the 1960’s, 5 films; the 1970’s, 6 films; the 1980’s, 8 films; the 1990’s, 33 films; and the 2000’s, 68 films. To some extent, this may represent the simple fact that newer films are tagged more often than films from decades ago. Yet this precipitous rise in depictions of homelessness in film is also representative of the growing interest the issue has commanded over the last seventy years.

To find popular American movies related to homelessness that were released after 1980, the author used the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) and its advanced search mechanism. A search for feature films tagged with the keyword “homelessness”, originating in the United

States from 1980-2009 with a user rating of 5.0 or greater, produced a list of 119 titles. The user rating search aspect was included to provide the “more popular” portion of the films, as this is seen as indicative of popularity. To further refine these results, the author organized the films in descending order from the highest US grossing films to the lowest, as another indicator of popularity. The top 25 films in terms of gross ticket sales were taken from this list. Proceeding further, the author removed children’s films, movies that take place before 1980, those set in futuristic or fictional worlds, and movies that take place in other countries. These were removed because these kinds of films fall outside the parameters of this study, which is an examination of film depictions of American homelessness, in contemporary times and functioning under the laws of nature, meant for mature audiences. Movies removed from the list include: *Shrek the Third*; *Batman Begins*; *Liar, Liar*; *I, Robot*; *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze*; *Groundhog Day*; *Holes*; *Cinderella Man*; *Scrooged*; *Blood Diamond*; *Munich*; and *Final Destination 2*.

After these revisions of the original list, thirteen titles remained fitting all the criteria: *The Pursuit of Happyness*; *Coming to America*; *Yes Man*; *Trading Places*; *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*; *Bruno*; *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*; *The Fisher King*; *Intolerable Cruelty*; *Curly Sue*; *Drillbit Taylor*; *The Soloist*; and *August Rush*.

These thirteen films, selected for their commercial success and thus collectively making up the most-viewed films containing depictions of homelessness from 1980-2009 that fit the other criteria, were then paired down to a suitable number for the current study through a process of random selection. Having determined to select seven films for review, the thirteen films were entered into the random list generator at the website Random.org, run by Mads Haahr of the School of Computer Science at Trinity College, Dublin. The titles were reorganized randomly,

and the first seven films on the list were selected. These seven films, examined in chronological order below, include *Trading Places*; *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*; *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*; *Coming to America*; *The Fisher King*; *The Pursuit of Happyness*; and *The Soloist*.

.....

In *Trading Places* (1983), the premise of the film is that a homeless man named Billy Ray Valentine (Eddie Murphy) gets a chance to trade places with a big-time stock market executive named Louis Winthorp III (Dan Aykroyd). The first representation of homelessness occurs in the opening montage, a bustling morning in Philadelphia, in which one of the scenes is composed of a homeless man with a dirt-covered face, blanketed in newspapers, asleep in a doorway. The montage continues, contrasting images of upper class and lower class Philadelphian society, and another image of a homeless man appears a few seconds later; he is standing staring off into the distance, a well-stocked shopping cart idle before him.

The first encounter with Billy Ray finds him outside of an exclusive executive club, atop a wheeled contraption posing as a blind Vietnam veteran without his lower legs. A few minutes later two police officers uncover the fact that he is a con man posing as a vet, who is neither blind nor an amputee. He is chased through the club and arrested. One of Louis' bosses, the Duke brothers, takes a sudden interest in Billy Ray, stating that he is "...no doubt from a broken home" and that he had probably committed crimes as a juvenile.

When Billy Ray is led away by the police, the man states "That man is the product of a poor environment. There's absolutely nothing wrong with him. I can prove it." His brother, the other boss, asserts "Of course there's something wrong with him! He's a negro. Probably been stealing since he could crawl." The two bet that Billy Ray could run the company if surrounded

by the “right environment”, and that Louis would turn to crime if surrounded by the “wrong environment.”

As the movie progresses, it conveys the message that environmental factors such as a stable setting and financial security play the primary role in the way people become either “successful” or homeless. This is achieved when the two main characters switch roles only to find they both evolve into their new roles when placed in the environments those roles entail. Their characters change with their environments.

Ultimately, this film has powerful images of homelessness, from the crafty, disingenuous disguise Billy Ray uses to collect change in the beginning, to the moral deterioration life on the street causes in aristocratic Louis – who turns to crime – the viewer sees the idea that homelessness makes people “bad” or of poor moral character. As will be shown, this representation of homeless people is also found in other films being explored. Also in this movie, the homeless are type-cast as dirty and unkempt, both in the opening scenes and in the characters of first Murphy and then Aykroyd as they each experience homelessness. Moreover, that Murphy is capable of profiting in the stock market without any education suggests he is of superior intelligence, an above-average protagonist who, as the reader will see, does not stand alone among protagonists of the films under review.

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In the film *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986), Nick Nolte plays Jerry, an indigent man who is rescued from drowning in the swimming pool of a wealthy Beverly Hills couple, Dave and Barbara Whiteman, played by Richard Dreyfus and Bette Midler. The audience first views Jerry pushing a heavily-laden shopping cart down the road just as dawn is breaking over Los Angeles. Jerry is unshaven, wearing a thick trench coat, and there is a small dog in the cart

among his tattered possessions. Following this scene a montage takes the viewer from a group of indigent men clustered on a sidewalk, two of them shaking hands, to a filthy black man in ragged clothing pushing a shopping cart piled with dirt-encrusted foam, rusty pots, and other miscellanea. Jerry emerges from a dumpster with a handful of thrown-away food, which he then shares with his dog, Kerouac. A man sporting a dirty toboggan and wrapped in a large red blanket walks to a payphone and checks it for loose change. Jerry pushes his cart past a pair of elderly women out for a walk, and grimaces as they commence chattering about him in disgust. A black man dressed in dirty black clothes from head to foot, with a series of bundles tied together and thrown over his shoulder, twitches his face strangely for a few moments. Then Jerry appears again, washing his feet in a park fountain with his dog on his lap. The audience subsequently sees him on a curb reading a discarded newspaper while a woman in pink walks by and looks at him disdainfully; resting nestled between large tree roots while his dog stands guard; and finally pushing his cart again down a street lined with mansions. Throughout this opening sequence, the homeless people depicted are dirty and disheveled, with vacant expressions. After the montage ends the rich family, whose orderly and luxurious life Jerry is about to upset, is introduced.

Meanwhile, Jerry has fallen asleep on a bench outside, and Kerouac runs off. Jerry wakes and begins searching for him frantically, ending up in a posh shopping center where he is roughly apprehended by security guards who tell him to "Go downtown and take a bath." Jerry continues searching for his dog while the adultery of Dave and his maid is displayed for the audience. Jerry's failed search eventually brings him to hopelessness and a swimming pool in Dave and Barbara's backyard, where he tries to commit suicide. Dave saves him, but Jerry is ungrateful. Jerry explains to Dave that he was caught selling counterfeit federal documents, got

45 years in prison, had it suspended, fell in love, was heartbroken, and did a lot of drinking and abused drugs. He goes on to say that then his little sister died of leukemia, and that this really affected him as they were really close, having been orphans together at a young age. Jerry explains that it was the death that made him lose his “incentive”, and that he stopped caring and learned to survive on the street. Dave invites him to stay, and the results of his introduction to the spoiled family are manifold: the dog, who responds to Dave with barks and growls, immediately takes a liking to Jerry; while riding in Dave’s car, Dave asks Jerry if it’s his first ride in a Rolls Royce, to which Jerry replies no, he owned one when he lived in London [for] graduate school; and Dave takes Jerry to lunch and Jerry is approached by a woman who recognizes him from Cannes Film Festival, where he is known as a writer. Jerry shows Barbara how to get her anorexic dog to eat by putting the dog food in a bowl and eating it along with the canine. Jerry takes Dave to a shelter, where the homeless people are depicted lining up for mail. Then Jerry takes Dave to hang out with some of his homeless friends, whom Dave ends up really liking.

They drink together, sing together, and Dave decides to spend the night outside with them. Jerry brings spirituality into the home by practicing Tai Chi, which he says he learned in an ashram in Oregon. Dave gives Barbara a massage, which leads to her intense emotional release. They sleep together and Barbara feels reborn. Jerry gives the son of the family, Max, lipstick advice and ultimately helps him be comfortable with his sexuality and come out to his father and mother. Jerry goes on to sleep with Dave’s mistress, the maid Carmen, and inspires her to become a Communist. She then renounces her ties to the capitalist Dave and stops letting him exploit her, ‘the worker’. Finally, Jerry woos Dave’s daughter Jenny, letting her find him playing Debussy on the family piano, explaining that when he played “...the concert circuit...” he always started with Debussy. Jenny falls in love with Jerry, and it cures her anorexia as well.

Dave finally breaks down, realizing that allowing Jerry into his family's life has undermined all the precarious familial structures he had been trying to prevent from crumbling for years, as well as his own position in the family. Jerry comes to be seen as possessing "...a strange wisdom" capable of transforming the spoiled lives of the Whiteman family, primarily by operating outside social strictures. After Dave melts down, Jerry confesses to having lied about much of his past experiences, and walks back out onto the streets. But in the end he changes his mind, and returns, ostensibly to stay with the Whiteman family indefinitely.

The homelessness portrayed in Jerry's character is a romanticized version, in which he is multitalented, inordinately experienced, and wise. While he denies the truth of his many claims, certain scenes in the film imply that at least some of what he said was true, such as the woman recognizing him from Cannes Film Festival, his playing of the piano, and his doing Tai Chi. With this in mind, it would seem that Jerry can be classified as being an above-average homeless protagonist, establishing a trend along with the above example of *Trading Places*. What's more, Harry and the other indigent people depicted in the film establish the beginning of a trend by appearing filthy and unkempt, as in *Trading Places*. Jerry's sleeping with every woman in Dave's life would imply a certain moral degeneracy, making that a commonality among the two films, as well: however, it should be pointed out that Dave's character was guilty of similar promiscuity. Still, Jerry's moral degeneracy is also implied by the fact that he has no problem with lying, as he claims to have told the Whiteman family "whatever they wanted to hear."

Despite these external trends of representation being found in the film, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* does a good job portraying the sense of community shared by some groups of homeless people, as in the scene when Jerry takes Dave to meet his friends and the multimillionaire Dave would rather sleep outside with them and enjoy life than be back in his

mansion. This scene offers a glimpse of Dave finding value and freedom in the experience he shares with the homeless, and its implications contradict a dominant message imparted by the films overall: that homelessness is something to be escaped from, a fully negative experience, without any positive facets. Counterbalancing this communal celebration is Jerry's attempted suicide. That Jerry wanted to kill himself when he jumped into the Whiteman pool implies the kind of hopelessness and vacancy found in Louis and the background characters in *Trading Places*, establishing a trend of depicting hopelessness among the indigent.

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In the film *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (1987), Steve Martin plays Neal Page, a successful advertising executive traveling from New York to Chicago. Through a series of mishaps involving Del Griffith, who claims to be a traveling salesman (John Candy), Page and Griffith end up traveling to Wichita instead of Chicago. Desperate to get home in time for Thanksgiving, Page allows Griffith to assist him in getting home by any means necessary. While Griffith knows many people along the way who help them, misfortune seems to follow him as well. Their train breaks down, their rental car catches flame, and then they hitchhike in the refrigerated container of an eighteen-wheeler. They lose all of their money and Griffith is reduced to conning people in a bus station, selling shower-curtain rings as rare earrings for enough cash to continue their journey.

It is only when they have reached Chicago and parted ways that Page realizes Griffith is homeless. He returns to the train station and finds Griffith sitting on a bench, with nowhere to go. It is then that Griffith confesses to being homeless, explaining that his wife died eight years ago and he has not had a home since. Page, who had been very frustrated by Griffith's shenanigans,

feels guilty about his treatment of the man when he realizes the position he is in. He invites him home for thanksgiving dinner.

This film carries few of the generalizations of homelessness found in the previous movies, nor many of the negative trends found in the films below. As Griffith is the only character in the movie that is homeless, only his character can be examined for how the film portrays indigency. Griffith is clean, neat, and well-dressed in most of the scenes. What's more, he seems to have hope for the future, a complex history, a method of employment, and a wide range of social contacts who help him and Page eventually reach Chicago. Thus this movie contains a depiction of a homeless man lacking the filth and grime found in other films, but not possessed of superior qualities either -- other than a positive outlook. The film gives Candy's character an individual personality without making him one of the above-average exemplars mentioned previously, a representation of an indigent person who falls between the two dominant poles of portrayal found thus far, somewhere in the middle of exceptionality and the negative stereotype. In addition, his employment indicates self-sufficiency even as he cons people when necessary. Though the immorality of his swindling people is made light of in the film, it is a representation of the moral degeneracy of homelessness that fits into the trend observed previously. His social connections point toward Griffith being part of a larger community. Overall, this film is an external representation of homelessness that does not fit into the dominant trends observed thus far, other than the scene depicting Griffith acting immorally. In this way it stands as an important counter-example to the trends being established.

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In *Coming to America* (1988), Eddie Murphy plays Akeem, an African prince who travels to America in search of a bride. He goes to Queens thinking that its name is indicative of

the kind of women he will find there. As soon as he and his friend Semi (Arsenio Hall) exit the taxi they take from the airport, the camera flashes to a trio of homeless people, dressed in drab clothing, surrounding an old barrel with a fire burning in it. While the royal and his retainer rent an apartment, their entire luggage pile is stolen by these and other homeless men. The next morning, the houseless people standing around the burning barrel are sporting rich African-style robes – presumably from the prince’s stolen luggage. The next depiction of a homeless person comes when Akeem and the woman he is courting are walking by the Hudson River at night. They come upon an indigent man leaned up against a huge pile of his belongings, including cardboard boxes, trash bags, and a shopping cart filled to the brim with seemingly random objects. The man is disheveled, dirty, and barely raises his head when Akeem puts a gift in his lap, offering no other acknowledgment of the gesture. After the couple walk on, the man looks in the bag, finding a large bundle of money. He awakens his friend, Randolph, who says “Leave me alone, Mortimer!” These two white homeless men are depicted in the stereotypical fashion, filthy and downcast – however, they are also the two men who played the rich Duke brothers who set up the experiment in *Trading Places*. This inclusion conveys the idea that anyone can become homeless.

In sum, this movie gives the stereotypical depictions of the homeless in the few instances they are portrayed, by covering them with dirty clothes, unkempt faces, and standing them next to piles of garbage or burning barrels. It also shows the indigent acting immorally, as when they steal the prince’s belongings. These portrayals continue the trends of showing the homeless as dirty and morally degenerate, found in the first two films above. However, the not-so-subtle message insinuated by the presence of the brothers from *Trading Places* is that anyone can become homeless, even multimillionaire investment bankers. Interestingly, while these two are

not the protagonists of the film, they do represent portrayals of exceptional individuals homeless by circumstance, and in part fit that trend found in the films.

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In *The Fisher King* (1991), N.Y.C. shock radio host Jack (Jeff Bridges) causes a man to go on a killing spree, and ruins his own career in the process. Later, he encounters a victim of the shooting, the brilliant, delusional former history professor Perry (Robin Williams) whose wife was killed that night, living homeless on the streets of New York. Perry had a mental breakdown following the tragedy, losing his job, his home, and his mind. He became engrossed with the quest for the Holy Grail, which he believed to be hidden in a castle-like apartment bordering Central Park. He is also pursued by a phantom dark knight, representative of his inner pain from his wife's death, whose imagined appearance causes him to panic and flee uncontrollably.

Perry enlists Jack's help in his quest, as payment for Perry saving Jack's life the night they met: mistaken for a homeless person, Jack is about to be burned alive in a hate crime when Perry steps in and chases off the attackers. Perry is mentally ill, but also an intelligent, caring, and interesting man. Jack helps Perry 'clean up' enough to get a date and a job, and ultimately he begins to defeat his demons.

The overall message of the film regarding homelessness is that there are many paths leading to it, and those deeply wounded homeless only need someone to go on their quest with them for awhile, in order to find their grail. Additionally, in the ambushed hate crime we find a representation of a segment of society's hatred for the homeless. In Williams' character one sees a continuation of the tendency to tell stories of captivating homeless characters whose homelessness occurs despite their giftedness or above-average qualities. Also, the trends of

representing homeless individuals as mentally ill, unwashed, unkempt, and morally degenerate continue in this film, making these trends nearly ubiquitous to this point.

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In *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), a man struggles to excel at an internship while taking sole custody of his son and becoming homeless. The story takes place in 1981. In the opening montage of this film, which is inspired by a true story, there is a brief scene of a homeless man laying face down on the side walk with people walking all around him. The next time we see a homeless person is when Will Smith's character, Chris, in waiting at the bus stop and a homeless man sits next to him and proceeds to mistake the box he is carrying for a time machine, following him onto the bus.

Later, Chris loses the box and the homeless man happens to see him drop it. Chris himself is what one would term tenuously-housed, in that his self-employment selling portable bone-density scanners (the boxes) is not panning out. When his wife leaves him, he and his son move into a motel. The next time we see the homeless man, he has taken possession of the box – which he believes is a time machine – and is furtively running through the crowded streets. Chris chases him, but does not catch him. When he finally catches up with the man later, the homeless man says “I’ve got to get back to the sixties man...I want to see Jimi Hendrix do the guitar on fire.....bring back my time machine!”

While he gets the scanner back from the homeless man, it does not function, and without any other means of paying their motel bill, Chris and his son find themselves out on the street. When he and his son find their stuff outside the door of the room, the boy throws a fit. They try a friend's place, but eventually end up in a subway station bathroom for the night. This is their entrance into homelessness. And while the boy sleeps on a toilet-paper mattress on the tiles,

Chris cries and holds the door shut from someone banging on it from outside. The next day he tries one shelter, but they only take women and children so he goes to another. When he arrives there is a line stretching for blocks of homeless people waiting for a room.

They get the last room, and Chris bathes his son in the sink. We then watch Chris and his son struggle to keep up with life at his demanding internship while living in the shelter.

Eventually, the many tasks of a day add up and they arrive a bit later and do not get a bed in the shelter, and they sleep on a train. Chris gives blood. About sleeping in the bathroom and other things, Chris tells his son “Some things are fun the first time you do em, then not so much.”

In the end, Chris gets the job he has been interning for, as a stockbroker, and his and his son’s lives are turned around. While the film does not stress the fact that Chris’ personal choice to invest in the bone density scanners – along with tough circumstances – led to his homelessness, the film does emphasize the fact that the same drive and initiative that saw him invest in those devices allowed him to rise up out of homelessness, in the end. This is a good depiction of the story of an intelligent, driven individual who becomes homeless, showing that anyone can end up that way, while also continuing the trend of depicting above-average homeless protagonists in the films under review. The film also suggests a prevalence of mental illness among the homeless, through the man who believed the scanner was a time machine, as in *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* and *The Fisher King*. The flitting image of the man passed out face first on the sidewalk speaks of alcoholism, which has been seen in the other movies. The street musician who steals another scanner from Chris is a depiction of the homeless as having a lack of morality – a willingness to steal similar to the other examples of moral degeneracy found in the previous films.

This movie is a true story about an exceptional man, whose drive and intelligence sets him apart from most people. Thus, inadvertently, a romanticizing of the homeless occurs, as the story of homelessness for Chris' character is quite different from that of the average indigent person. Chris, as with the homeless exemplars mentioned in the introduction to this section and found in *Trading Places*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, and *The Fisher King*, is more than just a normal person, we are supposed to believe – this is made apparent when he solves a rubik's cube in an impromptu interview over the course of a taxi ride. This example of a homeless protagonist's exceptionality does not stand alone in American film, as has been seen.

Furthermore, the ambient homeless that the audience glimpses briefly in parts of the film are all shattered-looking people, eyes downcast, wills broken, silent and dirty. Other than the protagonist, the homeless are stereotyped and generalized. These minimal character sketches underrate the fullness of personality prevalent among the homeless and any other population. It is almost as if pains were taken to make them all look the same, fit neatly into the stereotypes of homelessness, providing movement in the background of the scenes. This tendency for minor homeless characters to be negatively generalized has been found in *Trading Places*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, *Coming to America*, *The Fisher King*, and this film, suggesting a strong trend of representation.

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In *The Soloist* (2009), which is based on a true story, a Los Angeles Times newspaper reporter named Steve (Robert Downey Jr.) discovers a brilliant, passionate, homeless street musician named Nathaniel (Jamie Foxx) and determines to help him in some way. The first time the two meet, Foxx's character rambles uncontrollably, then says "I apologize for my appearance but I've had a few setbacks." Nathaniel then tells Steve that he went to Julliard.

Steve leaves and researches the claim, finding it is true. He then sets out to find Nathaniel again. He eventually sees him again in a tunnel, sporting a bright yellow vest, purple and yellow mask, maroon pants, and a garland of plastic flowers. He is playing the violin to himself, and when Steve approaches him Nathaniel begins babbling again...but there is sense in the babble. Overall in this second encounter Nathaniel gives the impression of being completely at peace with homelessness, by making statements such as “god is right behind that wall” and “it really is a dream out here...the sun is shining and everyone is smiling.”

Steve goes on to find out that Nathaniel had been musically gifted from a young age. They meet again, and this time Nathaniel is wearing a silver tinsel vest, picking up cigarette butts from the middle of the road exclaiming that he won't have the tunnel being degraded. This is an interesting look at the way community orientation can be found in some homeless people because it depicts a homeless man cleaning up after other people in the area he inhabits. When Steve tries to give him a cello, he says he can't “cover that”, then goes on to say that he has been mugged fourteen times and that he would fight to the death to protect such a cello. Steve visits a shelter and finds all kinds of interesting people, including a woman who says her medication makes her hear voices, a woman whose face is covered in bumps, and a timid young man listening to Christian music. He also sees a woman and man exchange strong words of love and community. There are varied representations of homeless people in this scene, some that fit into the negative trends of filthiness, mental illness, and vacancy found previously, but also the expression of the emotional relationship between the man and woman.

On a later visit to the shelter Steve finds Nathaniel playing the cello, and the music creating a calming effect on the other people in the shelter. As it turns out, Nathaniel began hearing voices and seeing visions when he was at Julliard. He began to lose his mind. Steve has

to follow Nathaniel when he leaves the shelter, and he passes through a nightmarish world of homeless people, drug dealers, prostitutes, people shouting and burning barrels. He watches as Nathaniel sets up his bed in a doorway, sweeping it carefully and laying down cardboard and plastic. A rat pokes its head from the covers.

The camera flashes through a montage: a man and a woman fighting; a man sifting through garbage; drug dealers and prostitutes milling around; a man with an orange cone on his head. There are people handing out food from the back of a truck, and people sleeping in dumpsters. Each scene seems designed to give an otherworldly atmosphere to the world of homelessness. Steve writes, "Every night he lays his head among predators and hustlers, and drunks...fallen in the streets..." Steve tells him he shouldn't be there, but he replies it is his choice, that he wants to be there.

Steve writes whether he should try to twist his arm into leaving the streets, rather than leaving him in "...this lost colony of broken, helpless souls." This language has a powerful capacity for generalizing the condition and opportunities of the homeless people he is writing about. The next time we see Nathaniel, he is wearing a black outfit with a full-size skeleton print on it, a camouflage jacket, and a diaphanous, glittering golden cape. His outfits throughout the film display a complete disregard for normative style, and utter idiosyncrasy.

The next time they meet, Nathaniel is playing drumsticks against his shopping cart in front of the L.A. Times building, and Steve has to ask him to leave. It becomes apparent that Nathaniel is unaware of the social boundaries across which he and Steve's friendship was created. Upon their next meeting, Nathaniel is covered in white face paint and wearing a sequined Uncle Sam hat. Steve offers Nathaniel an apartment and he says he doesn't want one, so Steve tells him it's a music studio and Nathaniel accepts. But it turns out that Nathaniel's

mental illness and the voices in his head became most intense when he was home alone in his apartment, when he was going to Julliard.

Ultimately, Nathaniel's mental illness led to his homelessness. When Steve tries to get Nathaniel to sign some papers that would allow him to get medicine for his Schizophrenia, he attacks Steve and tells him that if he ever sees him again he'll "...cut you open, and gut you like a fish." This moment has profound implications concerning how safe it is represented to be to befriend a homeless person. The film ends with Nathaniel reconnecting to his long lost sister and going to see a symphony. A last scene finds many homeless clients of the shelter, along with Steve and Nathaniel, dancing and having a moment of community.

This film, while a true story, fits into the dominant theme observed so far, that of telling the stories of homeless men who through some intrinsic genius or heroic quality rise out of homelessness despite mental and situational obstacles. In addition, the trends of representing homeless people as mentally ill, unkempt, filthy, and morally degenerate also continue with the many characterizations of homeless extras and secondary characters throughout the movie.

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Summary of Homelessness and the Movies

Overall, the films examined represent homelessness in a number of ways frequently enough to be called trends of representation. The environment of homelessness is often depicted as filthy doorways, dumpsters, garbage dumps (*The Soloist*), gutters (*Trading Places*), under bridges (*The Fisher King*), around fires in barrels (*Coming to America*), on benches and in roots (*Down and Out in Beverly Hills*) or the floors of public bathrooms (*The Pursuit of Happyness*) – in general places on the margins of society, where lawlessness, violence, filth, and addictions run rampant. The sole abstainer from this trend among the films examined was *Planes, Trains, and*

Automobiles, in which Griffith is homeless but self-sufficient and inhabiting the upper-class environments the title indicates. The trend to focus these stories on the exceptional individuals among the homeless population, as has been observed among the majority of the films above, leaves the 'normal' homeless people who fill the environments around these exemplars as seeming less than worthy of attention. They are the average indigent whose lives do not make good movie material, the audience is left to interpret. And while the protagonists of these films supersede society's expectations of them, they are often surrounded by homeless people, extras and secondary characters, who are portrayed acting exactly as stereotypical homeless people might: doing drugs, beating each other up, passing out in the middle of the sidewalk, etc. This leaves the impression that if a homeless person is not extraordinary in some way, they are probably a degenerate who is not trying hard to overcome the obstacles between him or herself and getting off the streets. Again, the exception to this rule is *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, in which Candy's character seems fairly average. Another exception can be found in *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, in which Jerry and his friends imbibe alcohol but sing and celebrate rather than fight or commit crimes afterwards, and Dave despite his wealth finds intrinsic value in their shared experience. Another example of the films stepping outside these trends comes in *The Soloist* when the man and woman express their love at the shelter.

There are trends of representing the mentally ill (*The Fisher King*, *The Soloist*, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*) as primary components of the homeless demographic. All of the homeless protagonists in these films are male. The appearance of the homeless in the majority of these films is often theatrically dirty, faces smeared with grime, as if no homeless people care about their appearance or shower and shave daily at a shelter. Their outfits in these films are also either dramatically flamboyant, or all the same. In *Planes, Trains,*

and Automobiles, Griffith is dressed normally, in clean, well kept clothing, and he is shown to be well groomed. In this way, as with the trends above, Griffith stands as an alternative to the tendency of popular American films to depict the indigent in negative ways.

Many of the homeless protagonists in the movies examined are people of high achievement in their past, who have fallen on hard times – insinuating that homelessness happens to people, rather than being a process brought on partially by choice. This is the case in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Soloist*, *Coming to America*, and *The Fisher King*. The flipside of this portrayal is that none of the films feature indigent characters succeeding despite a lack of past achievement, indicating a lack of personal growth and development among the homeless. Finally, there is a trend in representing the homeless as morally degenerate, which unlike the other trends includes not only *Coming to America*; *The Soloist*; *The Pursuit of Happyness*; *The Fisher King*; *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*; and *Trading Places*, but also *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*.

Concluding this section, there are numerous trends in the depiction of homelessness in the top grossing American popular films examined that seem to generalize the indigent into two groups: those few who through extraordinary ability rise up out of homelessness; and the many other houseless people -- caricatures of stereotypes, filthy, hopeless, and seemingly out of control -- who populate the environments out of which these protagonists rise. The isolated exception is *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, in which the story narrates a different kind of homelessness than that depicted in the other movies.

Another point of note: when looking at the random selection of popular American films chronologically, one notices the gradual shift from comedies to dramas containing homelessness, and the turn from fictional to biographical subject matter, as the films become more recent. This

could be viewed as a mirror to the rise in appreciation of the seriousness of homelessness found in the growth of academic articles over the course of the same period of time, and the same rise in the news, discussed below. Despite these shifts within the medium's representation of homelessness over the span of years examined, the other trends enumerated above, including portrayals of moral degeneracy, filthiness, mental illness, and the exemplary homeless protagonist, all remained present.

Having established these trends in the representation of homelessness in popular movies, the next section will examine articles related to homelessness published over the last five years in the Asheville Citizen-Times newspaper. As with the above films and the kinds of stories they tell or imply about indigency, the articles below will be investigated for stories about homelessness and tendencies in the way these stories are reported, contextualized, and organized.

Public Perception and Opinion: The Asheville Citizen-Times and Homelessness

The news represents a powerful force in the shaping of American public opinion. Another way to look at the representation of homelessness in America is to see how often it is covered in a newspaper, or on the nightly news on the three major networks. The latter is exactly what Edward Erikson did in his paper “The Representation of Homelessness in the Nightly News.” In it, Erikson scanned the airtime data from Vanderbilt Television Archive on ABC, NBC, and CBS from 1981 until 2005, finding interesting patterns of airtime on topics related to homelessness. He found that the height of airtime was between 1988 and 1994, though 2005 presented another high result. This peak of airtime could represent the height of cultural interest toward homelessness, but it definitely represents what the producers of the various networks thought was a seriously hot topic at the time. When the homeless are the topics of stories on the news, there is a tendency to cast them in the role of victim, though they are also frequently the committers of crimes of desperation as well as crimes of homelessness – which often land them in the public spotlight.

In the Asheville Citizen-Times the word ‘homelessness’ has been used many times between 2006 and 2011. After picking through an original count of 240 articles and clips totaling more than 900 pages – searching for articles actually about homelessness in Asheville and the service providers helping the homeless in the city – that count was reduced dramatically to roughly 250 pages. The rest were instances where homelessness was mentioned but not the primary concern of the article, often as one of a litany of social issues in the speeches of politicians and the minutes of city meetings. Pieces relating news covering indigency in places other than Asheville were also removed.

Among the articles that remained, it was logical to organize them into certain sub-categories indicative of the kind of news found in each article. Therefore a category collecting pieces about services offered to the homeless and service providers; a category of articles relating statistics on local homelessness and the experiences of homeless people; a group of items on the relation of homelessness to addiction, crime, and mental illness; and a set of articles focusing on homelessness and veterans were all created to differentiate the kinds of news being presented when examining the representations of homelessness therein.

To begin to understand the way homelessness is represented within the context of these ‘kinds of news’, it is essential to examine the contents of each kind and determine various information about them. This information will include the emphasis, language, and orientation of each group of articles, as well as any gaps in information about homelessness left when the collection of articles is viewed in its entirety.

Homeless Services and Organizations

The first category to be examined is the group of articles relating news about organizations in the Asheville area that serve the homeless community. This collection of pieces pertains to the homeless experience obliquely, informing the general public about grants acquired by charitable organizations, news about fundraiser’s for service agencies, paeans for closing shelters, and pieces on numerous people working and volunteering to aid the homeless. It is also the largest group of articles among the above categories, which indicates that the public is more often informed about the organizations serving the homeless than about the homeless themselves.

Coincidentally, the five-year limit to this study’s exploration of homelessness in the Asheville Citizen-Times begins with the hiring of the first city employee meant specifically to

work toward implementing the city's 10-year plan to end homelessness. In the Feb. 15, 2006 article "City OKs funding to hire staffer to work on homelessness issues[:] Plan calls for end to homelessness in Asheville, Buncombe", one sees the beginning of a series of articles that covers the hiring of Amy Sawyer, the Director of the Asheville Homelessness Initiative, and her subsequent, successful efforts to increase awareness and community participation in the issue. In the article "'City's Homeless Get New Champion", Sawyer gets "involved in bringing community groups, agencies and other stakeholders together to start working groups, identify needs and form action plans." The article states, "This community has a pretty big wealth of services for the homeless," she said."

In this last statement, the public is told there are many services in Asheville for the homeless population's needs. What the piece fails to consider is whether such a wealth of services could draw homeless people from elsewhere. Sawyer goes on in the article, "'It's not a matter of saying that people are never going to be poor," she said about the plan, "We don't have to have people who are chronically homeless.'" This statement could be construed as denying the validity of that small group of homeless people who choose 'chronic' homelessness as a way of life. Also, such a statement becomes problematic when confronted with evidence of homeless people being drawn to Asheville from across the country, in which case every person housed would be replaced by a newly arrived homeless person from the next state over. As the reader will see in the section of interviews below, this is sometimes the case.

There are many articles in this group dedicated solely to informing the public about the various programs operating to aid the homeless in the Asheville area. In "Community News", Dec. 16, 2005, a brief item on the WNC program 'Women for Women' describes it as a group of 188 women from the region who pooled their own funds to supply grants to needy members of

their gender, thereby trying to prevent homelessness and hunger among their grantees. On Dec. 30, 2005 the article “Women for Women to Award Grants” said the organization’s grant committee had chosen to “...help prevent setbacks [among women] such as homelessness...” This service provider is but one mentioned in this collection of items; others include Western North Carolina Community Health Services, the Affordable Housing Coalition, Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministry, Mountain Housing Authority, and Homeward Bound. Over the course of the five year narrative in the Asheville Citizen-Times related to Homeward Bound and the other programs, the reader gets the idea that they are exceptional programs, often winning grant money and awards and working purposefully to put homeless people in stable housing.

In all of these articles on services for the homeless, one rarely hears from the homeless themselves. Barely a word is recorded reflecting the opinions of homeless people on these programs meant for them, or their experience of them. For example, in “Stimulus Gives Hope to Homeless”, one sees a dry break down of the H.U.D. funding going to various service agencies in the area, but there are no interviews with homeless people expressing any “hope”. The article’s title implies a human element that is starkly absent in the text. In Barbara Blake’s article “Wednesday Service Opens Doors to All”, the author describes the open and welcoming service offered at the Haywood Street Congregation. She describes seeing the homeless, or “the city’s downtrodden”, walk toward the church in an interesting manner: “One by one, some on crutches and walkers, they stream down the hill overlooking Interstate 240, their raggedy backpacks carrying all of their worldly possessions, in search of food and fellowship.” This seems like less than objective reporting, implying isolation amongst homeless people – with them imagined arriving one by one rather than in groups of two or three, as also happens regularly at the church.

There seems to be a bit of dramatic artifice in the reporting here, a romanticizing, external perspective to the writing. Yet Blake, in this article, does include the words of the homeless, and so saves this category of articles from being wholly without the voice of the indigent.

Also in the series of pieces on service providers, there is news on events such as “Project Connect”, which connects homeless people to services, and the “VA Stand down”, which offers veteran-specific services. In “City to Get Early Stimulus Money”, one reads “About 635 homeless people, or 28 per 10,000, residents lived in Asheville and other parts of Buncombe County in 2007, according to a national once-a-year count supported by federal housing programs. That was well above the state average of 13 per 10,000 and the national average of 22 per 10,000, a 2007 study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness said. Since then, the number of homeless in Buncombe County dropped by 13 percent to 555 this January.” This phrasing makes it evident that there are more homeless people in Asheville than the state and national average. The question that arises is, why? Does that mean there are more than there should be? Further, there is an implication that the homelessness situation in Asheville was bettering, yet no corroboration of that idea from homeless people themselves.

The service provider category also contains opinion articles offering ideas for new services for the homeless, such as “A proposal to create vegetable gardens that benefit all of Asheville”, in which the author shares his vision of community vegetable gardens where homeless people work and gain self-confidence and social mobility, “The haves and the have-nots will have formed the unlikeliest fellowship, baptized at birth by the sweat of their collective brow. These community gardens could wear the title "VICTORY" once again: Victory over the alienation that currently exists between Asheville's wealthiest and poorest citizens, victory over despair and humiliation...” It is interesting how the author assigns despair and humiliation onto

the homeless he is referring to. He also writes “the homeless and the poor, those requiring the dignity of accomplishment and meaningful involvement in city affairs”, implying that the homeless have no accomplishments with which to assuage their dignity, and that they in fact require involvement in city affairs. This seems a bit of a generalization of the aspirations and achievements of homeless people, who are in fact made up of varied and complex people who have the whole range of differences of opinion, experience, and outlook amongst them. While the intentions of the author’s words seem benevolent, they are also representative of a generalization of homeless people.

In “Mental Health Care Draws Fire Group Gives N.C. a D-Plus”, the author tells his readers “People are going to have to realize that properly treating mental illness is far cheaper to the taxpayer than the costs of no or inadequate treatment, costs that manifest themselves in higher law enforcement and incarceration costs, in dealing with school dropouts, homelessness, the uninsured, unemployment and a myriad of other issues.” In this article, the state of mental health care in N.C. is cited as a major contributing factor to the state’s homelessness, and it is implied that this service is not being provided adequately for the needs of the state’s mentally ill. The article could have benefitted greatly, it is believed, from the inclusion of a mentally ill homeless person’s perspective on the state mental health system.

Taken as a whole, the coverage by the Asheville Citizen-Times related to service providers paints a picture of an indigent population that is well-off compared to populations in other locations; with a wealth of services, dynamic partnerships, fundraisers, dedicated government crusaders, stimulus funding, private and Christian charities, creative and thoughtful citizens, and a shrinking number of chronically homeless people in the area. The question is, is it true? Do homeless people enjoy greater benefits in the Asheville area as compared to elsewhere?

Does it cause indigent people to move here? No, according to Garret in “Asheville has Reasonable Plan to End Homelessness”, saying “People aren't moving to Asheville because of our social services.” The truth of this statement will be examined later in the paper.

Besides Blake’s poetic descriptions of need, there is little in the category reflecting individual representations of homelessness. While service providers are quoted 115 times in the 40 articles making up this category, homeless people are quoted a mere 11 times, in only four of the articles. This appears to be a huge gap in the reporting on service providers in the Asheville Citizen-Times. Blake’s article contains six of those direct quotations of the homeless, all of them expressing support for the Haywood Street Congregation and its diverse community, or the solace some houseless people derive from the church. Other than this sparse commentary of the indigent on services meant for them, homelessness in this collection of pieces remains a generalized theme, a population of people all in dire want of assistance. Homeless people are stereotyped as “needy victims” in the same sense as found by the aforementioned study of Hodgetts, Cullen, and Radley in the U.K. Also similar to the findings of the above study, homeless people are talked *about* rather than talked *to*, as the aforementioned numbers describe. While these are all interesting facts, this collection of articles only serves the investigation of this paper by underlining a trend to generalize the homeless population and block them together en masse as needy victims, the “downtrodden” of minimal achievement, assigned alienation, despair, and the requirement of earning dignity.

The Homeless Experience

The second category of articles is made up of 29 pieces about the homeless experience and the shifting circumstances that affect the indigent. Pieces relating statistics are also included in the group. As the second largest category, this is also the type with the most representations of

homeless people within the articles it consists of: the reader will find that almost every article in this group contains the words and stories of the homeless.

In “GOAL OF ENDING ASHEVILLE'S HOMELESSNESS IS ADMIRABLE, BUT RESOURCES SORELY LACKING”, Feb. 16 2006, the reader is introduced to the obstacles the author sees in the 10-year plan to end homelessness. It reads, “The reality is that many of those who live in trash-strewn "camps" among the shrubs on public rights of way are mentally ill. Others are addicted to alcohol or drugs. Still others are homeless because of a personal crisis, such as a devastating illness that caused them to lose their job or home.” This represents a fairly balanced view of the root causes of homelessness, offering a range of possible causes from misfortune to personal choices.

It goes on to describe some of the real obstacles that exist to certain segments of the homeless population, “People who are mentally ill need treatment, in most cases for the rest of their lives. And even with treatment, many will require close monitoring and ongoing financial support if they are to remain off the streets. Abusers of drugs and alcohol will require substantial and costly intervention if they are to overcome the addiction that keeps them from being productive members of society.” While the author here illustrates some general truths, the way he speaks about homelessness from on high, pronouncing prescriptions and foretelling the destiny of the nameless, faceless homeless people he seems to be describing, sets this within the external category of representation.

In Tracy Keene’s May 7, 2006 article “Never take for granted the power of believing in someone, or of being believed in”, the author describes spending time in “Preacher’s Park” (Pritchard Park) getting to know a homeless man. She writes “The other day I sat outside on a park bench in "Preachers Park." I watched the regulars congregate and engage with one another.

I talked with one of the patrons and gained some insight into the regulars who inhabit the park on a daily basis. Through my discussion, I found that many of the regulars come to the park to enjoy the friendship and support provided by the inhabitants. My acquaintance/friend informed me that it is hard to be homeless and that the isolation that one feels from society can be stifling; this park counters some of the rejection and separation that many of the dwellers experience on a daily basis.”

Keene has described social isolation and loneliness similar to that mentioned previously in Rokach’s studies. That she uses the term “regulars” would imply that she knows they are at the park daily, though she fails to get the park’s name right, suggesting she herself is not a regular and thus does not actually know if anyone there that day could be classified as a regular. It is interesting that the person she is asking about the park points on the community feeling people get when gathering there.

When she asks her “friend” how the people in the park became homeless, he tells her one factor is low paying jobs, and “...individuals suffer from homelessness due to mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction, which leads them to lose housing.” She is told the story of the person she is talking to, that he was born into a wealthy family, had jobs in big cities, and moved to Asheville for peace and quiet. After leaving a “toxic” roommate situation, the man ended up staying in the shelter for three months while looking for a job and an apartment. He goes on to say,

I am fortunate that people believed in me and were willing to give me a chance. I have learned that being homeless takes strength that you are not aware you have until you are stripped of everything that you feel is important to you, or defines you. One rule I learned, one that everyone who becomes homeless becomes aware of is, when you are homeless never look like you are homeless. People overall do not know what to do with you. They shut down and look the other way, they begin to take pity on you and not see

you for your true value and gifts. My belief in God/higher power allowed me to counter people's insecurity, and has allowed me to maintain my identity as a good man with value.

These are powerful statements regarding the experience of homelessness for one man, and his insight into the public perception of homeless people. In this sense, they signify a positive representation of homelessness in that they are internal depictions.

Finally, the man sums up his thoughts, “My experience has not been easy, especially when you lose everything. If I were to give any advice to someone around the issue of homelessness, it would be, do not assume that everyone who is homeless is not of value and does not want the same dreams of comfort, respect and love as you do. The reality is anyone can be homeless in any given time. In my case, I never thought that I would be homeless, jobless and alone. The experience has taught me not to take things for granted and enjoy the things, and life that I do have.” This statement, too, is a positive representation of homelessness in that it relates the unique, complex, and valuable nature of each homeless person, reminding readers that homeless people are as human as themselves.

In “Fourth Graders are Inspired to Help Homeless”, by Kim Barto, the reader discovers a class inspired by a book about homelessness to brainstorm what they think are the causes behind the social problem, “‘Most people weren't born homeless,’ said fourth-grader Mykal Prather. ‘Some of them just had financial problems.’ Prather and her classmates brainstormed a list of reasons why someone could end up on the street. Some people made bad choices. Others lost their jobs or suffer from mental illness. All in all, [the teacher] said, ‘the kids learned not to judge a book by its cover.’” This story of children understanding homelessness can happen to anyone, and subsequently reaching out, is an example of how media that defies the negative

generalizations of homelessness – such as the book that inspired the class – can aid in the regeneration of bonds between the homeless population and the wider community.

In the article “Children in Foster Care Need Extended Public Help”, Feb. 29 2008, the author describes the story of Manuel Bates,

Bates was abandoned by his mother at birth, taken in by a series of relatives during his childhood and spent his adolescence in and out of group homes and with his mother and other relatives. Each year, more than 20,000 teens who turn 18 while in foster care in the United States can choose to remain in state custody and receive benefits such as tuition waivers, housing and training in life skills to help them be successful. Though he received services through the Buncombe County Department of Social Services, Bates was not in foster care when he turned 18. As a consequence, he did not have the opportunity to take advantage of those benefits. He's on his own...Bates doesn't want a handout. When he dropped out of school at 16, no one urged him to stay. He regrets that decision because he's learned that he can't earn enough to live on his own. He wants to join the military, but even that's not an option without a high school diploma or equivalent...Left to fend for themselves before they have the skills to navigate the adult world, such children are at a much higher risk of homelessness, depression, substance abuse, criminal activity and having children before they can care for them, beginning the cycle over again.

This article, drawn from a real life experience, is eye-opening for the reader by revealing a facet of the foster care system that is rarely mentioned in connection to homelessness: that after 18, many foster children lose any support system they had as children and are left to fend for themselves, without their erstwhile ‘family’. This describes a less-known factor leading to indigent status, providing an internal representation of homelessness.

In the article “Homeless Initiative prepares for tougher times ahead”, by Leslie Boyd, a woman’s tenuous housing situation is described, followed by a meeting of various agencies helping the homeless in Asheville. The article states “Michelle Freeman lives like many people ‘paycheck to paycheck.’ But since she was laid off her job in late October, everything is slipping

away from her.” This is a poignant description of the economic factors that can lead to homelessness. “‘I’m afraid I’m about to be evicted,’ she said. ‘I’m looking for work, but nobody’s hiring, and all the agencies that help people say I need to have an actual eviction notice before they can help me.’” The above shows some of the difficulties a person threatened by homelessness can have in getting help to prevent it, where someone has to already be homeless in order to get help getting housed. At the meeting some interesting things were discussed, “Among the issues: decreased funding; a lack of mental health and other services in the community; the number of people in jails because they are homeless; and the lack of affordable housing. Institutions like hospitals and jails often discharge people to the streets or homeless shelters, and they wind up back in jail or the hospital, said Rich Munger, behavioral health supervisor at the Buncombe County Health Center. ‘It’s not deinstitutionalization,’ he said. ‘I call it transinstitutionalization. As psychiatric beds decline in hospitals, arrests increase proportionately.’”

These brief statements represent some key realities in the life of homeless people, from their incarceration for ‘crimes of homelessness’, to the cyclical institutionalization their lives may entail. If people who need care and attention are abroad alone in society, they end up back in an institution from injuries or crimes, sooner or later, the article suggests. Containing an internal representation of homelessness, the article achieves grounding in the human element of the issue which many other pieces lack.

In the Article “With Each Candle Lit, Homelessness Honored”, the author Carol Motsinger describes a candlelight vigil held in honor of the memories of homeless people who died over the course of the preceding year. In the article, Rebecca Hopkins speaks about homelessness, “We are somebody’s something” she says. During her speech, “Hopkins spoke of

how a stranger's simple kindness - a hello, a smile - would bring her so much joy when she was homeless." These are fascinating insights into the nature of homelessness, as experienced by the woman speaking. Further in the article, Pastor Joe Hoffmann comments, "'It's not something that people choose," Hoffman said of homelessness. "It's something that people fall into."

This last statement is arguable, considering the segment of the homeless population who has chosen homelessness as a way of life. This article bears both internal representations of the emotional side of the homeless experience of an individual, as well as an external generalization by a member of the general public concerning the choices of everyone who is homeless and the effect these choices had on their state of homelessness.

The piece "An Enlightened Society Treats its' Fallen Men, and Benefits", finds the author Bill Petz describing how trauma at a young age can change the brain chemistry of a child, and that one in five males in America will be abused before age 18. He writes "Left untreated, the emotional pain, reduced behavioral controls, and low self-esteem common to traumatized males often lead to substance use and for some, addiction. Criminal behavior frequently follows." This is a strong statement emphasizing the environmental factors that can lead to addiction, crime, and homelessness, though without grounding it remains a generalization. It is an external representation of one of the many unsung root causes of conditions leading to homelessness, relating unhealed trauma to other well-known, stereotypical causes of homelessness such as addiction and crime. The article could have benefitted from an example of a traumatized male whose homelessness stemmed in some way from that wounding.

Going further, Petz states "For poor or indigent men, who are often seen as the problem rather than men with problems, there are few programs of social support or affordable substance abuse treatment. Such treatment is increasingly short-term and seldom linked to related issues

such as unemployment, homelessness, illiteracy and poor fathering skills.” Here again, the reader finds a description of some of the obstacles of the homeless. In Petz’ description of the homeless as people with problems rather than problems themselves, the reader is reminded that society and the general public tends to view them as a nuisance rather than as men and women on their own paths with their own obstacles. While this piece is an impassioned cry for the healing of trauma among the homeless and others, it becomes a kind of generalized message without the inclusion of individual accounts.

In the Article “LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Comments on tragic death”, the reader learns that people are saddened and outraged by the death from exposure of Billy Cordell, a homeless man who died in Black Mountain. It serves primarily as a reminder of the very precarious position homeless people sometimes have when the temperatures drop, and by depicting the actual experiences of a homeless man who lost his life to exposure, the piece sheds light on the end of one man’s homelessness.

In “Living in a Freezer” by Barbara Blake, the author returns with her investigation of the homeless experience in Asheville,

I've got 12 blankets, and I lay them on the concrete slab, then I roll them over me," said David Wine, a Navy veteran and expert carpenter who has been sleeping under a bridge for the past year. "But the wind comes up under that bridge and blows them off, and it takes about 20 minutes to get warm again every time." It's important, he said, to always have a pair of dry socks with his belongings under the bridge. "When you're walking around all day, your feet can get sweaty, and if your socks are wet when you get still ... I always take off my shoes and socks and put the dry ones on, so I won't get frostbite," he said. Rather than complaining about the dayslong phenomenon of dangerously cold weather gripping the region, Wine preferred to look on the bright side. "It got down to 12 degrees last night, but it wasn't so bad because the wind had died down," he said earlier this week. "If it warms up to 25 at night, I'm going to feel like I'm in Miami.

In this article, Blake achieves an admirable representation of the positive spirit embodied in David Wine's bluff optimism. It is an internal representation of homelessness in that it serves as a balance to the many 'eyes-downcast, despairing' multitudes found in the backgrounds of the aforementioned films representing homelessness. This internal representation gives voice to a hopeful point of view among the indigent that is rarely described in the literature.

Blake goes further, writing about another homeless man with a balanced eye for his qualities and personal obstacles,

Charles Smith has been homeless for about 10 years and volunteers each day at A HOPE doing whatever is needed. After sleeping on porches and in abandoned houses, he now has a tent in the woods and four or five blankets, and manages to survive the nights. He confesses that he was convicted of felony drug charges in the past, meaning it's been difficult for him to find someone who will hire him for work other than construction. And there is little construction work available, to felons or anyone else. "I'm trying to be an upstanding citizen now," Smith said. But he is dogged by high blood pressure, stress and anxiety and is waiting for word on possible disability payments for his ailments. "When I get in the tent at night, I read (by flashlight) books I get from the library and listen to the radio," he said. "I'm able to stay warm; I'm comfortable, but not really, because I'm always stressed, worried that the cops are going to make me leave or that people might hurt my stuff.

Here again Blake does the representation of homelessness a justice by describing both the positive attitude and community mindedness of Charles, while also pointing out the difficulties and worry that hinder his re-entry into society. This balanced portrayal could be seen as reflective of the complexity of the individuals that make up the homeless population.

In another article by Blake, "Homeless Who Died Recalled at Memorial", the author writes about the memorial service for 26 homeless people who died over the course of 2010,

Each of the 26 was someone's brother, mother, son, father, sister or daughter. Or maybe just someone's friend. They were soldiers, sales representatives and construction workers who worked long,

hard hours. Sometimes they made the wrong choices in life, and sometimes life dealt them a brutal hand. Many of them lived, at least for a time, in perilous conditions -- under a bridge, hidden in an abandoned building, along a riverbank, finding refuge under boxes and rags, hoping to still be alive in the morning. Many of them had families, both inside and outside their lives. All of them had friends, if only others within the homeless community and the professionals in the agencies that served them. Some of them had begun to turn their lives around, finding housing and jobs and hope for their future.

Blake continues to prove that she is the most compassionate reporter covering homelessness for the Asheville Citizen-Times, by including the stories of homeless individuals in her work and describing them in human terms. In the above passage one can see a representation of homeless people who tried hard to pull their lives together despite difficult circumstances, a depiction of the hardships of homelessness, and the statement that some of them were beginning to climb out of indigency when they died. There are generalizations, but there is also the internal representation of the homeless experience in the high mortality rate depicted. Such a high number of deaths in a small town in a year informs the public of the harsh reality of homelessness' dangers.

Overall, the 29 articles in this second category tend to be much better at expressing the realities of homelessness, as they contain a greater degree of narration in which the homeless tell their own stories -- what this study has called internal representation. In the tales of Manuel Bates, Michele Freeman, Billy Cordell, David Wine, Charles Smith, Tracy Keene's "Friend" in "Preacher's Park", and the many homeless honored in the annual memorial services mentioned above, there is a trove of information relating the realities, complexities, and idiosyncrasies of the homeless population and the many paths they walk.

However, some generalizations remain even in this portion of the literature, which seem more focused on exploring the reality of homelessness than either the previous category of

articles or the films critiqued above. These generalizations include the assignation of loneliness, despair, and separation to individuals simply because they are homeless, such as in the Keene article, and Blake's tendency to describe the homeless she writes about in either tragic or semi-heroic terms. Further, there is a tension between Mumpower's article below, in which he claims the indigent should take responsibility for the personal choices that led to their homelessness, and the aforementioned statement of Hoffman claiming people do not chose homelessness. These opposed views underline two dominant generalizations of the homeless as deserving of either shame and blame, or succor and support.

Homelessness and Addiction, Crime and Mental Illness

The third category of Asheville Citizen-Times pieces investigated involves five articles related to homelessness and addiction, crime and mental illness. As the reader is aware, each of these themes has been present in many of the articles already discussed, but the articles included here are the most relevant to the category. The following is a selection of articles representative of this 'kind of news', though much smaller than the previous two categories.

In "Homeless a Big Challenge for Mental Health Care Advocates[,] Unpredictability makes displaced hard to treat", by Leslie Boyd, the author tells us the story of Bill Perry,

Bill Perry was 14 when he discovered alcohol made him feel better. A couple of drinks and he was less anxious, less fidgety and he fit in better with his peers. As the years went on, Perry drank more and more to feel better. The alcohol affected the choices he made, and finally after two failed marriages, he landed on the street, where he spent the better part of a year. "I was definitely self-medicating," said Perry, who has been diagnosed with anxiety disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. "When my mother and my son died within a month of each other, I jumped into a bottle of Jack Daniel's for about four months."

In this passage, Perry's inability to acquire medication for his mental illness is said to have led to his "self-medicating" with alcohol. Since Perry is a Vietnam veteran, he was able to get help, but

the article points out that many with mental health issues are not veterans – and these people are not getting the care they need. Kristen Jaeger, “director of a federally funded program at New Vistas that reaches out to homeless people who have a mental illness”, put it simply, ““We're seeing homeless people discharged onto the street because there's no discharge plan for them,” Jaeger said. "They go from the hospital to a box behind Ingles.””

The obvious ramifications of this article show a dearth of services meant to help homeless people requiring consistent mental health care to get to their appointments and take their medicines as proscribed. This article is representative of a small number of homeless people, as many are capable of getting around and following schedules, yet it is an accurate assessment of a need. For people who do not get treatment for their mental illnesses, their situation often worsens, “People with untreated mental illness often resort to alcohol or street drugs to self-medicate, as Perry did. As the addiction takes hold, they often can't hold a job, relationships fall apart and people land on the street, where the mere fact that they are homeless exacerbates their mental illness, Thomas said.” This is a generalized statement, yet it holds true for a segment of the homeless population. It is represented here that homelessness can be caused by untreated mental illnesses leading to addiction leading to the street. There is internal representation in which the experiences of a homeless person are described, but also an external depiction of homeless people as incapable of attending to their own affairs, in general.

In the article “False Report May Lead To Fine”, Adam Behsudi writes about a man who wandered away from an adult care home and was gone ten days before he was reported missing,

North Carolina is recommending fines against an adult home care center after deciding staff there failed to properly supervise a man later found slain under the Smoky Park Bridge. James Lovin, 47, was stabbed and beaten to death Jan. 28. Police charged two homeless men, accusing them of killing Lovin in a dispute over a camping spot under the bridge. Lovin had been in and out of

homelessness for years but had been staying at Unit 6 of Sunrise Family Care Homes on Hornot Circle shortly before his death.

This article reflects the bleak end of a man who had been in and out of homelessness, someone who was supposed to be receiving treatment for his alcoholism but who was allowed to leave supervision for ten days without anyone noticing. The negligence of the staff of the facility is suggestive of the kinds of resources some formerly homeless people have at their disposal, their only tools for staying off the streets. That two homeless men were charged with murdering the man for a spot underneath a bridge carries its own associative weight, producing a shockingly negative representation of homeless people. The influence of this one example of the criminal homeless among all of the articles so far examined is worth noting, as such a piece reinforces negative stereotypes of the homeless even though it is a representation of only two homeless men. Nevertheless, it is an internal representation of homelessness.

Finally, in the piece “Getting a Return on Investment”, the author Norman Hoffman writes that treating addictions to drugs and alcohol give the taxpayer a 7-1 return on every dollar invested, as opposed to dealing with the consequences of ongoing addictions such as crime and homelessness. “The Mountain Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence collected some data a few years ago that looked at treatment availability and other changes during the same period. The number of addiction treatment providers had dropped almost 70 percent, but incarcerations went up more than 25 percent and the number of people on probation or parole went up more than 50 percent. Chronic homelessness increased more than 40 percent.”

These statistics show an inevitable association among the decreasing numbers of addiction treatment providers and the rising level of homelessness. The assumption is that with more providers there might be less homeless people. There is no mention of the other factors that may have played into the rise of homelessness that year, so the reader is left to suppose that for

every 1.75% of the region's addiction treatment providers that close down, there is a 1% increase in the number of homeless people. This kind of article is far-removed from the experiences of the homeless, being an oblique, external representation.

Overall, this category of articles shows homeless people as incapable of caring for and healing themselves. From Lovin, who wandered away from his adult care home and was beaten to death under a bridge, to Jaeger's nameless homeless person going from the hospital to "...a box behind Ingles", to the diminishment of addiction services and the subsequent rise in homelessness, these three pieces frame an image of homeless people as helplessly addicted and doomed without increased aid. These seem to be primarily external representations of homelessness, for though the experiences of two homeless persons were examined, their experiences became a generalized projection onto the homeless population at large.

Homelessness and Veterans

The fourth category is composed of five articles relating news about homeless veterans. In "Homeless Vets Find Hope at Home", Paul Clark talks about the Veterans' Restoration Quarters,

Travis Robinson was headed for the streets when he heard about the Veterans Restoration Quarters. It may have saved his life, he believes. For months, he'd been having nightmares about his time in Iraq. Enemy fire and bombings were constant for the 37th Engineer Battalion as it set up support in hostile territory for soldiers coming from the rear. At home at his parents' house in Rutherford County, he'd wake up with a shotgun beside him. He was drinking, heavily. Because of it, his parents gave him a timetable for getting out of the house. He sought treatment at the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville, where he learned about the Veterans' Restoration Quarters, an old Super 8 motel on Tunnel Road that Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministry had made into housing for homeless vets.

In the above passage, one gets a feeling for the experiences of an individual veteran, whose traumatic memories of war were leading him to homelessness. He is not the only person suffering such a malady, either, as the article points out, “Right now, the number of homeless male and female Vietnam-era veterans is greater than the number of service persons who died in the war.” The article describes the individual experience of another veteran to drive the point home,

Willie Baskerville, 56, knows the feeling. A platoon sergeant in Vietnam, charged with freeing prisoners being held by the Vietcong, he launched a missile into a village one day and discovered the people he killed were actually women and children. "I had a hard time getting over that," Baskerville said. He started drinking and using drugs, but still, “when I woke up in the morning, the first thing I'd see was that round going down range” into the village, he said. His behavior made him homeless, for a long time. In Asheville, he slept on church steps, in shelters when it was cold and in woods behind Mission Hospitals when it wasn't.

In the above passage Baskerville's experience seems similar to Robinson's; both men suffer from trauma acquired while serving America in war, an experience that led them to homelessness. This article is an internal representation of the complexities of individual indigency and it depicts a way that veterans in the process of self-medicating trauma end up homeless.

In the article “Homeless Who Died Recalled at Memorial”, Barbara Blake writes about one of the homeless women who died in the year prior to the memorial,

Angela Hart was murdered at age 45, a victim of domestic violence as she was working her way through Steadfast House, ABCCM's transitional home for women and children. A U.S. Army veteran, serving from 1982-94, she was a woman "with a kind, gentle spirit who spoke softly with little to say," said Steadfast House director Meredith Hammond. "She was determined to beat the odds and wanted much more in life than the circumstances of homelessness," Hammond said. "I can't really say what the struggles were that led her to homelessness, but while she was with

us she made the necessary changes to help herself be successful. We were blessed to have known Angela, and she will be truly missed."

In the above passage, the reader is given a vision of a quiet, resolved woman who served her country for eleven years before ending up houseless, and eventually was murdered in a case of domestic violence. This is another bleak depiction of the atmosphere surrounding homelessness, similar to the article regarding James Lovin mentioned above, and the fact that she was a veteran of 11 years who was homeless and dead by 45 calls many things into question. Was there undiagnosed mental illness involved? Why was she killed? What kind of relationship ends in the murder of one of the people involved? These dark questions become for the reader parts of the mystery surrounding homelessness.

Being an internal representation of a homeless veteran who died while trying to improve her circumstances, this piece is a portrayal of homelessness that does justice to the dangers inherent in the environments and relationships of the homeless experience. However, as a piece of news that portrays the deadly side of homelessness, it is a powerful force. Along with the two homeless men who killed Lovin discussed above, the person who murdered Angela with their actions cast a shadow over a score of homeless people who would never harm a fly.

In the article "Summit in Asheville Focuses on Homeless Veterans", the author Sandra V. Rodriguez describes a conference intended to reduce in number the 210 homeless veterans in Asheville. She writes, "It wasn't drugs or alcohol that pushed Raymond Curtis into homelessness. Curtis, a 45-year-old veteran and single father of two, lost his job shortly after undergoing a heart transplant in 2006. He spent two years without a job, drifting from here to Florida to South Carolina, "wondering whether I was going to live or die." "I had no

expectations," Curtis said. "All I wanted was to get back on my feet, and I wanted to go to work."

In the above passage it is clear that Curtis, a homeless veteran, did not suffer from the same kind of affliction that forged Baskerville's and Robinson's homelessness; rather, as Curtis puts it, "'I had to take a really hard look at myself," Curtis said. "I didn't have an alcohol problem. I didn't have a drug problem. I had a personality problem.'"

Thus he sums up his experience, and the article stands as a portrayal of an alternative kind of root cause for indigency among veterans, though the cause is abstract. Nevertheless, it is an internal representation of homelessness and valuable as such.

The final article in this category, "Making Victims out of Warriors" by Asheville City Council member Carl Mumpower, is a call to arms against what the author sees as the most dangerous place for a soldier, "...Not a battlefield...[but] a psychiatrist couch." He writes that throwing pharmaceuticals at veterans struggling with post traumatic stress disorder only enhances the problems, allowing them "...to hide, fester, and solidify." He makes it clear that he believes the choice of self-medicating mental illness to be a bad one, yet he also cries out against taking pills to deal with inner problems, ultimately suggesting that veterans with P.T.S.D. and other disorders should "...share with people who understand". He underlines his views on homeless veterans as follows,

Creating entitlement attitudes and accountability passes for trauma victims is a terrible disservice. Though circumstances certainly have impact, a loving culture should never overlook the choices undergirding alcoholism, homelessness, mental illness and most other dysfunctions. Personal healing is impossible without personal responsibility.

This last statement of Mumpower's, as mentioned previously, seems to suggest that while circumstances have an impact, homelessness is a matter of personal choice. This is an external

representation of the complexities of homelessness, as some people who become homeless have no choice in the matter and Mumpower seems to be generalizing.

In sum, this category of articles contains representations of homeless veterans and the origins of their homelessness, be they mental illness and P.T.S.D. as with Baskerville and Robinson, or a “personality problem” as with Curtis. There is also a representation of the dangerous nature of the homeless environment, as exemplified in the story of Angela. Finally, Mumpower’s article seems to portray homelessness as the homeless person’s fault. All told, two of the above articles are internal representations, and the last is external.

Homelessness in the Asheville Citizen-Times

After examining the contents of each category of articles related to homelessness, taken from the past five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times, a number of trends have been discovered. In those articles in the category covering homeless services and organizations, the homeless are stereotyped as a population of people all in desperate need. Homeless people are generalized as “needy victims” and are talked *about* rather than talked *to*. This last fact is evidence by the disparity between service providers quoted and homeless people quoted, within the collection. There is a trend to generalize the homeless population and block them together en masse as disadvantaged sufferers, the “downtrodden” of minimal achievement, assigned alienation, despair, and the requirement of earning dignity. It is also represented in this category that Asheville is a good place to be homeless. This category consists almost entirely of external representations of homelessness.

In those articles in the second category covering the homeless experience, the representation of the realities of homelessness is much truer to life, as they consist to a greater degree than the first category of homeless people telling their own stories – of internal

representations. In the tales of Manuel Bates, Michele Freeman, Billy Cordell, David Wine, Charles Smith, Tracy Keene's "Friend" in "Preacher's Park", and the many homeless honored in the two annual memorials services, there is an abundance of information connecting the obstacles, intricacies, and eccentricities of the homeless population and the many paths they walk. This trend of representation is person-based, and thus internal, leading to a greater variety of information and shedding light on many versions of individual homelessness. The articles making up the third category, homelessness and addiction, crime, and mental illness, homeless people are portrayed as essentially incapable of caring or healing themselves, or weaning themselves off of addictions. These articles were primarily external, though internal representation was also present as supporting evidence for the articles' claims. In the fourth set of pieces on homelessness and veterans, the reader is given representation of mental illness and "personality problems" leading to homelessness among veterans, while also being told that homelessness and continued reliance on pills among veterans is a "personal choice." Two of these articles were internal representations, and one article was an external representation.

The four groups of items covering homelessness in the Asheville Citizen-Times from 2006-2011 are a mixed bag of internal and external representations, and it seems as if the external portrayals tend toward generalization while the internal depictions are inherently individualistic. With the above trends uncovered, a summary of the trends of homelessness depictions follows.

Summary of Representations

Homelessness in America is represented in many ways, from popular films to local newspapers. In popular American films from 1980-2009 a groundswell has occurred in relation to inclusions of homelessness, and many depictions of homeless people exist, from the

wandering hero to the social miscreant, from the musical prodigy to the heroin addict, the crazed professor and others; the regularity of the depiction of homelessness in film implies it is a powerful archetype of American culture, with connotations of everything from failure to freedom. In the Asheville Citizen-Times, the homeless are portrayed as helpless victims in need of intensive attention and aid, as veterans suffering from mental illness who can't keep it together, as addicts and the mentally ill who cannot take care of themselves.— an oversimplification of a diverse demographic with multiple causes behind their individual homelessness. However, also in the Citizen-Times one finds a good number of examples of individual homelessness experiences being told, complete with their complex circumstances and their human element. These internal representations provide an alternative to the generalizations sometimes found in the other types of stories about homelessness discussed previously.

Ultimately, to compile internal stories of indigency against which to compare the above trends in film and newspaper, one must go to those experiencing homelessness and find out about their lives from them. Equipped with the above trends in the representation of homelessness in film and the Asheville Citizen-Times, this study will now progress into its examination of ten interviews of people experiencing homelessness, and compare and contrast their stories with the representations found thus far.

Homeless People on Homelessness

The first step in comparing the stories of individuals to those manufactured for entertainment and the dissemination of information is to introduce those individuals and describe their lives. Before entering this section, it is important to recognize the researcher's own possible biases and the inherently subjective terms on which the researcher met these individuals. The researcher is the product of his experience, and much of that has been within the confines of American culture, facets of which were critiqued above. While subjectivity is difficult if not impossible to escape, the researcher strove toward objectivity in recording and reporting the lives of these men and women. This segment of the study serves a dual purpose, as both a series of internal representations of homelessness against which to compare the dominant trends found above, and as a platform providing for the possibility of the self-representation of homeless people for its own sake.

The interviewees participated in a voluntary research process described in detail in Appendix A. That each individual who shared his or her story volunteered for the process may have filtered the population being represented; however, the incentive to self-represent and tell the story of one's life was a significant attractor for each of the individuals involved, in their own words. Hence those who volunteered for the process shared the attribute of desiring to portray or depict themselves. This desire to depict homelessness for others aligns these ten indigent people with the assumed desires of those producing the films and articles above: to portray the homeless experience.

It should be noted that these self-representations are, as with the movies and articles above, stories told about homelessness: there was no effort made to verify the details related during the interview. The stories are the internal, self-representations of homeless people,

reflective of their lives but also of their own individual biases and the interpretations of their experiences. All of the people interviewed have lived the majority of their lives within America, and thus been consumers of its culture. Concordantly their perceptions of homelessness may have been influenced by the cultural representation of homelessness discussed above. It is the argument of this paper, however, that the stories these homeless people tell about themselves differ greatly from the portrayals of homeless people in the media discussed previously, and that this difference is important when trying to understand homelessness and how it is perceived.

Jesse

Keith Jesse Anderson is a gregarious man, quick to smile and tell a joke. He had just gotten out of jail after 83 days. The charges – which were false according to him – were dropped, and while he was behind bars all of his possessions were thrown away. “...my philosophy is this, what I was explaining to this youngster I was hanging out with last night, a lot of people are like, ‘how do you not become bitter?’ and this and that and I’m like look, if I become that way I allow what other people do [to] change me...I’m not letting them win.” (Anderson 3).

44 years of age, Anderson was born in Bloomington, Indiana in 1967. He was adopted by a wealthy family, and then kicked out at the age of 13 for stealing “\$16,000” (Anderson 2) from his adoptive father. By fourteen he was “a full-blown alcoholic, and a father at fifteen”, yet despite this he finished high school. He got in trouble with the law at 17 and was charged as an adult for commercial burglary. This would be the first of several visits to penitentiaries over the course of his 30 years of episodic homelessness. At four of these penitentiaries, Anderson, who prefers to be called Jesse, got four different G.E.D.’s. When he was 25 he met his biological father for the first time, in a jail. He said, “Damn, you look familiar!” And his father replied “You do too!” (Anderson 1).

His life “spiraled down” after the first arrest, only to bounce back again and again. He was married three times, and in the nineties he was a program administrator for Motorola making \$85,000 a year. This is when he made a mistake, he says, marrying a lawyer who took everything in the subsequent divorce. He moved around a lot, and eventually made his way to Asheville for the first time in 2008, on the recommendation of another homeless man he’d met in Florida.

Jesse had a heart attack when he was 35. He has chronic deterioration of the heart arteries. He would work at anything, but his back was broken six years ago when he was blindsided by a two by four and knocked from the second story of a building onto concrete. He has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, intermittent explosive disorder, and borderline personality disorder. When one talks to him, none of these things are readily apparent.

Jesse is the kind of man who will give the Desert Storm shirt off his back to a veteran who asks for it, but will also break the jaw of a boss who gets “mouthy.” He is the kind of man who has a lawyer watching his dog “Trucker” back in Fresno, who makes signs that do not simply ask for help, but read “Ninjas stole family! Need money for kung fu lessons!” He related each of these incidents over the course of the interview. He is, in sum, an individual with complex problems but also many virtues.

Jesse wants to get out of Asheville, away from what he sees as a repressive judicial system, and back to Fresno, where his best memory since he became homeless was born. “When I was leaving I made a big sign that said me and my dog Trucker thank you everyone for your help, god bless you, this and that. I found out from a friend of mine that sign, I mean it was a big sign like this, I had it up against where I used to sit every day with my dog, it stayed there for two weeks after I left. And, I mean I had people come up from the courthouse...[they] hugged

me, one lady cried, Cindy, sweetheart, um, you know, and, that night I drank with some friends of mine, homeless people, about a dozen of us sat around and they were like god we are gonna miss you so much...it was like family.” (Anderson 9).

That his best memory is one of community support and love, a feeling of family at his farewell gathering, says a lot about Jesse.

Mark

Mark Twain Dockery grew up in the mountains, following his father and his “motorcycle gang” from county to county, living what he called the “street life”(Dockery 1). He is a happy man with a curious gaze and energy, quick to start up a conversation and friendly. When asked for memories of childhood, he talks about “laughing at a serial killer” and scaring off a “boogie man” who had broken into his family’s home and stood furiously smoking a cigarette in the dark.

Mark calls himself a “Serial Thinker”, and ever since he got out of prison in 2008, where he spent twenty-four years for “gangbanging”, he has been happily camping out in the woods near Hot Springs. He seems to love the wilderness, and was excited to relate his joy at walking out in a “hurricane” the night before the interview, looking for other people “laughing at the hurricane” (Dockery 2). His friendliness and love of the outdoors could be related to the 19 years of his prison sentence which he served in solitary confinement.

Mark, who was born in Asheville in 1967, was kicked out of Erwin Middle School when he was 15, because he wouldn’t do the work. He moved in with his cousin, got in trouble with the law, and spent a long time in prison. Now that he’s out, he speaks of walking down the railroad tracks picking up trash, and his best memory since he became homeless is the peace of sleeping by the river at night. He tells of times he’s gone walking, looking for people to help in some way.

When asked if he and the interviewer sitting together talking helped them understand each other, he replied “Ok, if you want to understand me, look in Leviathan, ‘He beholds all high things of god’, and there’s a rock and roll group out there and the...singer’s got a set of eyes that look like a wise owl, and he got kinda like long hair and some Christians say that Jesus don’t like long hair and this guys hair was shorter than Jesus’ was, he stand there and you look through those dark glasses that he’s got on, and you imagine Jesus in the city learning wisdom like an owl of wisdom you know it’s like a wise owl, the one that bites the lollypop, and you kinda imagine you know this dudes pretty technical he might know about things.” (Dockery 5).

Mark is a man with a lot on his mind, and a readiness to share it. He is also someone who believes himself to be evil, who believes society looks at homeless people as “Lower class, no good, down and out, dirty, cussing girls out, people going around messing with their lives. I mean our life is lower...why mess with a higher-class life?” (Dockery 8).

At the end of the interview, Mark told a story, “I’d like to tell the story of a man who was raised in a little cage and wasn’t ever given nothing but food, no words or nothing but he had dreams and he started making sounds because he wanted to form some kind of language even if it was like you know a rat’s language...and he learned and he finally just told those people look yall, yall lost everything you had because you was evil.” (Dockery 10).

Mark has had a difficult life by most standards, yet he seems content.

Arthur

“Arthur” didn’t want to remain anonymous when asked. He simply gave a fake name. He had a look of concentrated thinking on his face and he ground his teeth periodically throughout the interview. Born in 1969 in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Arthur was raised as a strict Catholic by his father.

School was tough for Arthur, full of kids who, according to him, "...didn't like the way I smelled" and were mean to him because their uniforms were "better" than his. After repeating the ninth grade three times, he left high school and got his G.E.D. The first time Arthur experienced homelessness, he was living in an elderly high rise in Lake Charles and was asked to leave because "They were bothering me so bad I raised some hell, and got evicted." When asked how he was being bothered, he replied "This guy in the apartment down the hall would walk...up and down the hall clicking his dentures ...and then one day I screamed and I lost it and screamed and beat my hand on the door." (Arthur 5)

After being evicted Arthur headed to New York looking for a Franciscan monastery he had heard about that helped homeless men. He was unable to find it, and ended up spending two years in three different psychiatric hospitals in and around New York City. He said that he heard his father's voice in his head often.

Arthur has been homeless since he was released from Bronx Psychiatric in 2008. He came to Asheville about a month before the interview. When asked what homelessness is like, he replied "...Unendless observance of a frier where they fry French fries in a fast food store, like watching french fries fry." (Arthur 9)

John

John Farthing was born in Orlando, Florida, to a father in the air force and a mother who was legally blind. He had a "multicultural" upbringing in East Tennessee, with Peurto Ricans, Jamaicans, and other ethnicities sharing his neighborhood. In school, he was "fortunate" (Farthing 2), because there were great teachers. He dropped out of high school a month before his 17th birthday, got his G.E.D. at 18, and enlisted in the Navy.

He only remained in service for a short time, however, as his stated disdain for authority overcame any desire he had to remain. He got out, was a painter, worked at a lumber mill, and in the restaurant business. He had a “near-nervous breakdown” after his mother died, and his “toxic relationship” drove him to high stress (Farthing 8). He stopped sleeping and started drinking too much. He began to believe he was hallucinating, and having memory lapses (Farthing 9).

Finally, he said, he couldn’t deal with it all anymore. He took a tent and went and lived in the woods for a year. “...my idea was to put my psyche back together and get back to being who I was.” He brought along books he read as a teenager, trying to get back to his essential self (Farthing 10).

According to him, he got what he needed, coming out of the woods and eventually marrying. But when the economy slumped, their housing became tenuous. John’s wife had some women from church offer to help her, but only on the condition that he left. So he left.

John’s best memory of homelessness recalls “camping in the forest lots of interesting things, like listening to the crows in the morning, they had their little discussion about their plan for the day I swear to god” (Farthing 17), and a family of raccoons that often approached him for a shared meal.

Chris

Christopher Chiaromonte was born in Philadelphia in 1955. He is a friendly, dignified, and conscientious man who has friends in all sectors of society, and he receives a lot of attention for both his garb and his decisions to live counter to the dominant paradigms of American society. His single blond dreadlock is large and curves back over his head like a helmet, and his red robe similar to a monk’s is festooned with dozens of buttons. He lives in a tent on private land where he is allowed by the owners to reside (Chiaromonte 2).

Chris was raised by a father who was a vet and a mother in the civil service. Chris was an average student until the ninth grade, he says, when prayer and motivation helped him pull his grades up to the top. He has had seven years of college in different fields, but never earned a degree. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, and then was a fireman in Florida, a private investigator, he laborer on boats, and he worked in "...the oil fields" (Chiaromonte 2). In addition, he says he has worked for Ringling Bros for a year, and he worked with thoroughbred horses for five years.

Chris is a man who's done and seen a lot. Currently, his main interest is "following what the lord wants me to do." (Chiaromonte 2). He had a personal epiphany after the events of 9/11 and went into the woods with the intent of not coming out the same, what he termed "The dark night of the soul". (Chiaromonte 3).

It was following this calling that led Chris to move into his tent in the woods 11 years ago by choice. And it is there he has remained since, ministering to other homeless people and passing his days. He has run for city council, and he often voices his opinion in ways other than raising his voice. His appearance alone has attracted a lot of attention, and he was named by the Asheville Mountain Xpress newspaper to be the area's "2nd hippest person" (Chiaromonte 4).

Tony

When one meets "Tony" it is not obvious that he is homeless. Born in Miami, Florida in 1982, Tony moved to Asheville as a boy with his mother and two sisters. He never knew his father. When he was 14, his step-father and he got into a fight. DSS proceeded to tell his mother that she had to choose between her husband and her son. As Tony tells it, she chose her husband.

Tony was placed in DSS custody, but fortunately received a scholarship to go to Christ School at the same time, an all-boys boarding school. He did well and graduated, spending his

summers with a “redneckish” (Tony 2) family in the country. When he graduated, he was suddenly and abruptly on his own, and felt “pressured into joining the military” (Tony 2) to keep his life on track.

It was when he was stationed in Japan that he smoked some marijuana and got caught. He was chastised and “made an example of” by his commanding officer (Tony 3). He was discharged and ended up in Arizona. He got a job doing molding restoration, but got laid off not long after as the economy slumped. He called his sister in Asheville, and got a job through her at a local plant. He got laid off there as well, and “that’s when the trouble started.” (Tony 3).

Tony likes to read and write. He has a son that was taken away from him, that he is working hard to get back. Like many people on the streets, Tony has been confronted with difficult obstacles which, compounded with economic realities and his lack of familial support, have led to his current homelessness.

Bill

“Bill” was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1958. His father was an electrician at the Kennedy Space Center, and his mother worked in a convenience store. His father was a “functional alcoholic”, and he occasionally abused his mother (Bill1). Bill dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, the victim of what he saw as peer-pressure from two groups of his peers. As he claims, he was a hippie that played football, and so he was torn between the “potheads” and the “rednecks” (Bill 2). He got his electrician’s certification, and worked all over the country, becoming addicted to traveling to new states and meeting different people. He started drinking at 28 and it became a problem. He started “...slipping at work, missing things I shouldn’t have missed” (Bill 3). By the time he was forty he had moved back to Florida and he was operating a fork lift at the port.

But he was still drinking. He realized his drinking on the job was dangerous, so he decided to quit “before I did something I would regret for the rest of my life” (Bill 4). The next day as he was coming back from lunch, he climbed up the tire to get back in the fork lift and woke up on the ground. He’d had a seizure from his body’s need for alcohol. Without detox medication, his body had been unable to cope with its absence (Bill 4).

He stopped drinking and got back on the job. But six months later he was drinking again. He tried to stop again. This time when he had his seizure, he was at home locked inside his house, and no one got to him for fourteen hours. When they found him, serious damage had been done to his brain and his arm, causing a heart attack, and he was taken to a nursing home. He stayed there for months while they rehabilitated him, teaching him to walk, talk, and balance again (Bill 5).

He was still recovering from this, living with his mother, when her landlord raised the rent on the lot her trailer rested on. Rather than be a burden, Bill packed his things and left, and by choice he became homeless.

Jan

Jan Hunnicutt is a sweet woman whose age is belied by her shining eyes and ready smile. Born in Asheville, North Carolina in 1945, her father was a watch repair man and a policeman, and she remembers having a good childhood (Hunnicutt 1). She was bored in school and graduated from high school to go to work for an insurance company. She married, and her husband, an engineer in the off-shore oil business, moved them to Abu Dhabi where they stayed long enough for Jan to get to know the local culture (Hunnicutt 2).

She describes the complex series of health issues that led to her present homelessness. It started with a swollen ankle, which she took to get examined at the hospital. She blacked out

while showing her foot, and when she came too, it turned out that “a meteor shower of tiny blood clots had burst and started bleeding inside my organs.” (Hunnicut 4).

She was diagnosed with severe osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, and she has since had 21 fractures (Hunnicut 4). She was living in Hillcrest, a public housing project, and “I lost my house, because that’s when I started breaking bones, and I couldn’t work anymore, and they foreclosed on my house. I managed to get enough money out of it that I could buy a trailer, and I moved in there, but then I...fractured my back...and I sold my trailer and started renting from a guy...and I had a check bounce. And he evicted me.” (Hunnicut 4).

Jan is called mom by many of the homeless people she now interacts with and supports at the shelter and the various other service providers she visits. She has a position of respect within the community she inhabits. She believes she could get public housing if she applied for it, and thus considers her homelessness a matter of personal choice. She explains that this is because she has a plan. She wants to get into Woodridge apartments – because she “likes the inside of them” – and start up a Braille transcription business, so she can be her own boss (Hunnicut 5).

James

James Gambrell looks younger than he is, wearing his hair in a loose pony tail and carrying a guitar with him everywhere he goes. Born in San Diego, California in 1962, James was the son of a father in the Special Forces and a mother “...into Wicca” (Gambrell 1).

He has since become estranged from both his parents, as his father was described as a “vicious individual” (Gambrell 1) and the last time he saw his mother she was spending all of her money on cocaine in Orlando, Florida (Gambrell 1).

He dropped out of school in the ninth grade, was in the navy for four years, and then he went on what he calls the “irresponsible tour, and I did that for a hell of a long time, back and forth coast to coast, coast to coast.” (Gambrell 2).

One day, after he had been doing this for many years, he realized he was homeless. It had just been traveling until he realized he had been stationary for fifteen years in Greenville, South Carolina (Gambrell 2).

James doesn't think homelessness is that bad. “...I'm not a murderer, I'm not a drug seller, I'm not a manipulator or abuser, I'm not a wolf....so what, so you don't have a roof over your head? Go camp out!” (Gambrell 2).

His best memories of homelessness come from all the people he meets playing his guitar on the streets. He enjoys the community-oriented elements of his lifestyle (Gambrell 4).

Matt

“Matt” was born in Roanoke, Virginia in 1953. He seems like a quiet man until one engages him, at which point his natural friendliness and goodwill become apparent. His dad was a “functional alcoholic” and his mother was a “workaholic”, but he remembers them both as being “really good people” (Matt 1).

The story of Matt's life begins, in his own telling, with music. He described his childhood as the transition from The Beatles to Jimi Hendrix and how his music changed over the course of that transition. He had a band in high school, and he graduated and went to college at the University of Virginia. But it was what he called a “party school”, and he didn't make it through (Matt 2).

He fell in love, moved back to Roanoke, and started attending a technical college for music and psychology. He worked at gas stations, in factories, and other “menial jobs, humble

jobs.” (Matt 3). His father died, and eventually Matt’s alcoholism got in the way of his work and he lost his job.

From 2005-on he has been homeless, and he arrived in Asheville three months ago. He said the hardest thing about being homeless was the initial adjustment, the shock of the situation. Over time, he said, one adjusts to a certain extent. But, “...you never completely adjust.” (Matt 4).

The last thing he wished to say to the public about homelessness was telling, “...those who live in glass houses should not throw rocks.” (Matt 6).

Analysis of Interview Responses

Of the ten people experiencing homelessness in Asheville, described above, only Mark and Jan were originally from Asheville. All but two were in their forties or fifties, with Tony at 29 and Jan at 66. Four – Chris, James, John, and Matt – had fathers in the military. Matt and Bill had fathers who were “functional alcoholics”; and Jesse, Mark, John, and Tony had fathers who were absent, a criminal, a “tax rat”, and who left when he was four, respectively – representing a lack of stable family life among these men.

Mark, Arthur, John, Bill, and James did not finish High School, while Chris and Matt attended some college but never completed a degree. With the exception of Mark, who spent almost his entire adult life in prison, all of the interviewees had multiple jobs – many of them interesting and highly paid positions. Four of the men were veterans who had served in America’s armed forces.

The people interviewed displayed a range of interests, from Jesse’s desire to keep his humor and optimism alive, to Mark’s wanting to help people, to Arthur’s interest in political science and sociology. John loved to draw and paint, write and read, and Tony enjoyed writing

and reading as well. Chris followed what he interpreted as god's plan for him, while Bill caught the travel bug at an early age. James and Matt shared an interest in music, and Jan wanted to get into Braille transcription.

The causes of their individual homelessness varied widely. Jesse was made homeless when his adoptive family kicked him out at 13. Mark became homeless when he got out of prison after serving a sentence of over half his life, and he claims to enjoy being outside after so long inside. Arthur first became homeless when he was evicted from an apartment in his hometown for having a mental breakdown. John chose his first homelessness in hope of putting together his damaged psyche. Chris chose homelessness so that he could better minister to the homeless, the result of a personal epiphany. Tony had money trouble, and got evicted. Bill tried to stop drinking, but had two seizures, the second of which caused serious damage, and he became homeless to refrain from burdening his mother. Jan started breaking bones so often she couldn't work, and was evicted, but says her homelessness is by choice since she could get public housing if she wanted to. James started traveling around the country and never stopped. Matt let drinking get in the way of work, then when things spiraled down, he drank more, and found himself homeless.

In the above origins of homelessness among the interviewees, Mark, John, Chris, Bill, Jan, and James became or remain homeless by choice. For Mark, it was being free of the confines of anything resembling his prison cell, for John it was a need to get away from it all, for Chris it was part of a spiritual journey, for Bill it was a way to ease his mother's burden, for Jan it is holding out for a plan, and for James it was a journey that never ended. Some of these geneses of indigency seem noble, and it is interesting that such choices are rarely presented in American popular films or newspaper articles.

All of those interviewed described a diversity of opinions on the causes leading people to homelessness, from addiction and crime to mental illness, the economy, poor choices or investments, a lack of family support, divorce, and other causes. Further, all of the interviewees recognized that there is a segment of the homeless population that wants to be homeless, though the percentage of the total homeless population who decided to be homeless varied from John's "very few" to Chris' 30-40%. Regarding the 60% self-reported rate of chosen homelessness among individuals interviewed for this study, Chris' estimate was closest.

Similarly, the interviewees' views of the proportions of mental illness among the homeless population varied widely, from Arthur's "All of them", Jan's "the majority", and Tony's "80%", to Chris "30%" and Matt's "40%". Regarding the 50% self-reported mental illness rate among the interviewees themselves, Matt's estimate was closest.

When asked if they had ever spent time in a large homeless camp, only one, James, had been in one and he said it was incredibly dangerous. The rest had camped out in a tent before, but never as part of a larger gathering of tents. None of those asked about staying in shelters had good things to say about them. Jesse, Chris, Tony, James, and Matt were all emphatically against the shelters they had stayed in, due primarily to the negative attitude they remembered displayed by the staff, calling it "unchristian" (Chiaromonte) and describing seeing a woman and child turned away in the rain (Tony).

When asked how the police view homeless people, the answers were generally the same: "I think they see evil" (Mark); "Police hate 'em" (Arthur); "[do they profile?] oh hell yeah" (John); "I know the homeless are targeted" (Chris); "As a problem" (Tony); "You know the answer to that...this is a tourist town" (Bill); "They harass them all the time" (Jan); "We're [the police] big people, like god, you're little people" (James); "Not all of them but a good part of

them tend to target homeless people” (Matt). All of those interviewed had had problems with the law, other than John, but many of those problems were crimes of homelessness such as trespassing and public drinking.

Only two, Chris and Bill, reported having had negative encounters with the general public, being told to “get a job” and being treated poorly, respectively. However, when asked how the general public viewed homeless people, the answers were again quite similar to each other: Jesse saw an overwhelmingly negative view of homelessness in the general public; Mark said “No good, lower class, down and out, dirty...”; John thought the public perception was full of generalizations and naiveté; Chris believed the perception of the homeless was that of a threat; Tony said there are people who look at homeless people in disgust; Bill said “They don’t like them”; Jan said “People have the idea that all homeless people are drunks or drug addicts or perverted”; James thought the public sees “The scum of the earth”; and Matt saw “Part of them degrading homeless people or smirking at them”. Here we find an overwhelming idea that the general public is afraid of and dislikes homeless people.

The interviewees’ best memories were another interesting connection among the individuals. Jesse, Arthur, Tony, Jan, James, Chris, and Matt all record either a feeling of community and family among themselves and their friends, or the kindnesses shown them by strangers, as their best memories of homelessness. Mark, John, and Bill each recall moments of intense communion with nature as their best memories of homelessness.

Their worst memories of homelessness were more varied, from physical violence to a bear attack to a trespassing ticket to just wanting to do something fun and not being able to. The initial adjustment to being homeless was hard for some as well.

There were four men who had a history of alcoholism. Seven of the ten interviewees had a mental or physical disability, and two of them had both mental and physical disabilities.

All of the individuals interviewed were neat looking, clean and well groomed. Their clothes were generally worn but clean. They were all polite, well spoken, and intelligent. Many had achieved significant and interesting things with their lives.

Taking these individual lives into account, this paper will now compare the representations of homelessness presented in popular film and the Asheville Citizen-Times to the stories of people experiencing homelessness in Asheville, North Carolina.

External and Internal Depictions of Homelessness

The trends in representing the homeless in American popular film and the Asheville Citizen-Times are as follows. In the films reviewed above containing representations of homelessness, the trends noted were fairly consistent. There was a definite separation between the homeless protagonist, who was often equipped with exceptional qualities allowing him to get off the streets, and the homeless extras, who were portrayed in stereotypical fashion as begrimed, raggedly attired, drug-addicted drunks fighting and passing out on the dark streets through which the hero passed.

This trend of representation, repeated in five of the seven films, implies that the majority of homeless people are addicts and criminals, and only a few have positive qualities. It insinuates that homeless people are, on average, poorly dressed and dirty. It suggests that the few who are not dirty are either war heroes or highly intelligent in some way, in some sense exceptional. What's more, it was implied that all such exceptional homeless people were males.

The majority of films insinuated that a significant portion of the homeless population were mentally ill. The movies contained many references to drugs and alcohol among the

homeless. The films also represented numerous examples of homeless people with criminal tendencies, a certain moral degeneracy. Also, the movies portrayed the homeless as hopeless, with vacant expressions and little direction or motivation.

Connecting these trends to the ten homeless people interviewed, there are some similarities and some differences. Most critically, there is a need to debunk the idea that without some unsurpassed quality, homeless people are all the same. The rich stories of the lives of the people interviewed for this study told of journeys abroad, high technical and professional achievement, ongoing education and drive; each of them were lives lived passionately, by people who cared about their story and what happened in it. Unlike the many downcast, unmotivated homeless filling the backgrounds of the films, and also unlike the over-gifted protagonists, Jesse, Mark, Arthur, John, Chris, Tony, Bill, Jan, James, and Matt were each somewhere in the middle. It would seem that this trend of representing the homeless as filthy and downcast, or alternatively as unusually gifted, stereotypes the indigent by either demonizing or romanticizing them.

While there were a significant number of veterans and a prevalence of mental illness among the interviewees, corresponding to trends in the films, less than half had been alcoholics and only one mentioned drugs of any kind – a contrast to the movie portrayals. All the individuals were clean and well-groomed, with clean if faded clothes. Some may note that this could be a facet of locating the interviews at a shelter – however, the depiction of grime and filthiness was present in homeless people inhabiting the shelters in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, and *The Soloist*. Hence another contrast between the film trend of dirtiness and the individuals interviewed arises. Almost all of the criminal activities the interviewees related in the interviews were crimes of homelessness such as trespassing, indicating an unrealistic overemphasis on moral degeneracy among the homeless portrayals in

the films, which portrayed such moral degeneracy among the homeless in seven of the seven movies. Also, each of the individuals interviewed had motivation and drive in some form, unlike the idle vacancy of the homeless in the films. Overall, these trends in depicting homelessness in film seem easily condemnable, as the stories collected from the homeless and their personal appearances seem to contradict them utterly. While none of the interviewees claimed to be war heroes or former professors, they were each carrying a story – and for them, being represented as the filthy outcast or drug addict could carry personal, social repercussions. While the internal representations of the protagonists' experiences with homelessness which often centered the films erred on the side of romanticizing, the external representations of the homeless people in the backgrounds of these films tended toward denigration, generalization, and theatricality. The stories told by the homeless about themselves did not overtly romanticize or denigrate themselves: they described life paths consisting of both highs and lows, achievements and mistakes. It would also seem that from the stories told by the homeless, important facets of their experiences have been omitted from popularized portrayals of homelessness in film: the choice of homelessness; heightened community among the homeless; the negative attitudes of the general public regarding the homeless; and the negative treatment of the homeless by police all seem generally absent from the films, though they were each mentioned by a majority of the interviewees.

The last five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times carries many representations of homelessness, falling into four categories of articles. In the category covering organizations and services for the homeless, homeless people were found to be portrayed as needy victims, and homeless people were rarely asked for their opinions or experiences with the organizations. There is a trend to generalize the homeless population and block them together en masse as

disadvantaged sufferers, the “downtrodden” of negligible accomplishment, allotted estrangement, despondency, and the requirement of earning pride in the eyes of some writers.

Taking the stories of the homeless people interviewed for this study, many were in need of assistance, but several (Mark, Chris, James, Jan) claimed no need of more than they had. This suggests a greater diversity among the homeless than this category of articles implied. Furthermore, the individuals interviewed displayed past achievement such as high-paying jobs; a good amount of optimism regarding their futures; community-orientation such as cleaning up trash and trying to help people; and personal dignity over the course of their interviews, pointing to a need for less generalized descriptions of homeless people in this kind of article in the *Citizen-Times*. As to the earlier question of whether homeless people were moving to Asheville because of the resources available here, Jesse, Arthur, James, and Bill said that they had done exactly that. Finally, Jesse, John, Chris, Jan, and Matt each displayed a tendency toward community-action and being involved in city life suggesting that the missing opinion of homeless people in the articles in this category could be a much needed addition to reporting on the issues. This seems more apparent considering the repeated negative appraisals the local shelter received from the interviewees, and the lack of any mention of this in this category. The internal representations of homelessness provided by the interviewees show that the external representations of homelessness found in this category of articles inadvertently insinuate false generalizations about those without homes.

In the second category of articles, on the homeless experience, the representation of the experiences of homelessness were generally internal portrayals, made up of homeless people telling their own stories. In the life experiences of Manuel Bates, Michele Freeman, Billy Cordell, David Wine, Charles Smith, Tracy Keene’s “Friend” in “Preacher’s Park”, and the

many homeless honored in the two annual memorial services, there is an abundance of information connecting the obstacles, intricacies, and eccentricities of the homeless population and the many paths they walk. This trend of representation is person-based. The experiences of those interviewed for this study and those of the individuals listed above together resonate with the diverse truth of the many causes of homelessness, from economics to addictions to divorce to mental illness to personal choice. These kinds of internal stories often depict the gradual accumulation of obstacles that leads to some people's homelessness. The stories from the Times in this category and the responses obtained from the interviewees parallel each other in the complexity and singularity of their experiences with homelessness, concurring with the idea that the generalization of homelessness only conceals the path toward understanding it.

In the articles making up the third category – Homelessness and Addiction, Crime, and Mental Illness – homeless people are portrayed as essentially incapable of caring or healing themselves, or weaning themselves off of addictions. Comparing this trend of representation to the homeless people interviewed for this study, many examples of self-care abound in the latter. Chris had found a personal cure for his bipolar disorder; Mark was living by himself in the mountains despite his history of mental illness; John initially became homeless to get away from the distractions of society and heal his psyche, Jan and Jesse persevere despite their illnesses. Here we find abundant evidence that some of the homeless people interviewed were skilled at self-care, making the representation of this kind of article seem something of a generalization.

In the fourth category, Homelessness and Veterans, the reader is given representations of mental illness and “personality problems” leading to homelessness among veterans, while also being told that homelessness and continued reliance on pills among veterans is a “personal choice.” Among the veterans interviewed for this study, two out of four of them had no history

of mental illness, their homelessness coming from other factors. Of those four, two of them had chosen homelessness. These facets of the internal experience of homeless veterans were not alluded to in this category of articles, leaving a gap between the Times' portrayal of homeless veterans and the stories of homeless veterans collected in the interview process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the representation of homelessness in American popular film and the last five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times contain both positive and negative depictions of homelessness consisting of some internal portrayals and some external portrayals. In film, one finds both romantic ideas of the ubiquitous homeless protagonist as hero or fallen genius, as well as normative representations of homeless people that barely retain their humanity, so devoid of character and aspiration are they. While the former group's exceptional quality removes them from the average homeless experience, the films regularly depicted moral degeneracy, alcoholism, addiction, filthiness, and hopelessness among the latter group. These trends in representation did not correspond with the stories told by the homeless people interviewed and the appearance of the people themselves, who spoke not of crimes or drugs but of obstacles and hopes for the future, and who were all clean and presentable. In the articles of the last five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times, one finds the homeless being cast as needy victims, unworthy of public participation, and incapable of caring for themselves. These trends contradict the stories of the interviewees as well, who described numerous examples of self-care, regimented scheduling, opinions on various civic matters, and ideas for the betterment of the community. In a portion of the Times articles one also finds the stories of homeless people as told by themselves, adding an invaluable resource to the public understanding of homelessness through stories told from the inside. While there are some exceptions among the films and articles to the

generalizing external trends enumerated above, these trends remain powerful influences within their respective types of information.

The difference between external and internal representations of homelessness underlies the ways in which the different sources of depictions of homelessness succeed or fail at responsibly portraying the homeless in America. The unprincipled external representation of homelessness not only disenfranchises a population already marginal and often mistreated, it enhances these features of the indigent experience by reinforcing negative perceptions of homelessness through irresponsible reporting, writing, and imagining in which stereotypes and generalizations are manifested onto the page and screen. The author believes the best balance to this kind of representation lies with internal representations of the homeless experience, voiced by those living the experience, detailing by default the idiosyncrasies, complexities, and positive attributes each individual homeless person inevitably contains within him or herself.

This study has found that homelessness is externally portrayed in a variety of ways in American culture, leading to the generalization of the homeless, for purposes ranging from entertainment to the propagation of information. Many of the films and newspaper articles cast the majority of the homeless as dirty, incapable, hopeless victims and criminals, though there were counterexamples for each trend. These generalized portrayals did not bear much resemblance to the stories of the homeless people interviewed. This study has found that the primary sources for internal representations come from the homeless themselves, whose appearance, achievements, and experiences differ greatly from the trends of representation found in the media. The exception to this is the portion of Asheville Citizen-Times articles that reported the individual experiences of homeless people. As Chris observed during his interview, the diversity among the homeless population is similar to the diversity of any population in America.

The people who make up this group come from all walks of life, and have travelled many different roads. This study has found a great imbalance between the kinds of representations of homelessness in American popular films and the last five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times and the kinds of portrayals found in the stories the homeless tell about themselves. While the former tend to generalize and stereotype the indigent experience, the latter describe a wide arc of geneses, qualities, and peculiarities that relate the humanity of each individual. The finding of this investigation implies that disseminating the self-reported stories of homeless people to the general public could alter a cultural conception of homelessness much-informed by negative, generalized portrayals of indigency.

Further research is needed in this area. Investigating the general public's perception of the homeless, whether these perceptions are formed through contact with the homeless or through a variety of cultural portrayals of the indigent, and exploring the impacts of these perceptions on the lives and social mobility of the homeless are all future avenues in need of inspection. Research into the aspects leading to some individuals' choice of homelessness is necessary. Investigation of the possibility of heightened feelings of community among some homeless groups is also needed. America's indigent remain a group whose diversity defies easy categorization, and following up on these and other routes of inquiry continues to represent one of the tasks essential to a sophisticated understanding of American homelessness.

Appendix: Forms

A. Research Plan Agreement:

My name is Josiah R. Johnston, a graduate student working on my thesis at UNCA. The research I will conduct this summer is driven by my compassion for people. I am passionate about uncovering the misrepresentation of people on the margins of powerful societies and giving voice to the realities of stereotyped, romanticized, and stigmatized populations. The thesis I will complete for the MLA Program at UNCA is focused on the ambient cultural representations of homelessness in America, issuing from popular cultural products such as film and television, and the last five years of the Asheville Citizen-Times. I plan on comparing and contrasting the generalized representations of homeless individuals issuing from these sectors of society with the stories homeless people tell about themselves – the actual experiences of homelessness in America.

I would like to collect these stories through a voluntary interview process from the homeless population that frequents Ahope Hospitality House, 19 N. Anne St., Asheville North Carolina. All the people who pass through the shelter will have the opportunity of signing up on a sheet on which I state my search for interview candidates who want their story heard and possibly published, all for the betterment of social understanding of homelessness. There will be no restrictions on race, gender, or any individual aspects other than a minimum age of 18 and ability to give consent.

Before the interview begins, I will have the individuals read, agree to, and sign an informed consent form laying out the proposed research; the interview process; any risks and benefits that could result from their participation in the study; measures insuring privacy; lack of costs or compensation; the individual's rights; my contact information; and a summary and signature section where they can request a copy of the results of the study. During the interview itself, which I will record on a digital audio recorder, I will ask the person to talk about homelessness in any form or way he or she wishes. I hope for the interview to provide a platform through which the individual's interpretations of his or her experience can be represented. I will ask each individual about experiences they have had with police, a merchant, and a member of the general public. I will ask about the individual's initial transition into homelessness. I will explore their hopes, and ask them to identify the primary obstacles in their path to permanent housing. Each interview will take about an hour.

Once the interviews have been collected, I will conduct qualitative analysis to discern the contrasts and comparisons between the stories the homeless tell about themselves, and the stories American culture tells about the homeless. The results will appear in my thesis, and possibly in a publication at a later date.

I plan on conducting my research with a strict adherence to the ethics of human subject research, as they are laid out by the UNCA Institutional Review Board. I have discussed this research with the staff at Ahope while volunteering there over the past couple of weeks. They have all responded favorably to my intended research, and now I have written to ask for your agreement in writing to the research I plan on conducting at Ahope.

Please sign below indicating that you agree to allow me to conduct the research described above, at Ahope day center, over the summer of 2011:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Position: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Position: _____

B. Sign up sheet for Interviews:

Call for candidates for Interview:

My name is Josiah Johnston. I am collecting stories for research at U.N.C. Asheville. If you would like to tell your story, and for it to be recorded, used in a research study, and possibly published, please sign below:

Name:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

C. Informed Consent Form:

The University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA) CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

1. INVESTIGATOR: Josiah Ramsay Johnston, a graduate student in the MLA Program at UNCA, will conduct this research project for his thesis. Dr. John Wood, associate professor of Sociology at UNCA, will be the research advisor.

2. PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this research study is to compare the stories our culture tells about homelessness with the stories homeless people tell about themselves. It is believed that the generalization of the homeless experience in the media misinforms the public, and that the stories of homeless people can help fix this problem.

3. WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY: The individual being interviewed will be involved in the following steps: First, the individual will sign up for an interview session on the sign-up sheet posted at Hope Day Shelter. Second, the researcher and the individual will meet at Hope and the researcher will ask the individual to read and sign this informed consent form. Third, the researcher will ask the individual a series of questions about his or her experience with homelessness, all of which will be recorded digitally. This interview will be used in the researcher's thesis, and possibly published at a later date. **The length of time you are expected to participate in the study is between one and two hours.**

4. POSSIBLE RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS: While there are no significant risks to the individual from participating in this study, telling the story of one's life can at times bring up painful memories. The individual being interviewed should be aware that telling about one's life may lead to both positive and negative feelings.

5. POSSIBLE BENEFITS: While talking about his or her life can be transformative for the individual and act as a kind of self-healing, this study is primarily expected to benefit the homeless population of America at large by helping shift social views about the stereotypes associated with homelessness.

6. PRIVACY: The interview data will be used in the writing of a thesis which, upon completion, will be accessible to UNCA students in UNCA's library. If the individual wishes, he or she can maintain anonymity in the study by asking the researcher to withhold his or her name, while still recording and analyzing the person's story. During the interview, the researcher and the individual will be in an office where none can overhear. The interviews will be transcribed, and ultimately added to UNCA's special collections. **The information provided in the interview may, with the individual's consent, be included in a further publication on this important social issue.**

7. COSTS OR COMPENSATION: There are no costs or compensation associated with your participation in this study.

8. YOUR RIGHTS: The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. You will not be punished or treated any differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study, you have the right to stop being in the study at any time.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION: Josiah Ramsay Johnston, josiahramsay@gmail.com & 828-545-8811, will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. You may also contact the [Chair of UNCA's Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about the rights of study participants. (The IRB is a college committee concerned with the protection of human subjects in research.)

SUMMARY: I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me.

Although the investigator will make every effort to maintain confidentiality, I understand that research records must be made available to UNCA's IRB, if they are requested. I will receive a copy of this form after it has been read and signed.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: Yes No

I would like my information to be included in a further publication: Yes No

I would like to remain anonymous Yes No

Mailing Address:

Printed name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

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