The Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology (CJAS) is the official journal of the Anthropologists and Sociologists of Kentucky. The CJAS is a multidisciplinary journal focusing on innovative research, pedagogy, media reviews, and invited editorials. While Anthropology and Sociology are the primary subject areas, original submissions from related areas (e.g., criminal justice and social work) are also welcome. CJAS encourages both historical and contemporary pieces as well as diverse uses of methodological and substantive tools, as such; quantitative and qualitative methodologies are acceptable. International submissions are welcome. The journal is made available exclusively on the internet at the Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology website (http://ask.anthroniche.com). Please direct any inquiry to the editor listed below:

---

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Ryan D. Schroeder  
Cjas.editor@gmail.com

**Managing Editor**  
Thomas J. Mowen  
Cjas.assistant@gmail.com

**Assistants to the Managing Editor**  
Ashley Farmer  
Cjas.ashley@gmail.com

Tammy Clemmons  
Cjas.tammy@gmail.com

---

**Associate Editors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Abrams</td>
<td>Centre College</td>
<td><a href="mailto:andrea.abrams@centre.edu">andrea.abrams@centre.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian Daughaday</td>
<td>Murray State University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lillian.daughaday@murraystate.edu">lillian.daughaday@murraystate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas William Hume</td>
<td>Northern Kentucky</td>
<td><a href="mailto:humed1@nku.edu">humed1@nku.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetrius Semien</td>
<td>University of Cincinnati</td>
<td><a href="mailto:demetirusssemien@yahoo.com">demetirusssemien@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Shope</td>
<td>Shawnee State University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dan.shope@murraystate.edu">dan.shope@murraystate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Editorial Review Board**

- Emmanuel Alvarado, Coastal Bend College
- Daniel Bradley, Somerset Community College
- Cherie Dawson-Edwards, University of Louisville
- Eric Carter, Georgetown College
- Carrie Oser, University of Kentucky
EDITORIAL NOTES FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

February 4, 2013

Editorial Notes

I am excited to present our fifth issue, and the first issue under the new name Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology. The name change reflects an effort to expand the scope of the journal to reach a national and international audience of readers, reviewers, and contributors. This issue reflects some initial success in these expansion efforts, highlighting research from authors in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Indiana, as well as Kentucky.

This is also my first issue with CJAS as the editor-in-chief. It is an honor to represent and promote the journal across the country. But my efforts are just a continuation of the extraordinary work by Daniel W. Phillips III, Ph.D., who had the vision, initiative, and organizational skills to develop the journal and guide it through the first four issues. As the founding editor of the journal, Dr. Phillips set the journal in motion and established a series of policies that will ensure the long-term viability of this publication. The editorial board, ASK membership, and loyal readers of the journal extend the highest level of gratitude to Dr. Phillips for his work in launching, promoting, and managing the journal.

I had the privilege of working closely with Dr. Phillips throughout the development and implementation of KJAS, first as a member of the editorial board, then as an associate editor, and finally as a co-editor, and I am excited to contribute to the progress of the journal as editor-in-chief. My job as editor moving forward is simple: 1) continue to manage the progress of the journal by adhering to the quality research standards already established by CJAS and the editorial board, and 2) expand the reach and scope of the journal by soliciting manuscript submissions and recruiting reviews from noted scholars throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Dr. Phillips provided a detailed introduction of me as co-editor in the editorial notes of the previous issue, and I will not reiterate the information provided in that introduction. For those who are interested, however, my vitae and other biographical information is available on my departmental website (http://louisville.edu/sociology/faculty-staff-students/faculty/faculty.html). I will also attend the 2013 annual meeting of ASK in April, where I will introduce myself to the organization and get to know the members on a personal basis. I look forward to working closely with ASK, the readership of CJAS, and scholars from Kentucky and beyond to guide and grow the journal.

My work as editor, however, would not be possible without the continued efforts of the Managing Editor, Thomas Mowen, and all of the Associate Editors and Editorial Board members. Also, Doug Hume, Ph.D. continues to serve in the invaluable role of Webmaster for the journal and Tammy Clemons and Ashley Farmer are instrumental to the editorial process.

The current issue features three articles that address various issues related to crime and justice. The first article by Elrod, May, and Lowe assesses the willingness of middle and high school students to report the possession of weapons at school by other students to a teacher,
administrator, or other adult under a variety of different contextual and situational conditions. Using data from adolescents in one high school and one middle school in an Appalachian region of the U.S., the authors show that school climate, perceived consequences of reporting, weapon type, and reporting conditions all influence decisions to report weapons possession. The authors also outline several strategies that schools can take to increase the likelihood that students will report weapons possession in schools.

The second article by Frana and Schroeder (submitted and accepted for publication under Dr. Phillips’ editorship), addresses the anticipated reactions of college students to having a professor that is an ex-convict. Data were collected from students enrolled in introductory courses at a mid-sized Midwestern university, and the results suggest that most college students would welcome a professor with a criminal history under certain conditions. Notably, many of the subjects reported that an ex-convict professor would actually enhance the educational process, whereas a small minority of students would immediately drop a course taught by an ex-convict.

The third article by Dawson-Edwards and Higgins investigates the attitudes about restoring voting rights to convicted felons among a sample of Historically Black College and University Students. As the title indicates, the respondents’ views of restoring voting rights varied by the type of crime (white collar vs. violent). Furthermore, race, college major, and gender influenced views of voting rights restoration for each unique type of criminal offense.

The final set of articles highlights research by undergraduate students. Under the direction of Professor Sandra Barnes, Ph.D., of Vanderbilt University, these five students produced quality empirical research papers. Completed as a course assignment where the students were to write a research note on a vulnerable population, Professor Barnes reports that the papers:

“…reflect a research endeavor driven by undergraduate student interest in performing research with academic and applied implications. As a professor, I wanted to challenge students to move beyond writing traditional term papers or journal entries that are common in undergraduate classes. The small class of five students had experiences in community engagement and was up for the challenge. They were also excited about possibly including peer views in their work. Several had written short research papers before; most had not. So we began the adventure of reading academic literature as well as learning a robust theoretical framework and analytical approach that could both be used to study an array of topics. The attached five research notes reflect the culmination of their hard work and initiative.”

Archer’s research addresses the responses to homelessness in Nashville, Tennessee and San Antonio, Texas. Focusing on two unique approaches to serving the needs of homeless populations, Archer combines interview data from undergraduate students, homeless newspaper vendors, residents of a homeless center, and an architect who designed the homeless shelter and worked with the homeless to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the perceptual and structural barriers that harm homeless populations.

Blount and Barnes examine cultural narrative patterns of resiliency and cultural pride among a Native American population. Drawing data from articles and advertisements in Native American
newspapers, the content analysis reveals several common narratives that serve to give Native Americans a voice by which they can inform broader audiences of the atrocities faced by native populations throughout history and re-establish cultural traditions.

Colbert presents the results of a survey addressing views of the origination of homosexuality and same-sex relationships among an ethnically diverse sample of college students. The author explores many of the unique nuances in the opinions and perceptions of homosexuality, concluding that even individuals with ambivalent views of homosexuality support the legal rights of such individuals and couples.

Floyd investigates the portrayal of Indian street children in two films: 1) the popular dramatic fictional film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) that depicts the lives of three poor children on the streets of Mumbai, and 2) the documentary *Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta* (2009) that portrays the lived experiences and challenges of street children in India through interviews with children facing these circumstances. The author concludes that both films only show brief glimpses of the realities faced by street children in India and argues for a variety of governmental programs designed to replace the horrors such children experience with loving and nurturing experiences.

Finally, Winer compares the views of college students and professionals who work with drug addicts in a recovery facility about the vulnerability of individuals facing substance abuse and mental health problems. The results suggest that awareness and empathy are strong for some groups and not others, and that views of vulnerability differ between college students and drug treatment professionals.

This is an exciting time for *CJAS* as we move forward in 2013. I am honored work with the many people who make this journal possible. As we continue with future volumes and editions, I believe *CJAS* will continue to be an excellent outlet for high-quality scholarship, and I am proud to be a part of it.

----

Ryan D. Schroeder
Editor-in-Chief
*Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology*
CONTENTS

Articles

To Tell or Not to Tell: An Analysis of Students’ Willingness to Report School Weapons Possessions to School Authorities..................................................7
  Preston Elrod, Eastern Kentucky University
  David May, Mississippi State University
  Nathan Lowe, University of Kentucky

An Analysis of Student Opinions on Former Convict as Professors.................................29
  John Frana, Indiana State University
  Ryan Schroeder, University of Louisville

“It Depends on the Crime”: Opinions Towards Restoring Voting Rights for Violent and White Collar Ex-Felons.................................................................41
  Cherie Dawson-Edwards and George E. Higgins, University of Louisville

Undergraduate Research

Responses to Homeless in Nashville, TN: People, Places and Perceptions..........................58
  Emily Archer, Vanderbuilt University

Voices Among the Vulnerable: An Analysis of Native American Newspaper Articles..........73
  Allison Blount and Sandra Barnes, Vanderbuilt University

The Heart Wants What the Heart Wants: A Student Survey on Same-Sex Relationship........87
  Kortnea Colbert, Vanderbuilt University

Barefoot Children Have No Bootstraps........................................................................99
  Kirsten Floyd, Vanderbuilt University

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse: Perceived Vulnerability Differences Between Students and Professionals.................................................................111
  Samantha Winer, Vanderbuilt University

About the Authors........................................................................................................126
To Tell or Not to Tell: An Analysis of Students’ Willingness to Report School Weapons Possession to School Authorities

Preston Elrod, Ph.D.¹
School of Justice Studies
Eastern Kentucky University

David May, Ph.D.
Mississippi State University

Nathan Lowe, M.S.
University of Kentucky

Abstract: This study builds on the small number of studies on students’ willingness to report weapons possession at school by examining their willingness to report weapons possession at school under the following conditions: (1) if they heard another student had a gun or another weapon, (2) if they saw another student with a gun or other weapon, and (3) if they knew their best friend had a gun or other weapon. The findings largely support those of previous studies. However, we also find that while students’ willingness to report weapons possession by their peers is a highly nuanced behavior, efforts to develop a positive reporting climate in schools, develop relationships between staff and students and enhance students’ self-efficacy are likely to overcome many students’ reticence to report weapons possession and produce safer schools.

Keywords: school weapons possession, school safety, school climate, social bonding, social capital, self-efficacy

¹ Please direct all correspondence to School of Justice Studies, Eastern Kentucky University, Stratton 467, Richmond, KY 40475. (859)-622-1978 / Preston.elrod@eku.edu

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA, November 6, 2009. The authors would like to thank Alyson Kershaw for her assistance in formatting the manuscript.
INTRODUCTION

According to the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010*, in 2009, 6% of students indicated that they had carried a weapon at school in the past 30 days (Robers, Zhang & Truman, 2010). Although this percentage is not large, weapons possession can occur at any school, and its consequences are significant. Instances of weapons-related violence and the fear produced by peoples’ perceptions that weapons are present at school can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including loss of life and serious physical injuries that produce trauma in victims that extends well beyond the school. In addition, school weapons possession can lead to school avoidance or avoidance of certain places at school (Dinkes, Kemp, Baum & Snyder, 2009), self-presentation by students that suggest to others that they are capable of defending themselves (e.g., putting on a “tough front”) (Lockwood, 1997), carrying weapons at school for protection (May, 1999), development of school “cliques” prone to aggressive actions designed to discourage potential offenders (Welsh, 2000), decreased quality of the learning experiences of students and the work experiences of school staff, reduction in positive relationships between people in the community and schools, and unfavorable media attention (Cao et al., 2008). Moreover, responses to the safety concerns of students and staff can produce school environments that alienate students, increase student mistrust, inhibit learning (Beger, 2003; Farmer, 1999; Verdugo & Schneider, 1999), decrease students’ perceptions of safety (Mayer & Leone, 1999), and hamper the development of a positive school environment (Scheckner, Rollins, Kaiser-Ulrey, & Wagner, 2002).

The possession of weapons at schools poses a variety of threats to students, school staff, and others. There is, however, evidence that students’ willingness to report weapons possession by their peers could play an important role in preventing instances of serious school violence. For example, research on school shootings indicates that such events are rarely impulsive, usually involve planning, and that other people, including students, are often aware of the attacker’s intentions. Unfortunately, other students who know about the attacker’s plans sometimes fail to inform persons who could intervene (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

Although students’ willingness to report weapons possession is a key element of school safety, few studies have examined factors related to willingness to report. Moreover, most studies (see, for example, Bailey, Flewelling, & Rosenbaum, 1997; DuRant, Getts, Candenhead, & Woods, 1995; Forrest, Zychowski, Stuhldreher, & Ryan, 2000; Kulig, Valentine, Griffith, & Ruthazer, 1998; Rountree, 2000; Simon, Crosby, & Dahlberg, 1999; Wilcox & Clayton, 2001) have failed to differentiate between firearms and other weapons because the processes of carrying out violent acts with various types of weapons and the outcomes of their use are different (Cao et al., 2008). With less lethal weapons, the act tends to be slow, possibly even preventable depending on the circumstances, and less likely to be fatal. In contrast, with firearms, the act is almost always quick and the potential for serious injury or death is increased.

In the present study, we build on previous studies and extend the nascent theory on students’ willingness to report gun and other weapons possession at school to authorities by examining a range of predictors drawn from social bonding, rational choice, lifestyles, social learning, and subcultural theories. We do this by examining specific components of concepts
like social bonding and school climate in order to develop a clearer understanding of those aspects of social bonding and school climate that may be critical in encouraging students’ willingness to report weapons possession at school. Our most significant contribution to the literature, however, comes in the exploration of the nuanced decision making related to students’ willingness to report weapons possession at school by examining models that explore varying relationships between potential reporters and youths who possess different types of weapons. In addition, we examine the potential effects of several factors that have not been examined to date--involvement in school misbehavior, youth alienation, students’ self-efficacy (i.e., their use of positive means to resolve problems) and youth victimization at school—on willingness to report.

**Students’ Willingness to Report Weapons Possession at School**

Previous studies on students’ willingness to report weapons possession (Brank et al., 2007; Brinkley & Saarino, 2006; Wylie et al., 2010) contained hypotheses derived from three theoretical frameworks rooted in criminology and social development: social bonding, social learning, and rational choice theories. For example, research by Wylie et al. (2010), Brank et al. (2007) and Brinkley and Saarino (2006) employed a bonding framework by (1) incorporating concepts derived from a social organizational/ecological framework, and/or (2) exploring the relationship between school climate and the willingness to report weapons possession in school. In this work, we have added to that literature by including variables that ask respondents’ perceptions of both their school and individual experiences across various theoretical models. We have organized the literature reviewed below with that strategy in mind.

**School Factors**

The examination of the relationship between school social climate and willingness to report revolves around the quality of relationships between students and the school. For example, it is believed that schools that encourage collective identity, student cohesiveness, mutual respect, order, fairness and clarity in the enforcement of rules, and discipline are more likely to foster stronger informal controls and exhibit lower levels of problem behavior (see Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Payne, 2008; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2003). With respect to weapons carrying, Wilcox and Clayton (2001) found that lower SES schools were more likely to contain students who carried weapons, however, the impact of SES on weapons carrying was mediated by schools’ social capital. Thus, schools possessing more positive climates should be expected to encourage reporting because they reflect a social organizational environment that is conducive to positive social relations between students and school staff.

The importance of school climate in providing a context where reporting is more likely is also supported by both studies that have examined the impact of school climate on students’ perceptions of school safety and studies that have explored school victimization. Studies of school climate indicate that feelings of safety are promoted among students in schools where teachers challenge students, where students enjoy school, where teachers maintain discipline and where there are clear school rules (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Aris, 2004; Welsh, 2000). As the studies by Brinkley and Saarino (2006) and Wylie et al. (2010) indicate, school climate does influence students’ willingness to report students’ weapons possession at school. In contrast, research on school victimization indicates
that students who have been victimized are less likely to feel safe at school (Wallace & May, 2005) and this may influence their willingness to report weapons possession. The influence of students’ victimization experiences on their willingness to report weapons possession in school, however, has not been examined to date.

**Individual Factors**

The social bonding approach examined by Brinkley and Saarino (2006) and Brank et al. (2007) suggests that weak bonds between youths and conventional adults and institutions may lead to exposure to deviant peers and discourage students’ willingness to report weapons in school. Previous research on the relationship between exposure to deviant peers and weapons possession in schools has produced results consonant with some versions of social bonding theory. Specifically, exposure to deviant peers increases the likelihood a student will have knowledge of a weapon in school (Estell, Farmer, Cairns, & Clemmer, 2003), and such exposure indicates a weaker social bond to conventional others (Erikson, Crosnoe, & Dornbusch, 2000). Thus, deviant peer associations are likely to inhibit students’ willingness to report weapons possession by other students to school authorities. As a result, Brank and her colleagues (2007) predicted that students who were closely connected to trusted adults at home, at school, or in the community would be more likely to report weapons possession. These researchers also predicted that students’ who associated with delinquent peers and who were involved in delinquency would be less likely to report weapons possession by classmates. Importantly, these predictions were supported by their analysis. These findings, however, would also be predicted by social learning theories because it is through such associations that youths are likely to learn attitudes favorable or unfavorable to reporting weapons possession by other students and to learn nuances related to the appropriateness of reporting different types of weapons under varying circumstances (see Akers & Sellers, 2004).

Brank and her colleagues (2007) also used rational choice theory to develop their hypotheses. Specifically, they borrowed from the literature on tattling or reporting friends contemplating suicide, snitching, and whistle-blowing, which is mostly embedded within a rational choice cost-benefit analysis framework. Previous research on reporting on the behavior of friends and peers in general indicates the social costs of tattling increase with age, and by adolescence these costs are substantial (Greiger, Kauffman, & Greiger, 1976; Lancellota & Vaughn, 1989). Where this research takes a rational choice cost-benefit analysis approach, researchers argue that the benefits of tattling accrue to the larger unit (e.g., class, school, organization) and the costs of it accrue to the individual in terms of social rejection (Friman et al., 2004).

Little research, however, has examined the social costs of tattling by adolescents (Friman et al., 2004). The research that has been performed indicates that delinquents are more likely than non-delinquents to report that informing on others is morally wrong (Stein, Sarbin, Chu, & Kulik, 1967). Similarly, other researchers have found that youths in a residential setting perceived tattling unfavorably and rated those who tattled as less likeable. They also noted a general unwillingness of youths to report on peers (Friman et al., 2004). In a study of suburban high school students, Kalafat and Elias (1992) found that about one-third of their sample had talked to a peer who was definitely considering suicide but only about 25% reported such information to an adult.

The act of informing carries social costs among other populations as well. In the
criminal world, a police informant, or snitch, is often described as “the worst thing that you can be” (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, & Wright, 2003, p. 298). Likewise, corporate and government whistle-blowers are typically viewed as being disloyal to the company or agency, and their fellow employees (Fitzgerald & Ferrara, 2008; MacNamara, 1991), may be subjected to blacklisting, dismissal from jobs, work transfers, personal harassment, sexual exploitation (Fitzgerald & Ferrara, 2008; Glazer & Glazer, 1989), and denied promotions and the support needed to effectively do their jobs (Fitzgerald & Ferrara, 2008). Loyalty to a friend is noted as the primary factor cited by cadets of the U.S. Naval Academy when they considered whether or not to inform on fellow cadets (Pershing, 2002). Furthermore, lawyers appear to have a general antipathy towards turning in fellow attorneys for misbehavior (Toomey, 2004), and police have a code of silence and are critical of those who inform on fellow officers (Westmarland, 2005). Again, similar arguments would be made by a social learning perspective because costs or benefits may be viewed as representing forms of social and nonsocial reinforcement for reporting or not reporting other students’ weapons possession (see Akers & Sellers, 2004).

Based on the knowledge gained from the research above, Brank and colleagues (2007) hypothesized that students would be more likely to report other students’ weapons possession “(a) when their relationship to the target is unspecified versus specified as friendship, (b) under conditions of anonymity rather than giving their name, and (c) when they do not perceive risk of physical or social consequences from the target student or the large peer group” (p.129). Their results indicated that the great majority of students would report weapons possession; however, factors such as anonymity, gender (females were more willing to report), age (younger students were more willing), and academic performance (those with better grades) influenced reporting. They also found that negative peer associations and greater levels of involvement in delinquency were associated with a decreased likelihood of reporting, while a positive relationship with adults, particularly the presence of a trusted adult in the school, was associated with increased reporting.

Outside of the criminological literature, there is evidence to suggest that the psychological process through which a “bystander” or “whistle-blower” decides to intervene is similar across emergency situations, regardless of the context in which those situations occur. Darley & Latane (1968) suggest that there are two types of intervention one might have in an emergency situation: direct (e.g., physically intervening to break up a fight, jumping in water and swimming out to save a drowning individual) and reportorial (reporting the emergency situation to one qualified to handle the situation), the type of intervention examined here. They suggest that the decision to engage in reportorial intervention in an emergency situation is based on a decision-making process whereby the bystander must know about the event, decide that the event is an emergency and that he or she is responsible for helping intervene to diffuse the situation. The bystander then must choose an appropriate method of intervention and successfully implement that intervention (Dozer & Micelli, 1985). Consequently, then, for weapon reporting in a school context, the student must first know another student has a weapon, decide that weapon poses a risk to others, make an individual decision to tell a responsible school authority about that weapon, and then actually intervene in the situation by reporting to an adult.
Overall, the literature indicates that younger students, females, high achievers, and youths who avoid significant association with negative peers and who are closely bonded with adults are more likely to report weapons at school to school authorities. In addition, the literature indicates that schools with positive social climates, where there are anonymous reporting systems, and where students believe that they have some responsibility for taking action, are likely to encourage weapons reporting at school. Moreover, it seems reasonable to expect that youths who experience victimization at school or believe that there is a problem with delinquency at their school may be inclined to report weapons possession as a form of self-protection. Also, those who indicate high levels of self-efficacy may report weapons possession because they feel empowered to take action to resolve problems. Conversely, those who report higher levels of school misbehavior may be less inclined to report weapons possession due to the poor quality of their relationships with school authorities, their lack of attachment to school, and their association with negative peers.

METHODS

The data were collected in one public middle school and one public high school in a predominately rural county in the Appalachian region of the U.S. (population approximately 73,000) during the first week of May 2006. The middle school was comprised of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades while the high school contained ninth through twelfth grades.

Survey Administration

The survey instruments were developed by university researchers at the request of school system administrators. After the survey instruments were finalized, packets containing instructions for administering the surveys and the survey instruments were delivered to the schools. The instruments were administered to each student in attendance on the day the survey was conducted with the exception of students in special education classes. Surveys were self-administered and the survey administration was supervised by teachers who provided a brief introduction to the survey and its purpose. Survey administration took approximately 30 to 45 minutes and no major problems with the administration were reported.

Students participated on a voluntary basis. Prior to the survey, letters were mailed to students’ homes by the schools. These letters explained the purpose of the survey and indicated that students would be omitted from the research at the request of the parent or guardian. Also, prior to survey administration, students were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could cease participation at any time. All subjects were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they provided. After subjects completed the surveys, they were instructed to place the forms in an envelope that accompanied the survey and to seal the envelope. Surveys were then placed in collection boxes and given to the researchers.

Of the 2,192 students enrolled at the two schools, a total of 1,521 students (approximately 70% of the students enrolled) returned usable surveys to the research team. Because of the school district’s insistence that the surveys be administered by classroom teachers, and because we did not have a classroom roster for each teacher, we do not know how many students were absent at the time of the survey administration nor how many were given the opportunity to complete the survey but chose not to do so. Nevertheless, the high response rate and the similarity of our sample to the schools’ population suggests
Table 1. Percent of Youths in the Sample and Youths Enrolled in the Schools at the Time of the Survey with Various Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Study Sample</th>
<th>Enrolled in Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>58.00%</td>
<td>48.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>85.00%</td>
<td>86.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>38.00%</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>61.40%</td>
<td>71.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 0.6% of the middle and high school respondents indicated that they were in a grade other than 6 through 12.

that the small number of youths who chose not to respond or were absent on the day of the survey administration have minimal impact on the generalizability of the findings presented here.

A number of educational and social psychological researchers have demonstrated that respondents to self-report instruments often engage in social desirability bias, over-reporting behaviors that frame them or their reference group in a more positive light (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). This over-reporting may be particularly acute in educational settings among middle- and high-school students (Baird & Ozler, 2012). To reduce the impact of social desirability bias in this study, a screening question was used at the conclusion of the survey that asked students how often (never, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time) they had given honest responses on the survey. We conducted chi-square tests comparing the percentage of students who indicated that they would or would not tell a teacher or other adult about other students’ possession of a weapon at school by whether or not they reported providing honest responses “all of the time” on the survey.

The chi-square results indicated that students who would tell about others’ weapons possession were significantly more likely to report providing honest responses on all survey items. Consequently, only respondents who indicated that they had provided honest responses all of the time were used in the analysis.² We believe that restricting our analysis to only students who reported honest responses on each of the survey items improves the accuracy of the findings, although it may provide a more conservative estimate of students’ knowledge of weapons possession and a more liberal estimate of students’ willingness to report. Thus, the final sample used for this paper totals 895 respondents and consists of 334 middle school...
respondents, which comprised 54.2% of the middle school students enrolled in that school at the time of the survey administration, and 561 high school subjects, or 35.6% of the high school students enrolled in the high school. In Table 1, we present the descriptive statistics for both the sample and the students enrolled in the school district at the time of the data collection. The descriptive statistics suggest that the majority (58.0%) of the students were female and most (85.0%) were white. Compared to students enrolled in the schools studied, the sample used in the following analysis contained proportionally more females, Hispanics, and youths who identified themselves as other than black, white, or Hispanic. The sample under study also had fewer African American youths. In addition, our sample contained proportionally more middle school students and fewer high school youths than the school district.

Study Measures

Six items on the survey served as the outcome measures. These items asked respondents to indicate if they would tell a teacher, administrator, or another adult at school about other students’ weapon possession under six conditions. Response options for each item were “Would not tell” (coded 0) and “would tell” (coded 1). The conditions presented were (1) “Saw another student with a gun,” (2) “Knew my best friend had a gun,” (3) “Heard another student had a gun,” (4) “Saw another student with a weapon (other than a gun),” (5) “Knew my best friend had a weapon (other than a gun),” (6) “Heard that another student had a weapon (other than a gun).”

Five items constituted demographic measures used in the analysis. These items included: “Do you qualify for” (coded 0 = full price lunch, 1 = free or reduced lunch), “What is your gender?” (coded 0 = male, 1 = female), “Do you consider yourself:” (coded 0 = Nonwhite, 1 = White), “Do you live with:” (coded 0 = some other parental arrangement, 1 = both natural parents). In addition, one dichotomous variable was constructed to identify students’ school level (coded 0 = middle school and 1 = high school).

Seventeen scales from the survey were chosen for use in the analysis because they were felt to reflect the theoretical focus of the study and were not highly correlated with one another. These measures were informed by criminological theory and borrow heavily from that literature. Nevertheless, because the purpose of the current project is not to test these theoretical perspectives but to identify individual level and school level variables that contribute to the decision to report weapons, none of the theoretical measures should be viewed as a “pure” measure of the theoretical perspectives that they represent.

Because the original survey items employed various response formats such as “no” or “yes”, Likert type options, and “none”, “1”, “2”, “3”, “4 or more” which was used on items asking about respondents’ involvement in delinquency, we conducted contingency table analysis to screen for cells with expected frequencies less than five. Due to the size of our sample, several scales contained small expected frequencies. As a result, response categories were collapsed into dichotomous measures coded “0” or “1” for most measures. This eliminated large numbers of cells with expected frequencies less than five and made possible the use of the goodness-of-fit tests calculated by logistic regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Reliability and factor analyses of the scales indicated that each had fair to very good reliability and each represented a unidimensional construct. Descriptive data for each of the measures used in the analysis can be seen in Table 2. The theoretical constructs and their associated predictors are
discussed below. The coding scheme for each scale is included in parentheses after its description.

**School Factors**

**School Climate**

Three measures representing different dimensions of school climate were used in this analysis. These measures were: (1) positive school climate, a five-item scale that measured the respondents’ belief that students understand school rules, are treated fairly when they break the rules, and respect teachers (positive climate=high score); (2) teacher/staff bias toward outsider groups, a three-item scale that measured students’ belief that students are not treated fairly, and are singled out due to fashion preferences (negative climate=high score); and (3) school guardianship, a six-item scale that measured respondents’ perception of whether or not teachers supervise hallways and restrooms (high guardianship=high score).

**School Strain**

Two measures of strain were used in this study. They were (1) students’ perceived risk of victimization at school, which was a seven-item scale that asked respondents’ to rate the chance that they could be the victim of actions such as having their locker broken into, being attacked by someone with a weapon, being bullied, being subjected to inappropriate sexual touching, or being threatened with harm (high risk=high score); and (2) a measure of the respondent’s perception of delinquency problems at school. The six-item scale included measures of the students’ assessment of the seriousness of problems at school such as kids damaging property, fighting, gangs, bullying, and bringing weapons to school was used (high problems=high score).

**School Safety**

One seven-item measure of students’ perceptions of school safety was used in the analysis. This scale measured students’ perceptions of safety in various areas of the school such as school classrooms, hallways, restrooms, cafeteria, gym, parking lots, and locations outside school buildings such as recreation areas and entrances (high safety=high score).

**Individual Factors**

**Social Bonding/Social Capital**

Four measures representing different dimensions of social bonding/social capital were used in the analysis. These measures were: (1) family attachment, consisting of four items that measure youths’ affinity for their family and parents (high attachment=high score); (2) adult social capital, a five-item measure that represented youths’ belief that various adults could be counted on to help them with a problem (high capital=high score); (3) school connectedness, comprised of four items that examined students’ perceptions of whether they have a number of friends and acquaintances at school, whether or not they know a number of teachers, and whether or not they will be helped by peers if they are upset (high connectedness=high score); and (4) alienation, consisting of six items that measured respondents’ reports that they spend much of their time alone and are disconnected from others (high alienation=high score).

**School Misbehavior**

One measure examined school misbehavior. This 11-item scale measured youths’ self-reported involvement in various activities such as calling other students names; bumping, pushing, kicking, or hitting another student; making fun of another student; getting into a serious argument with a student, teacher or another adult; being sent out of class; or being suspended (high misbehavior=high score).
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Alphas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-saw another student with gun</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-knew best friend had gun</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-heard another student had gun</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-saw another student with weapon*</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-knew best friend had weapon*</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell-heard other student had weapon*</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = female)</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.492</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (1 = White)</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch (1 = free or reduced)</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangement (1 = bio. parents)</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.492</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School (0 = middle school)</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Climate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school climate</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.489</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/staff bias toward outsider groups</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.112</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School guardianship</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.775</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Strain</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School problems-delinquency</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>1.618</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived risk of victimization at school</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.923</td>
<td>0-7</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School safety</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>1.756</td>
<td>0-7</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Bonding/Social Capital</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family attachment</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult social capital</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School connectedness</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.050</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.237</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School misbehavior</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.155</td>
<td>0-11</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.009</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Academic Performance</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*other than a gun

Self-Efficacy

One three-item measure of self-efficacy was used. This scale measures students’ use of positive means to resolve anger, including talking things out with others, seeking the advice of an adult about how to handle problems, and seeking the advice of a friend (high self-efficacy=high score).

Self-Reported Academic Performance

Finally, the analysis included one measure of self-reported academic
performance. This item asked students “What grades do you usually get?” Response options were collapsed from nine categories into the following, “Mostly Fs” to “Mostly Fs and Ds” (coded 0), “Mostly Ds” to “Mostly Ds and Cs” (coded 1), “Mostly Cs” to “Mostly Cs and Bs” (coded 3), and “Mostly Bs” to “Mostly As (coded 3). Descriptive statistics for each of the study measures can be seen in Table 2.

Analytic Plan

Because the outcomes of interest consist of dichotomous variables, binary logistic regression was used to assess relationships between each of the predictors and willingness of students to report weapons possession to school personnel. Although logistic regression is a robust technique that does not require assumptions about the distributions of predictors for purposes of analysis, it does assume a linear relationship between continuous predictors and the logit transformation of the outcome variables. Moreover, the power of the test is likely to be improved when there is multivariate normality and linearity among the predictors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Consequently, a number of steps were taken to screen the data prior to running the final models. We computed tolerance statistics for each of the continuous predictors, all of which exceeded .68, thus indicating that multicollinearity was not present. To test for linearity between continuous predictors and the logit transformation of the outcome variables, we computed interaction terms consisting of each continuous predictor and its natural log and conducted a logistic regression with the continuous predictors and the interaction terms. This test revealed that the assumption of linearity in the logit was violated in the case of four of the predictors.

As a result, a square root transformation of positive school climate and adult social capital, and a reflect and inverse transformation of family attachment was computed. A subsequent test of linearity of the logit revealed that the assumption was no longer violated. In addition, we screened the data for univariate outliers through plots of standardized residuals and for multivariate outliers by calculating Mahalanobis distances and evaluating extreme cases using the chi-square distribution ($\chi^2 (17) = 40.790, p = .001$). As a final step prior to conducting the analysis, we computed DFBETAS to check for cases that might exert extreme influence on the regression coefficients. ***Together, these efforts led to the identification of 15 cases that were considered for removal from the database. Models were then estimated both with and without these cases. Minor changes in three of the models were found. Consequently, the following analysis is the result of the models run without the 15 outliers. Because none of the predictors used in this study contained more than 3% missing data and because various procedures for handling missing data are likely to produce similar results when less than 5% of cases are missing in large data sets (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), we employed listwise deletion of cases with missing data.

Results

In Table 3, we use multivariate logistic regression to examine the demographic, contextual, and theoretical predictors of whether or not a student would report the presence of a firearm at school under three conditions: when they heard another student had a gun (Model 1); when they saw another student with a gun (Model 2); and when their best friend had a gun at school (Model 3).
Table 3. Logistic Regression Results Regressing Whether Student Would Report the Presence of a Gun at School Across Three Situational Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whether Student Would Report if They Hea</td>
<td>Whether Student Would Report if They S</td>
<td>Whether Student Would Report if Their Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Another Student Had a gun (N=756)</td>
<td>d another Student with a Gun (N=751)</td>
<td>Friend Had a Gun (N=757)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B/S.E. Exp(B)</td>
<td>B/S.E. Exp(B)</td>
<td>B/S.E. Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>- .260/.181 0.77</td>
<td>- .593/.272 0.55*</td>
<td>- .510/.186 0.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>- .145/.250 0.87</td>
<td>- .364/.338 0.70</td>
<td>- .403/.349 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch recipient</td>
<td>.102/.210 1.11</td>
<td>.013/.309 1.01</td>
<td>.109/.214 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangement</td>
<td>.054/.186 1.06</td>
<td>- .470/.275 0.63</td>
<td>- .167/.190 0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Level</td>
<td>- .286/.199 0.75</td>
<td>- .922/.316 0.40**</td>
<td>- .409/.206 0.66*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school climate¹</td>
<td>.609/.213 .54**</td>
<td>- .941/.321 0.39**</td>
<td>.658/.218 0.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/staff bias</td>
<td>.017/.084 1.02</td>
<td>- .077/.123 0.93</td>
<td>- .072/.085 0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School guardianship</td>
<td>.082/.054 1.09</td>
<td>.074/.075 1.08</td>
<td>.024/.054 1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Problems-</td>
<td>.054/.056 1.06</td>
<td>.264/.082 1.30**</td>
<td>.065/.055 1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School safety</td>
<td>- .089/.057 0.92</td>
<td>- .002/.080 0.10</td>
<td>- .111/.058 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived risk of victimization</td>
<td>.003/.052 1.00</td>
<td>- .095/.074 0.91</td>
<td>- .002/.053 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family attachment²</td>
<td>.673/.330 1.96*</td>
<td>.468/.455 1.60</td>
<td>.384/.338 1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult social capital¹</td>
<td>.259/.197 0.77</td>
<td>.267/.287 0.77</td>
<td>.426/.202 0.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School connectedness</td>
<td>.021/.090 1.02</td>
<td>- .228/.138 0.80</td>
<td>- .020/.093 0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>.022/.042 1.02</td>
<td>- .021/.060 0.98</td>
<td>.009/.042 1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>.142/.047 1.15**</td>
<td>.230/.076 1.26**</td>
<td>.178/.049 1.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>- .168/.164 0.85</td>
<td>.266/.219 1.30</td>
<td>.167/.190 0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Misbehavior</td>
<td>-.276/.091 0.76**</td>
<td>-.426/.142 0.65**</td>
<td>-.440/.095 0.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.087/.902 8.06*</td>
<td>4.305/.133 74.06***</td>
<td>3.085/.931 21.86**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square (18 df)</td>
<td>72.49***</td>
<td>106.61***</td>
<td>128.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R-Square</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>830.25</td>
<td>420.83</td>
<td>788.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

¹Reflect and square root transformation , ²Reflect and inverse transformation

The logistic regression results presented in Table 3, Model 1 indicate that students who were least likely to misbehave at school, those students who felt that the school climate was most positive, and those
with higher levels self-efficacy and family attachment were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report if they had heard another student had a gun. None of the other variables had a significant association with the decision to report in this model. The variables included in the model explained slightly more than 10% (Nagelkerke R-square=.131) of the variance in the decision to report.

The logistic regression results presented in Model 2 suggest that those students who were least likely to misbehave at school, those students who felt that the school climate was most positive, and those with higher levels self-efficacy remained significantly more likely than their counterparts to report that they had seen another student with a gun. Additionally, those who perceived that their school had more delinquency problems, females, and middle school students were also significantly more likely to report if they had seen another student with a gun at school. The variables included in the model explained slightly more than one quarter (Nagelkerke R-square=.262) of the variance in the decision to report.

The logistic regression results presented in Model 3 suggest that females, middle school students, students who were least likely to misbehave at school, and students with higher levels self-efficacy remained significantly more likely to report if their best friend had a gun. Additionally, students that indicated adults were willing to help them with a problem when needed and students with higher levels of alienation were also significantly more likely than their counterparts to report if they had heard another student had a weapon other than a gun at school. The variables included in the model explained approximately 21% (Nagelkerke R-square=.211) of the variance in the decision to report.

In Table 4, we use multivariate logistic regression to examine the demographic, contextual, and theoretical predictors of whether or not a student would report the presence of a weapon other than a firearm at school under three conditions: when they heard another student had a weapon other than a gun (Model 1); when they saw another student with a weapon other than a gun (Model 2); and when their best friend had a weapon other than a gun at school (Model 3).

The logistic regression results presented in Table 4, Model 1 suggest that females, middle school students, students who were least likely to misbehave at school, and students with higher levels self-efficacy were significantly more likely to report that they had heard a student had a weapon other than a gun. Additionally, students that indicated adults were willing to help them with a problem when needed and students with higher levels of alienation were also significantly more likely than their counterparts to report if they had heard another student had a weapon other than a gun at school. The variables included in the model explained approximately 21% (Nagelkerke R-square=.211) of the variance in the decision to report.

In the second model in Table 4, we regressed students’ decisions to report if they saw another student with a weapon other than a gun to an adult on the demographic, contextual, and theoretical variables described earlier. The logistic regression results presented in the second model closely follow those in the first model in Table 4; females, middle school students, those students who reported lower levels of school misbehavior, and those who felt the school climate was most positive were significantly more likely to report the presence of a weapon than their counterparts.
Table 4. Logistic Regression Results Regression Whether Student Would Report the Presence of a Weapon Other than a Gun at School Across Three Situational Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B/S.E.</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>B/S.E.</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>B/S.E.</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>-.427/.175</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
<td>-.703/.189</td>
<td>0.50***</td>
<td>-.726/.178</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>.064/.248</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>-.193/.262</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-.344/.249</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch recipient</td>
<td>-.125/.206</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>.164/.223</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangement</td>
<td>.071/.180</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.295/.196</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>-.011/.181</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Level</td>
<td>-.875/.197</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>-.637/.196</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school climate(^1)</td>
<td>.425/.207</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
<td>.573/.223</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
<td>.643/.209</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/staff bias</td>
<td>.205/.081</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.107/.088</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.030/.081</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School guardianship</td>
<td>.076/.053</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.002/.057</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.024/.054</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Problems-Delinquency</td>
<td>.022/.054</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.138/.059</td>
<td>1.15*</td>
<td>.083/.054</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School safety</td>
<td>-.069/.055</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.025/.058</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>-.111/.056</td>
<td>0.90*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived risk of victimization</td>
<td>-.034/.050</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>.022/.055</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>-.019/.052</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family attachment(^2)</td>
<td>.449/.328</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.651/.339</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.725/.339</td>
<td>2.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult social capital(^1)</td>
<td>.731/.191</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>.834/.206</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>.737/.194</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School connectedness</td>
<td>.007/.088</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-.192/.096</td>
<td>0.83*</td>
<td>-.072/.090</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>.081/.041</td>
<td>1.09*</td>
<td>.002/.044</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.054/.041</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>.118/.045</td>
<td>1.13*</td>
<td>.149/.050</td>
<td>1.16**</td>
<td>.181/.045</td>
<td>1.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>.098/.158</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.001/.169</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.007/.161</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Misbehavior</td>
<td>-.375/.088</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
<td>-.378/.096</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
<td>-.450/.089</td>
<td>0.64***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.534/.881</td>
<td>12.60**</td>
<td>3.392/.945</td>
<td>29.72***</td>
<td>3.092/.895</td>
<td>22.02**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square (18 df) 127.03*** 151.15*** 166.55***
Nagelkerke R-Square 0.21 0.26 0.27
-2 Log Likelihood 878.42 766.65 863.74

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

\(^1\)Reflect and square root transformation , \(^2\)Reflect and inverse transformation

Additionally, students that indicated adults were willing to help them with a problem when needed, students who felt their school had the most delinquency problems, and
students with higher levels of self-efficacy were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report that they had seen another student with a weapon other than a gun. Students with lower levels of school connectedness were also significantly more likely than their counterparts to report that they had seen another student with a weapon other than a gun at school. The variables included in the model explained approximately one quarter of the variance (Nagelkerke R-square=.258) in the model. The logistic regression results presented in Table 4, Model 3 suggest that, similar to the previous models, females, middle school students, and students who reported lower levels of school misbehavior were more likely to report if their best friend had a weapon other than a gun. Moreover, those reporting higher levels of school safety, positive school climate, self-efficacy, and family attachment were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report if their best friend had a weapon other than a gun. Additionally, students that indicated adults were willing to help them with a problem when needed and students that reported higher levels of delinquency problems at their school were also more likely to report that their best friend had a weapon other than a gun than their counterparts. The variables included in this model explained the most variation in reporting among the six models presented here (Nagelkerke R-square=.266).

**DISCUSSION**

Consistent with previous studies, we found that the vast majority of middle and high school students who had information that another student had a weapon on campus (whether the weapon was a gun or some other type of weapon) would report the student to school administrators (Brank et al., 2007; Brinkley & Saarino, 2006; Wylie et al., 2010). This suggests that students are willing to take an active part in protecting the safety of their own school. This finding is particularly encouraging and reaffirms the less publicized fact that many acts of violence are averted in schools each year because students are willing to report those who either threaten to bring or actually bring a weapon to school. Like previous studies, however, we also found that willingness to report declines when those who possess weapons are close friends and in many instances, willingness to report also declines with age. This decline points to the importance students attach to being accepted by their peers and the need for school officials to develop strategies that help students understand that reporting weapons possession is paramount, even when those weapons are possessed by one’s friends.

Second, despite the finding that most students will report weapons possession, there were also a number of students who would not report the presence of a weapon at school. Depending on the scenario, between 11.1% (when students saw another student with a gun) and 43.2% (when a student’s best friend had a weapon other than a gun) indicated that they would not report the presence of weapons to administrators and 8.6% of the students indicated that they would not report weapons possession under any of the situations we presented. Similar to other studies, we found the likelihood of reporting varied by a number of different factors, including the type of weapon brought to school and the relationship of the students who were aware of the weapon’s presence at school (Brank et al., 2007; Brinkley & Saarino, 2006; Wylie et al., 2010). Several of these factors are discussed in detail below.

**Similarities in Reporting the Presence of Weapons at School**

Students who reported that they were involved in lower levels of school
misbehavior were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report the presence of a weapon to an adult, regardless of how they became aware of the presence of the weapon, the type of weapon, or the relationship between the student and the student with the weapon. This finding is identical to that of Brank and her colleagues (2007) and it supports arguments by social bonding, learning, and rational choice theories that youths with deviant peer associations are less inclined to report weapons possession at school to authorities. This finding suggests that efforts to lower levels of school misbehavior and address negative peer groups, coupled with efforts to reduce youth cultural beliefs that reporting represents unacceptable behavior, can play a critical role in encouraging youths to report weapons possession. This is likely to be an important component in ensuring school safety because youths with negative peer associations may be better situated to have knowledge of youths who possess weapons.

Students who had the highest levels of self-efficacy were also significantly more likely to report the presence of a weapon in every situation. Recall that these students report the use of more positive strategies for solving conflicts. Consequently, empowering students with the skills and knowledge to talk about their problems and resolve them in constructive ways should indirectly affect weapon reporting across all contexts.

Students who perceived that the climate at their school was most positive were also more likely to report the presence of a weapon in each of the situations presented to them. The direct relationship between positive school climate and willingness to report weapons possession is consonant with previous research by Wylie et al. (2010) and Brinkley and Saarnio (2006) who found a positive relationship between these measures, although Wylie et al. (2010) concluded that school climate is less important under conditions of anonymous reporting.

**Differences in Weapon Reporting by Type of Weapon**

None of the other measures had a statistically significant association with the reporting of a weapon in all situations. Consequently, the impact of the other theoretical variables depends on the weapon that was brought to school and/or the relationship the student has with the weapon carrier. For example, students who felt that there were more delinquency problems at their school would report the presence of a weapon when they saw a student with a weapon, regardless of the type of weapon, but were not significantly more likely to report either second-hand knowledge of the presence of a weapon or when their best friend had a weapon at school, regardless of the type of weapon. These students, perhaps because of the negative relationships they perceive in the school environment, are not willing to assist the school by reporting unless they feel it will immediately impact them. Students with higher levels of family attachment, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to report when they heard a student had a gun and if they knew their best friend had a weapon other than a gun.

Other important differences were also present. Only two demographic variables, gender and grade level, had a significant impact on weapon reporting in this study. Similar findings have been uncovered in earlier studies that have examined these predictors (Brank et al., 2007; Brinkley & Saarnio, 2006; Wylie et al., 2010). Female and middle school students were significantly more likely to report the presence of a weapon when they had direct knowledge of that weapon’s presence at school (e.g., when they saw a student with a
weapon or when they knew their best friend
had a weapon) and when they heard that a
student had a weapon other than a gun. Both
groups were also more likely to report
that they heard another student had a
weapon other than a gun but were not
significantly more likely than their
counterparts to report when they heard
another student had a gun. Consequently, it
appears that (1) the “culture of snitching”
(that discourages reporting of deviant acts)
is much more prevalent among males than
females and (2) this culture may be weapon
specific. In this case, school administrators
should develop programming and policies to
encourage reporting among males and high
school students, and they should stress the
potential harm that can be caused by various
types of weapons even when those weapons
are possessed by close friends and even
when those weapons are not firearms.

Our findings regarding the relationships
between students’ willingness to report
weapons possession at school and adult
social capital mirror those of Brank and
associates (2007), although our findings
provide a more nuanced view of this
relationship. Context clearly matters in
reporting weapons to adults, but so does the
nature of the weapon. For example, our
results indicate that students with higher
levels of perceived adult social capital were
significantly more likely to report to an adult
when they heard a student had a weapon
other than a gun, when they saw another
student with a weapon other than a gun, and
when they knew their best friend had a
weapon of any type. Thus, those students
who trusted in adults to help them when they
needed it were more likely to report the
presence of a weapon other than a gun in
every situation, and to report the presence of
a gun when it was in the possession of their
best friend. This suggests that bonds of trust
with adults make students more likely to
report weapons other than guns and they
appear to overcome some of the reticence
that many students have about reporting
guns that are possessed by their friends.

Nonsignificant Predictors of Weapon
Reporting

Although the relationships discussed
previously are important, there were a
number of nonsignificant relationships
uncovered in this study that are important as
well. Among the demographic variables,
students who received free lunch, performed
poorly in school, were from single-parent
homes, or were nonwhite were no more or
less likely than their counterparts to report
the presence of weapons at school to an
adult. This calls into question a commonly
held stereotype that only the “good” students
(e.g., the middle class white students who
perform well academically and live in
homes where both biological parents live
together) will report problems at school to
teachers and administrators. These findings
indicate that properly developed strategies to
build trust and an “open reporting climate”
will be successful or unsuccessful across all
demographics and, when students do not
report the presence of weapons, it is because
of factors other than demographics.

Additionally, variables that intuitively
would have a relationship with reporting the
presence of weapons did not have an
association with weapon reporting in this
sample. Students with elevated levels of
perceived risk of victimization and lower
levels of perceived school safety and school
guardianship were generally not more likely
to report the presence of a weapon at school
than their counterparts. This finding
suggests that efforts to reduce fear and risk
of victimization at school more generally
may have little impact on encouraging
weapon reporting among students, and
school administrators need to target, and
advertise as such, any efforts to encourage
weapon reporting among students.
Finally, despite the extant literature suggesting otherwise, student alienation, school connectedness, and perceptions of teacher/staff bias toward outsider groups had little to do with weapon reporting among the youths in this sample and in those instances where significant relationships were found the findings were counterintuitive. These findings are important because they suggest that differing components of multidimensional concepts such as social bonding and school climate may operate in different ways on students’ willingness to report weapons possession.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we used data from 895 middle and high school students in the Appalachian region of the U. S. to examine predictors of reporting weapons of various types to school authorities. Because we have not examined a representative sample of schools, our results cannot be generalized to other schools. Nevertheless, our findings are consonant with those found in previous studies with some notable exceptions and reveal a number of interesting findings that are relevant for both policy and future research.

First, and perhaps most importantly, our results suggest that efforts to encourage an “open reporting climate” where students feel empowered to report the presence of a weapon at school (and, intuitively, other actions that threaten the school environment) could be successful if properly designed and targeted. These efforts should begin with encouraging students to take ownership of their school, developing positive relationships between students and adults in the school, and building self-efficacy among students. Including students in the decision-making efforts of school administrators is a logical, yet often overlooked, step that can begin to accomplish this task. Inviting students to participate in assessments of school safety and crisis response planning is also essential; having these students report back to the larger student body and solicit feedback from their peers should create a larger sense of “buy-in” from the entire student body. Just as disgruntled voters often accuse their elected representatives of having a larger agenda that ignores the voters’ needs, students who are not asked to provide feedback to administrators about their schools may feel ignored by school decision-makers. Because they feel the school administrators do not value their feedback, they may feel the administrators will not respond to their reports of weapons and other harmful behaviors and become apathetic about the efforts of teachers and administrators to improve the school. Student empowerment will produce ownership; students who feel they own the space will not be apathetic. Although Wylie et al. (2010) argue that improving school climate may not be the most effective way to increase students’ willingness to report weapons possession, and call for providing students with an anonymous avenue for reporting, we think it is too early to suggest that school climate improvement efforts will not produce significant results.

A second finding from this study needs future attention. Students who felt that the teachers and administrators were not helpful and created an environment of unfair and often nonexistent punishment for rule-breaking were less likely to report the presence of all weapons than those who felt school administrators and teachers treated students fairly and punished them when they broke the rules. Also, students who reported that they knew a number of other students and teachers at school was found to be significantly related to willingness to report in only one model and knowing many other students and teachers was inversely related to willingness to report. In contrast,
students who reported that there were several adults they could turn to when they were having problems were more likely to report weapons possession in several of our models. Thus, schools exert considerable influence over the extent to which students are encouraged to report weapons possession. Importantly, with effort, schools can take steps to develop close bonds between students and staff and to create a supportive school climate likely to increase levels of school safety.

Our findings, in conjunction with earlier studies on this topic, indicate that students’ willingness to report weapons possession is a highly nuanced phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include the reporting climate of the school, students’ perceptions of the potential consequences to themselves and others of reporting, the types of weapons involved, and the conditions under which reporting takes place. Moreover, previous research in this area (Brank et al., 2007; Wylie et al., 2010) indicates that allowing students an anonymous way to report weapons possession may be an important factor in encouraging student reporting. Unfortunately, we were not able to test this measure. Future studies, however, should examine how anonymity interacts with a variety of factors including those explored in this paper.

The developing body of research in this area provides a starting point for understanding students’ willingness to report weapons possession at school and can serve as a basis for policies designed to enhance school safety. Moreover, our findings support and build on previous studies in this area that highlight the relevance of school climate, social bonding, and the development of social capital and self-efficacy in the development of safe schools. Moreover, our research indicates that specific components of multi-dimensional constructs like school climate and social bonding are more important than others. Thus, it will be important for future studies to examine these relationships more carefully and determine what forms of social bonding and what aspects of school climate are likely to have the most impact on students’ willingness to report weapons possession. Clearly, additional research is needed to more fully understand the circumstances and factors that will be the most efficacious in encouraging students to report weapons possession in schools. This research is important, however, because it can play a major role in developing strategies for reducing some of the most serious forms of violence that affect children and communities.

REFERENCES


school students: Results and validation. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 22*, 313-319.


Verdugo, R.R., & Schneider, J.M. (1999). Quality schools, safe schools: A
theoretical and empirical discussion. 
*Education and Urban Society, 31*, 286-308.


**NOTES**

1. We introduce social learning theory because the hypotheses explored by Brank et al., 2007 and Wylie et al., 2010 are compatible with the social learning perspective, although this is not noted in either study.

2. Because the school system collected the data for this project, we were concerned that some students might not take the questionnaire as seriously as they might if outside researchers were collecting the data. In addition to including a protocol providing teachers step-by-step instructions regarding how the questionnaires should be administered, we also included an item asking students how honest they were during the completion of the questionnaire. The chi-square tests to examine the relationship between respondent honesty and reporting the presence of a weapon suggested that, compared to those students who indicated they provided honest responses all the time, larger percentages of respondents who indicated that they never gave honest responses, were honest some of the time, or were honest most of the time indicated that they would not tell about the presence of a weapon. These percentage differences ranged from 9.9% to 13% and each was statistically significant (p < .001).

3. In three of the six models, the final model with outliers removed resulted in one predictor either being added to or being removed from the initial model. In the final model regressing Heard Another Student had a Weapon on the predictors, alienation did not reach significance when it was found to be significant in the initial model. When Knew Best friend had a Weapon (other than a gun) was regressed on the predictors, family attachment reached significance; it was not significant in the initial model. Finally, with outliers removed, when Saw Another Student With a Weapon was regressed on the predictors, family attachment did not reach statistical significance when it was significant in the initial model.
An Analysis of Student Opinions on Former Convicts as Professors

John F. Frana, MA
Indiana State University
Department of Sociology

&

Ryan D. Schroder, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology
University of Louisville

Abstract: Recently numerous convicts, upon release from prison, have been pursuing advanced education as an avenue for successful re-entry. A small group of ex-convicts have been conducting research, and/or teaching Criminal Justice or Sociology courses at universities worldwide. Using survey questionnaires, students majoring in Criminology and Criminal Justice (CJ) at a midsized Midwestern university were asked how they would react to a course that is taught by a former convict. The findings from this research suggest that the vast majority of CJ students would welcome professors with a criminal history into the classroom. Consequently, policies implemented within various universities of not employing those convicted of felony offenses may be ill advised as students’ value the diversity a convict criminologist would bring to the classroom.

Keywords: Convict Criminology; Criminal Justice Students; Criminal Desistance

1 Please direct all correspondence to John F. Frana at student_of_crime@yahoo.com
INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, America has experienced a type of “incarceration binge” (Irwin & Austin, 1997) which has arguably been the most thoroughly implemented social program of modern times. At the start of 2008 there were 2,319,258 persons incarcerated across the nation representing a full 1% of the adult population (Pew Center on the States [PEW], 2008). Currently there are 4.3 million people on probation, and another 824,365 on parole (PEW, 2009). Jointly, these numbers reveal that over 3% of the American adult population is under some form of correctional supervision. On the other hand, each year over 600,000 individuals are released from prison back into society nationwide (Petersilia, 2004). It is conceivable that some of these released prisoners will someday aspire to careers in academia (Ross & Richards, 2003). Additionally, it is also probable that many of these former-convict academics will pursue studies in criminology and criminal justice.

As the faculties of many Criminology and/or Criminal Justice programs are dominated by former practitioners of the Criminal Justice system and/or trained academics, some of whom may have never visited a prison or interacted with a convict, more often than not, they do not understand the subjects of their studies: convicts (Irwin, 2003). Many academics do not value the perspective of former convicts, nor do they view prisoners as people (Jones, Ross, Richards, & Murphy, 2009). Consequently, much academic research currently being conducted is motivated by political ideology, economics, and government funding with an emphasis and concern with increased social control of an already marginalized population: the prisoner (Richards & Ross, 2001; Austin, 2003; Terry, 2003; Jones et al., 2009). In short there is an obvious disconnect between much of the academic literature and the realities of prisoners and the realities of the lives they lead (Richards & Ross, 2001).

Many universities, which claim to value diversity, regularly deny employment to persons convicted of a felony offense. In the past the majority of academics with a criminal record “stayed in the closet,” choosing not to disclose their past (Jones et al., 2009, p.153). Today, with the ever increasing use of background checks, it is increasingly more difficult to conceal a disreputable background. The increased use of background checks along with augmented correctional supervision can be seen within the plight of Paul Krueger, who was terminated from a tenured position at Penn State University when it was discovered that nearly 40 years prior he had been convicted of multiple felonies. At the time of his dismissal, the university stated that Paul Krueger’s “ability to carry out his responsibilities effectively ... has been compromised in light of revelations about his history” (Leung, 2004).

At the same time instructors in virtually every introduction to criminal justice or corrections course assure students that a basic tenant of the criminal justice system is rehabilitation. The response by Penn State University sends a clear message that the administrators of this institution do not believe the concept of rehabilitation of former convicts; even after 12 years of incarceration and 25 years of productive citizenship. In short, felons need not apply at Penn State University. Many universities deny employment to anyone with a felony record including the most menial positions (custodial worker, landscaping etc.) let alone for a position as an assistant professor. Not only are universities denying employment to former felons, many inquire as to criminal past on student applications for admissions.

As the vast majority of CJ students, like their instructors, have never actually visited a prison, interacted with prisoners or been the victim of a crime; their perceived
knowledge of the subject is therefore socially constructed (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Potter and Kappeler (1998) observe that over 90% of the American population has not experienced any form of direct criminal victimization, nor ever will. Consequently, a great deal of what mainstream society, as well as CJ students, believes and holds true about prisoners is often disingenuous. The stereotypical prisoner is often based on a mixture of media representations of sensationalized crimes, politicians’ rhetoric, as well as academic studies of career criminals (Irwin & Austin, 1997).

Over the last 30 years, in the face of numerous studies which have repeatedly shown that most prisoners are not career or even dangerous criminals, a disproportionate amount of academic attention has focused on “career criminals,” “super predators,” and the “truly dangerous” (Austin, 2003). It has been observed that, “one of the best ways of defining what we are is by pointing to what we are not” (Erckson, Baranekand, & Chan, 1987, cited in Greer & Jewkes, 2005, p. 29). This then creates a sense of otherness, or that “they” commit crime because they are not like “us” (Greer & Jewkes, 2005). In other words, on the topic of criminals, society constructs a clear distinction between those who are good and those who are bad. Criminals serve as the common enemy, without “them” (bad people) there can be no “us” (good people).

The separation between “us” and “them” is extremely problematic since virtually all of us are lawbreakers. Bohm (1986) suggests that, “for many people, it is comforting to conceive of themselves as law abiding citizens...[meanwhile] evidence suggests that over 90% of all Americans have committed some crime for which they could be incarcerated” (p. 200-201). Austin (2003) observed that what is truly frightening for many people is to recognize that, in general, prisoners are regular people.

There is no big difference between the person labeled criminal and the average citizen (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967).

**THE EMERGENCE OF CONVICT CRIMINOTOLOGY**

Convict Criminology is a relatively new and contentious perspective within academia. John Irwin (2003) observed that “excon criminologists are going to have to play a major role in pushing our discipline to critically examine the issues surrounding incarceration” (p. xvii). In general, Convict Criminology is a compilation of essays and research conducted by convicts or former convicts who have acquired PhD’s, or are enrolled in graduate studies, as well as other non-convict academics and practitioners who are contributing to a reform ideology within academia (Richards & Ross, 2001). Many of these former convicts attempt to utilize their past experiences to better inform the study of prisons and prisoners (Richards, Faggiani, Roffers, Hendrickson, & Krueger, 2008; Richards & Ross, 2001).

The Convict Criminology (CC) perspective was first realized at the 1997 meeting of the American Society of Criminology as a means for giving a voice to those former convict academics (Irwin, 2003; Terry, 2003; Richards, et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009). The idea that former convicts could influence the study of criminology/sociology can be viewed within the “standpoint theory” of social relations. This perspective, originally advanced by feminist theorists, observes that marginalized populations have a unique opportunity to conduct social science research as a result of their marginalized status (Harding, 1991). Wood (2004) explains that “a standpoint is achieved – earned through critical reflection on power relations and through engaging in the struggle required to construct an oppositional stance” (p. 61).
Standpoint theory, which is a methodological premise based on critical theory as opposed to a theory of its own, is guided by the argument that social location (i.e. gender, race, social class etc.), experience, or perspective shapes peoples’ lives and perceptions. According to Harding (1991), researchers from marginalized or unprivileged social positions (such as former convicts) are likely to generate research which is “less partial and less distorted” (Harding, 1991, p. 121) than research generated by traditional social scientists who often hold more privileged social positions. Similarly, Wood (2004) observes that “knowledge is situated in social circumstances [and] shaped by our social location” (p. 215). Therefore, the CC perspective notes that the former prisoner academic will perceive the prison and the criminal justice system differently than traditional academics.

When applying the CC perspective to the study of criminology/sociology we understand, as Eugene V. Debbs (1927/2000:95-96), who ran for President of the United States while incarcerated in Federal prison, observed that:

Only the inmate, the imprisoned convict, actually knows the prison and what it means to him and his kind. Even the officials in charge and on the grounds, and in close personal contact with the inmates, do not know the prison. Indeed they cannot know it, for they have never felt its blighting influence, nor been oppressed by its rigorous discipline; nor have they suffered the mental and physical hunger, the isolation, the deprivation and the cruel and relentless punishment it imposes (p. 95-96).

Consequently, when conducting research related to prisons/prisoners, researchers must consider the standpoint of the prisoner and whenever possible conduct qualitative, ethnographic or observational research relevant to this marginalized population. Moreover, Irwin (1987) argues that “any approach not based firmly on qualitative or phenomenological ground is not only a distortion of the phenomenon but also is very likely a corruption” (p. 42, cited in Jones, et al., 2009, p. 157). Objectivity, a basic canon of social research which observes that research need be unbiased and ethically neutral, according to the Convict Criminologists perspective, is “an illusion that illustrates the social distance of the traditional armchair academic researcher from the sordid lives of criminals and convicts” (Richards & Ross, 2001, p. 185).

In other words, Convict Criminology seeks to provide academia, as well as the general public, with an understanding of criminal justice with a more realistic viewpoint; one based on the standpoint of prisoners first hand qualitative research methods (Richards & Ross, 2001). The time these academics have served behind prison walls and fences contributes to their ideology, which in turn informs their research agenda.

**THE CURRENT STUDY**

As former prisoners turned academics may be controversial within CJ it becomes paramount to understand how, or if, students (particularly of criminology, criminal justice, justice administration etc.) will accept these academics that undoubtedly will bring a unique perspective not only to the research they conduct but also into the classroom. The current study, utilizing survey methods, seeks to discover how students studying criminology and criminal justice at a mid-sized Midwestern University would respond to a course taught by a former convict. This research is unique in that it represents the first attempt to qualitatively measure student attitudes ($n = 186$) pertaining to Convict Criminology or for having ex-convicts as professors in the classroom.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**
To date, there has been no research conducted which has sought to qualitatively examine student attitudes pertaining to Convict Criminology or of having former-convicts as professors in the classroom. Prior research pertaining to CC in the classroom has been limited at best.

Richards, et al., (2008) conducting exploratory research related to student perceptions concerning the usefulness and/or value of a Convict Criminology course offered at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh. For this research surveys were distributed to students upon completion of the elective course. In general, the student sample (n=16) for this research came to the realization that CC was about transformation of the former prisoner. Many of these students observed that the CC course was not the typical criminology course. As one student observed:

I felt that Convict Criminology was a very valuable class for me. I felt that the books I read had a very different take on the correctional system. It was good to have another side of the story. I think that a person who wants to study the criminal justice system would be selling themselves short if the only information they were given was from the outside. I felt that this course gave me a complete understanding of the system than I did before this class (Richards, et. al. 2008, p. 131).

The findings contained within this essay must be viewed with caution. As the researchers note, the sample of student responses contained was obtained from a convenience sample and should not be viewed as a basis for making inferences to a larger university population or sub-population of criminology students. This is evident in the relatively small sample, 16, of students from a course which has been taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (by a former convict) since 2004. Additionally, this research did not discuss response from students who may have not found value or usefulness within the course.

Other research has been conducted by Mackey and Courtright (2000) who sought to measure the differences, if any, between criminal justice (CJ) students and non-CJ students with regard to their attitudes towards criminal punishment. This research was implemented when researchers observed that when the works of John Irwin (a former prisoner and prominent Convict Criminologist) was introduced into several CJ classes, numerous students “displayed open hostility to [Irwin’s] ideas” (p. 424). Researchers had utilized Irwin’s (1985) book The Jail in an attempt to:

Illustrate the view that criminal justice interventions may not always provide a better correctional solution for the individual offender, and may also lead to the continuation and escalation of criminality by further isolating the offender from society, weakening his or her bonds to family, friends, and work (Mackey & Courtright, 2000, p. 424).

For this research, researchers define punitiveness as “an attitude toward sanctioning and punishment that includes retribution, incapacitation, and a lack of concern for offender rehabilitation” (p. 430). When compared to the control sample CJ majors, at all levels of student status, held more punitive attitudes. Researchers note that there may be a sort of liberalizing effect related to increased educational attainment as seniors from both the control group and CJ majors were found to be less punitive than were freshman, though due to a lack of longitudinal methodology, this liberalizing effect was not a conclusive finding.

Based upon the aforementioned resentment displayed by numerous students when exposed to the works of John Irwin, Courtright, Mackey, and Packard (2005) hypothesized that CJ students were unable to empathize with disadvantaged populations especially prisoners. This research measured “emotional empathy” of CJ
majors with a control group of non-CJ majors. The finding of this research does show statistical significance between the 2 groups with the CJ majors showing lower levels of empathy. As the research sample contained students from both private Catholic universities as well as public institutions, it was revealed that students enrolled in Catholic Universities displayed significantly higher levels of empathy than their public university peers. Similarly, the findings also found that gender has a major effect upon empathy. Overall, male CJ students displayed the lowest levels of empathy followed by males from other majors with females from both groups’ possessing higher empathy levels than their male counterparts. An additional significant finding within this research is a negative relationship between students who sought careers in law enforcement and empathy. In other words, students who sought to pursue employment in law enforcement were most likely to possess low levels of empathy. In regards to students who plan to pursue employment as a correctional counselor, the findings reveal that these students had the highest empathy levels.

Similar research conducted by Mackey, Courtright, and Packard (2006) set out to test the rehabilitative model among students. This research put forth the hypothesis that there would be a difference in whether or not students would accept the principles of rehabilitation when the independent variable of gender was introduced. The findings did support their hypothesis as there was a significant statistical difference present between females and males within their sample with females showing more support for the rehabilitation model. Additionally, a second hypothesis, that CJ majors would be less supportive than non-CJ majors, was also tested and this hypothesis was supported though the difference was not statically significant. Hypothesis number three for this research sought to determine if any difference existed between students of various class standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Again the findings show that lower classmen were less supportive of the rehabilitation model than were upper classmen, but this finding was not statistically significant.

Research conducted by Farnworth, Longmire, and West (1998) examined students’ attitudes in relation to the death penalty, alternatives to incarceration (i.e. probation), as well as attitudes towards the war on drugs. They hypothesized that (1) senior classmen would hold less punitive views than their freshman counterparts thereby supporting a “liberalizing effect” from education; and (2) in-service students (those who currently are or have been employed in some capacity within the CJ system) would be more punitive in their views than traditional students with no in-service experience. A secondary goal of their research was to compare the attitudes of CJ majors with students of non-CJ majors theorizing that CJ majors would be more punitive in their views than non-CJ majors at all levels.

By comparing attitudes of freshman CJ majors with attitudes of senior CJ majors their findings reveal that for all variables (support for the death penalty, support for alternative sanctions and attitudes towards the war on drugs), non-CJ seniors were less likely than non-CJ freshmen to hold punitive views, thereby supporting the hypothesis of a liberalizing effect of the college experience; this effect was not evident for CJ majors. At the same time just the opposite was found for non-CJ majors with seniors having more punitive views than non-CJ freshmen. Another hypothesis that in-service CJ students would hold more punitive views than traditional students was not supported by this research.

Utilizing a pretest-posttest design, Lane (1997) hypothesized that students enrolled in a corrections course at a California
university, emphasizing intermediate punishments or alternatives to incarceration (i.e. house arrest, ISP and boot camp), would be increasingly likely to accept the less punitive punishments. Findings from this research show that after exposure to a college course emphasizing intermediate sanctions, students were more likely to support alternatives to incarceration for non-violent crimes than they were when they completed the pretest. These findings did not extend to violent crimes, as both before and after the corrections classes students still preferred incarceration for persons committing violent crimes. This does seem to point towards a liberalizing effect of education to some degree as students exposed to education and knowledge of the harm perpetuated by the prison system; these findings show them to be less punitive in regards to non-violent crimes.

However, the author did note that during the interval between pretest and posttest, media influence may have affected these results for support of incarceration for violent crimes. In-between the pretest and posttest periods of this research, the State of California was in the midst of a heated debate over Three Strikes legislation, with the media giving much attention to the murder of Polly Klaas which was a current event at that time.

Research conducted by Miller, Tewksbury, and Hensley (2004) concluded that most university students, CJ majors or not, commonly do not have a true understanding of crime in America nor do they truly comprehend many of the problems within the correctional system. Their research with students in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida reveal that students are seriously misinformed about crime and corrections issues. Within this study, six dependent variables were utilized, (number of homicides in America, total number of prisoners in the system, number of prisoners killed by other prisoners, number of correctional officers murdered by prisoners, amount of consensual sex amongst prisoners, number of sexual assaults in prison). For all six of these variables, a majority of students appear to be misinformed as they regularly overestimated totals for all these categories. For example, when asked to estimate the total number of homicides in 2001 (the year prior to data collection), which was 13,752, 41% of the CJ students vastly overestimated this total, with some 16% of this sample believing that there were over 250,000 homicides that year (p. 318).

The findings also show that when compared to non-CJ majors, CJ majors did not have a more reliable or accurate understanding of the issues. Furthermore, it does not appear that education clarifies these issues for this sample as upper level CJ students’ knowledge was no more accurate than the knowledge of freshman CJ students. The authors note that if educators do not address this misinformation within the classroom, they “create a vacuum in which the students are never challenged to rethink the realities of crime compared to the myths” (p. 314). The authors caution that if these myths are not addressed by educators, they could subsequently affect the decision making process once the student is working within the CJ system.

The literature review contained above makes clear CJ majors tend to be more punitive and less empathetic in relation to criminal conduct than students of other majors. Also, that educating students to the realities of imprisonment may produce profound changes within their notions on criminal justice. This literature review leads to the hypothesis that students of Criminology and CJ would not welcome former convicts as professors of CJ.

METHODS
In an attempt to measure if students of CJ would accept former convicts as
academics, a three page pencil and paper survey instrument was distributed to a stratified random sample of students majoring in criminology and criminal justice at a mid-sized, mid-western university. Lower-level freshman classes (100’s & 200’s) were not asked to participate in order to avoid participants who may be taking the course as an elective while majoring in a different field, thereby allowing this research to concentrate on CJ majors. By concentrating on only upper level courses (300’s & above) the sample will better represent those students majoring in criminology and criminal justice. A total of 197 student surveys were distributed. During the coding process, it was discovered that four respondents were not Criminology & Criminal Justice majors. An additional seven respondents had not fully completed the survey instrument and were therefore deemed unusable. Hence, a total of 186 completed surveys were used for this study (n=186).

Dependent Variable

The outcome under investigation in the current study is the students’ responses to an open-ended question about how they would react to a course that is taught by a former convict. The written responses were coded using a focused coding scheme based on three mutually exclusive dimensions: 1) not an issue, 2) hesitant, and 3) would drop the course. The vast majority of criminal justice students surveyed reported no problems with a convict professor (N = 126, 67.7 percent), many of whom indicated that a convict professor would actually enhance the educational process. Others were less enthusiastic about a convict professor, mainly reporting the fear that a convict professor might introduce too much bias into the classroom material (i.e. they may have an axe to grind) or would be reluctant due to the nature of the crime committed (N = 50, 26.9 percent). A minority of students reported that they would immediately drop the course upon learning of a professors’ status as a convict (N = 10, 5.4 percent).

Independent Measures

To address the patterns of responses to a convict professor, the following independent measures are included in the following analyses: age (1 = 18-21, 4 = 31 or older), gender (female = 1), race (minority = 1), self-reported socioeconomic status (1 = poor, 5 = wealthy), current or prior work in the criminal justice system (1 =yes), full time college enrollment (1 = yes), class standing in college (1 = junior, senior, or graduate student), and a traditional measure of political conservatism (1 = conservative) (Hamm, 1990).

The vast majority of the sample is between the ages of 18 – 26 (N = 168, 90 percent), females comprise 43 percent of the sample, and 24 percent of the sample are racial minorities. Class standing in college is relatively evenly split, with 102 of the subjects (54.8 percent) being of junior, senior, or graduate student status. Accordingly, 164 (88.2 percent) of the subjects maintain a full-time course load, and 54 (29 percent) of the subjects report subscribing to a conservative political viewpoint.

Analytic Strategy

We begin the following analyses by examining the differences in the values of the independent measures across the categories of student responses to a convict professor with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) methods. The second step in the quantitative component of the project is a multivariate assessment of factors contributing to criminal justice student responses to a convict professor using multinomial logistic regression techniques (see Aldrich and Nelson, 1985). The second component of the current investigation is a qualitative evaluation of the open-ended
Table 1. Mean Comparisons between Key Variables in the Study (One Way Anova)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not an Issue</th>
<th>Hesitant/Bias</th>
<th>Would Drop</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.480</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>0.292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.374</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>1.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>3.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>2.710</td>
<td>2.880</td>
<td>2.900</td>
<td>0.453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ Employee</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td>0.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Student</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>1.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Standing/Year</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>0.466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

responses provided by the research participants. We analyzed the qualitative data using a grounded theory coding strategy (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in an effort to describe, explain, and understand the reactions of the research participants to a convict professor.

Mean Comparisons by Student Responses to Convict Professor

As mentioned above, the vast majority of criminal justice students surveyed for the current project report no problems with a convict professor, while others would be hesitant or drop the course. To better understand the characteristics of the students with each perspective, the mean levels of each independent variable are shown by each perspective in Table 1.

With age, the data show that the students who would drop a course with a convict professor are slightly older, on average, than those who do not have an issue or are hesitant, but the differences are not statistically significant. Females are overrepresented in the hesitant category, those currently or previously employed in the criminal justice system and political conservatives are overrepresented in the “would drop” category, but again the differences are not significant. In fact, the only significant variation evidenced within the sample of criminal justice students are between racial minorities and whites. Minorities are significantly overrepresented in the “would drop” response category, suggesting that racial minorities are more likely to exhibit negative reactions to a convict professor.

Multivariate Assessment of Student Responses

Given the strong relationships between many of the independent measures in the current study (i.e., political conservatism and employment in the criminal justice system); a more complete understanding of the patterns of student responses to a convict professor is produced through a multivariate analysis of the available data. The results of the multinomial logistic regression comparing the odds of inclusion in each of the three response categories are shown in Table 2.

Consistent with the ANOVA calculations reported above, the results of the multinomial logistic regression indicate that minorities are significantly less likely to report than a convict professor is not an issue than indicate they would drop the course. Similarly, minorities show significantly lower odds of being included in the hesitant category when compared with the “would drop” group. Interestingly, however, minorities are significantly more
Table 2. Student Reactions to Convict Instructor by Background Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not an Issue v. Would Drop</th>
<th>Not an Issue v. Hesitant/Bias</th>
<th>Hesitant/Bias v. Would Drop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.284</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.783</td>
<td>-0.747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-1.339</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>+ 0.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-0.348</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>-0.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ Employee</td>
<td>-0.795</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>0.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>-0.586</td>
<td>1.403</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Year</td>
<td>-1.462</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>+ -0.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>174</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model X²=</td>
<td>17.455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²=</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, + p < .10

likely to indicate that a convict professor is not an issue compared with being hesitant about a convict professor. These results suggest that racial minorities are simply less likely to report being hesitant about a convict professor in the classroom than either of the more firm reactions (not an issue, would drop). The other notable finding from this analysis is that students with upper class standing are significantly less likely to report that a convict professor is not an issue than indicating that they would drop the course.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings contained within this research note that many student would appreciate and value the diversity and perspective that a formerly incarcerated individual would bring to their education. As noted by Ross and Richards (2003) many of the portrayals of prisoners and prisons, as they are currently discussed in university classrooms, as well as movies, are often a distortion of reality.

As the majority of this research sample supports the idea of former prisoners as university instructors, these findings are important for university hiring policies as the finding contained here indicate that students seem to reject the dominant stereotype of a prisoner as one committed to crime and unresponsive to rehabilitation. Many of these students note that it is the different perspective, or standpoint, which a former prisoner would bring to the classroom which would enhance their education.

As many universities claim to value diversity, while denying employment to former felons, incorporating felons on staff will bring an added dimension of diversity which would greatly benefit students. A small minority of students (less than 10%) were totally against the idea of having former convicts in the class. By introducing former convicts into the classroom students would be required to face their fear of others and thereby possibly reconsider any preconceived stereotype. The university
classroom is the ideal place to expose and dismiss many of the stereotypes and myths surrounding former convicts, and having convicts in the classroom would assist in this area.

This research fills holes in our knowledge and adds to the literature concerning CJ students and is the first attempt to analyze CJ students’ perceptions of having former convicts as professors while articulating convict criminology in a broader framework. These findings are contrary to previous research by Courtright, Mackey, and Packard (2005), which found that CJ students are reluctant to consider empathy towards prisoners, or that CJ students are reluctant to support the idea of rehabilitation (Mackey, Courtright, & Packard, 2006). We are unsure as to why our findings are inherently different from the previous literature.

This research is not without its flaws, our sample did not include distant education students; future research should incorporate these students as many distant education students may be “in-service” or currently employed as CJ practitioners which may influence future research. Also, utilizing a longitudinal design in future research may also display different results. As this research attempted to exclude freshman students, future research should use a pretest/posttest experiment where students are asked about their perception as incoming freshmen and asked the same questions as seniors prior to graduation. Additionally future researchers may evaluate academic faculty perceptions and whether they would welcome former convicts as peers and fellow faculty members.

REFERENCES


contemporary criminal justice, 6 (3), 176-200.
“It Depends on the Crime”: Opinions Towards Restoring Voting Rights for Violent and White Collar Ex-Felons

Cherie Dawson-Edwards, Ph.D. ¹
Department of Justice Administration
University of Louisville

&

George E. Higgins, Ph.D.
Department of Justice Administration
University of Louisville

Abstract: Existing punishment-related attitudinal research has focused on criminal sanctions and collateral consequences of conviction; however, few studies have explored perceptions of felon disenfranchisement. Felon disenfranchisement laws often restrict the franchise to certain types of offenders. This restriction based on an offender’s correctional status, not the type of crime. The current research uses a modified version of a previously tested national survey instrument, which measured attitudes toward felon enfranchisement based on variations of the types of convicted offenders. Using a convenience sample of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) students, this research explores attitudes toward felon voting prohibitions in a permanently disenfranchising state. The findings reveal that race impacts views towards voting rights for violent criminals while college major and gender influence perceptions of disenfranchising white collar offenders.

Keywords: felony disenfranchisement, voting rights, African American students, felon voting rights

¹ 2301 South Third Street, 210 Brigman Hall, Louisville, KY 40292. (502) 852-0080 (voice) / (502) 852-0065 (fax) / bcdaws01@exchange.louisville.edu
INTRODUCTION

The January 2012 Republican debate in South Carolina illustrated some fundamental differences between presidential hopefuls Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum based on their opinions towards felon voting rights. Romney declared that violent felons should never be able to vote, while Santorum cited racial disparities in the prison system and argued for automatic restoration once an offender completes his or her sentence. These two opposing views brought to light the divisive nature of felony disenfranchisement, a practice that can be traced to Ancient Greece and Roman societies where criminals were branded as “infamous” which resulted in a loss of their rights to hold public office and vote (Johnson-Parrish, 2003).

In the United States, early felon disenfranchisement laws distinguished categories of offenders who would lose the franchise. This incarnation appeared soon after the abolishment of slavery when race neutral language in Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment permitted disenfranchisement on the basis of “participation in rebellion, or other crime” (Chin, 2004; US Const. Amend, XIV, 2). This clause empowered southern states to craft disenfranchisement laws that included offenses more likely to be committed by freed slaves. Eventually, crimes of “moral turpitude” (Dugree-Pearson, 2002), vagrancy laws and other offenses such as “mischief” or “insulting gestures” (Alexander, 2010, p. 31) would result in criminal disenfranchisement while more serious offenses just as likely to be committed by Whites such as murder and robbery would not disenfranchise (see Dawson-Edwards, 2012; Fellner & Mauer, 1998; Hench, 1998; Holloway, 2009; Shapiro, 1993). Currently, the “crazy quilt” of state felon disenfranchisement laws reflects that voting rights are often restricted based on correctional status more so than offense type (see Ewald, 2005, p. 1; U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). However, while some policies categorically disenfranchise by correctional status, another apparent policy trend is restoring voting rights based on crime type.

According to The Sentencing Project forty-eight states categorically prohibit felons from voting (2012). Thirty states prohibit persons on probation from voting. Thirty-five states do not permit parolees to vote. Forty-eight states bar prisoners from voting, and four states permanently disenfranchise ex-felons from voting. Recent attention has been given to those few states that permanently disenfranchise felons. The term permanent disenfranchisement is used to describe the potential that certain felons may never regain their voting rights. While described as permanently disenfranchising, each of these four states has a process in place that allows for ex-felons to regain their right to vote; however, the reality remains that certain types of offenders are permanently disenfranchised due to “tough on crime” politics.

As recently as 2005, five states permanently prohibited all convicted felons from voting – Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Virginia (Mauer & Kansal, 2005; The Sentencing Project, 2012). Lifetime restriction is considered the most restrictive form of felon disenfranchisement because a pardon from the governor or a pardon/clemency board is required for restoration of voting rights. Changes in Nebraska, Florida and Iowa policies and practices removed them from the list of permanently disenfranchising states. As recently as early 2011, only two states permanently disenfranchised ex-felons – Virginia and Kentucky (The Sentencing Project, 2012). Later in 2011, changes in both Iowa and Florida placed them back on
the list of states that permanently disenfranchise convicted felons (The Sentencing Project, 2012). In addition to permanently disenfranchising numerous felons, regardless of their correctional status, these states also make the restoration process (also referred to as re-enfranchisement) more difficult for certain types of offenders. Analyses of felon disenfranchisement policies are often focused on the manner in which the correctional status (i.e. probation, parole, prison, etc.) of the offender impacts the restriction of their vote. A less common approach to examining these laws is to look at how the offender’s crime type affects whether or not he/she remains disenfranchised. The latter approach focuses on regaining their right to vote.

Permanently disenfranchising states are not alone in their distinctions between categories. While they do not provide for blanket disenfranchisement, states like Delaware (Delaware Constitution, Article V § 2) and Tennessee (Tennessee General Assembly, Public Chapter 860) identify certain crime categories as eligible for permanent disenfranchisement. In Delaware, the state constitution permanently disenfranchises those convicted of murder, manslaughter, felony offenses against public administration, and felony sexual offenses (Delaware Constitution, Article V § 2). The law in Tennessee permanently disenfranchises convicted murderers, rapists, anyone convicted of a sexual offense under TCA § 40-39-202(17) and any violent sexual offender convicted under TCA § 40-39-202(17) with a child victim (Tennessee General Assembly, Public Chapter 860).

The current study examined student opinions towards the restoration of voting rights for certain categories of ex-felons. The purpose of this research is to add to that body of literature by exploring the correlates of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) students’ views towards ex-offenders regaining their voting rights.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Throughout history, the criminal justice system has determined criminal sanctioning based on the severity of the crime. The utilitarian approach to criminal sanctioning argues that the severity of the punishment should depend on the gravity of the offense. With that in mind, there is no question as to why certain crimes receive harsher penalties. However, little is known about how this translates into collateral consequences of criminal conviction. As a non-penal sanction, felony disenfranchisement laws do not fall under the same legal parameters as criminal sanctions. This has been affirmed by the United States Supreme Court in the *Green v. Board of Elections* (1967) case in which Green, a convicted felon, disputed the New York State Constitution’s felon voting prohibition on the grounds that it was a violation of “bills of attainder clause” in Article I, Section 10 of the US Constitution (Johnson-Parris, 2003). The Court held the voting prohibition constitutionally permissible because it provided a “non-penal exercise of power to regulate the franchise” (Johnson-Parris, 2003, p. 116).

The Green Court’s distinction of felon voting restrictions as “non-penal” complicates legal arguments against the practice. If collaterally losing a fundamental citizenship right is not punitive, it then becomes difficult to argue that public opinion supporting reform should directly impact public policy. The Green Court, though finding felon voting restrictions to be regulatory, hypothesized a decision made from an Eighth Amendment cruel and unusual punishment argument. They found that the standards of decency in 1967 would not support a decision to strike down felon voting restrictions.
The Green court’s conclusion that 1967 America was not offended by the disenfranchisement of felons was a correct interpretation and application of Trop. The fact that 42 states disenfranchised those convicted of a crime in 1967 was overwhelming evidence that society did not consider felony disenfranchisement offensive. Rather, national opinion clearly endorsed such disenfranchisement (Thompson, 2002, p. 202).

Due to their original intent, collateral consequences are still held to be civil in nature, but increasing evidence shows that over time their results have become punitive. In contrast to Green, the US Supreme Court has noted the punitive nature, not intent, of felon disenfranchisement laws. In Richardson v. Ramirez (1974), the Court found felon disenfranchisement laws to be “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and are a punitive device stemming from criminal law” (Richardson v. Ramirez, 1974; Johnson v. Bush, 2005, p. 36). The current research is based on a similar hypothesized premise to the Green court argument – if felony disenfranchisement was currently considered a legal punishment, would evolving standards of decency support its continued use?

There is evidence suggesting that legislators and the public they represent believe all felonies are equal and thus qualify for disenfranchisement, while the restoration of voting rights is only reserved for certain less serious offenses (see Behrens, Uggen & Manza, 2003). As one of the few states that enacted a felony disenfranchisement law prior to the Civil War, the state in which the study was conducted has been disenfranchising felons since 1798. At the time, felony convictions were reserved for the worst crimes, which have changed in modern times with the expansion of felony crime definitions. Currently in this state, felony offenses exist that are not considered serious enough by courts for a sentence of incarceration but still disenfranchise an estimated 40,316 individuals serving community sentences (Uggen, Shannon & Manza, 2012). In addition, another 180,984 ex-offenders remain disenfranchised (Uggen et al., 2012).

In this state, legislation streamlining the restoration application process passed in 2001, and since then felon voting rights restoration has remained on the legislative agenda in the state. The first iteration of a voting rights bill went largely unsupported because it called for automatic restoration for all offenders who had completed their sentences. The wording was revised to exclude murderers and sex offenders. In an effort to gauge residents’ opinions towards the restoration of ex-felon voting rights, an item in the 2006 University of Kentucky Survey Research Center asked the public if they favored automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of a sentence. Of the 900 residents surveyed, 56% of the respondents would vote for an amendment to the state Constitution that permits automatic restoration of voting rights to individuals who are no longer under correctional supervision (Kentucky Survey, 2006).

Though the relationship between public opinion and felon disenfranchisement policies seems intuitive (Murphy, Newmark & Ardoin, 2006), very little research has been conducted to assess public opinions on the subject and less has been done on attitudes towards categorically restoring voting rights based on offense type. According to Wright, Erikson and McIver (1987), political science literature has provided supporting evidence that certain state policies can be attributed to prevailing state attitudes, which illustrates the need to assess public opinion towards state policy issues such as felony disenfranchisement.

In the most notable study of felon disenfranchisement, Manza, Brooks and Uggen (2004) examined opinions towards
felon re-enfranchisement by crime type and found that the majority of respondents were supportive of all offenders regaining their right to vote. More specifically, sixty-three percent supported re-enfranchisement of white collar ex-offenders, and sixty-six percent favored restoring voting rights for violent ex-offenders. Overall, Manza et al. (2004) suggested that targeting certain categories of offenders did not sway opinions towards re-enfranchisement.

Other research has assessed opinions towards felony disenfranchisement in more general terms. A 2001 survey found differences in public opinion towards felony disenfranchisement based demographic groups in Florida which is another permanently disenfranchising state. In this study, McManus (2001) found that 75% of African American respondents and 47% of young adults (18-34 years old) supported voting rights for ex-felons. Forty-eight percent of Democrats and 17% of Republicans supported the restoration of voting rights. While this study did not assess opinions based on offense type or provide information on the predictive value of correlates, it is one of the few surveys that offer evidence of felon voting rights opinions based on respondent demographics.

In 2003, Pinaire, Heuman, and Bilotta studied public attitudes towards felony disenfranchisement. Their study focused on more general concepts and garnered opinions on whether or not disenfranchisement should be temporary or permanent. The majority (81.7%) of the respondents were unsupportive of permanent disenfranchisement. In addition, they found significant subgroup differences based on race and party affiliation. Only half of all Whites or Hispanics supported full restoration of voting rights compared to eighty percent of African-Americans. Respondents were also asked about their opinions towards restricting voting rights for offenders dependent on their correctional status. Democrats’ were split equally between support for only disenfranchising inmates versus extending the voting restriction to also include inmates, probationers and parolees. Republicans and Independents favored disenfranchising all felons under any correctional supervision. Republican opinions were inclined to be harsher and supportive of lifetime disenfranchisement.

A follow-up to this study was conducted 2005 in which focus groups were used in a university setting to examine opinions towards collateral consequences of felony convictions (Heuman, Pinaire & Clark, 2005). Their study consisted of four focus groups comprised of university students, faculty and staff to explore why participants support or oppose felony disenfranchisement. Currently the only published study exploring university students’ attitudes towards felon voting rights, Heuman et al., (2005) found that participants overwhelmingly disagreed with permanent disenfranchisement laws. Furthermore, even those with favorable opinions towards permanent disenfranchisement felt that only certain offense types should qualify. “It depends on the crime” was an approach used by some of the participants to determine how felons should be treated. The participants expressed concerns about utilizing blanket sanctions for offenders and they preferred that punishments be determined on a case by case basis. Participants also supported the categorical restoration of voting rights but some felt that certain types of offenders should never regain their voting rights.

Lifetime disenfranchisement, as the suggested policy from Heuman et al.’s (2005) participants and as practiced in the state in this current study, disallows civic participation for all convicted felons without regard to the utilitarian principles of
rationality and proportionality. The current study is drawn from the Heuman et al (2005) respondents’ “it depends on the crime” approach and uses a university setting to assess the punitive attitudes of college students in Kentucky by focusing specifically on felon disenfranchisement. The purpose of the study is to explore the attitudes of HBCU students toward the restoration of felon voting rights based on the offender’s type of offense.

The importance of this topic suggests that research be performed in this area. Some research in this area has been produced (Manza, Brooks & Uggen, 2004; Heuman, Pinaire, & Clark, 2005; Pinaire, Heuman, & Bilotta, 2003), but has not taken into account the views of college students from Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). Crime seriousness literature has long considered the differing punishment perceptions of street crime versus white collar crime types (see Schoepfer, Carmichael & Piquero, 2007; Piquero, Carmichael & Piquero, 2008). However, the extant literature on felon disenfranchisement does not consider student views of ex-felon voting restoration based on perceptions of different crime categories. College students are important in studying this topic because they are voters and future decision-makers, and as Payne and Chappell (2008) put it, college students bring contemporary perspectives that the general public do not always possess. Research shows that the voice of college students at HBCUs are underrepresented when it comes to criminal justice (Gabbidon, Penn, & Richards, 2003; Penn & Gabbidon, 2007).

The Present Study

The present study is meant to contribute to the limited literature on perceptions of felon disenfranchisement. In order to do this, the present study uses a sample of students from the only public Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the state. Thus, the present study is able to contribute to the dearth of literature that currently exists. Exploratory studies generally yield more hypotheses than they prove. This study hopes to reveal general information about opinions toward felon voting in a permanently disenfranchising state. As the first study of its kind in the state, there is not much literature that can contribute to the development of hypotheses; however, based on the previous criminal justice research, the general hypotheses are listed below:

\[ H_1: \] African-Americans will be significantly more supportive of restoring ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_2: \] Younger students will show significantly more support towards the restoration of ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_3: \] Females will show significantly more support towards the restoration of ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_4: \] Criminal justice/social science majors will be significantly more supportive of restoring ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_5: \] Lower income students will show significantly more support towards the restoration of ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_6: \] Democrats will show significantly more support of restoring ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_7: \] Individuals with experience in the criminal justice system will be significantly more supportive towards the restoration of ex-felon voting rights.

\[ H_8: \] Knowledge of felon voting restrictions will have a positive relationship with the restoration of ex-felon voting rights attitudes.
**H$_0$:** Rehabilitative attitudes will have a positive relationship with the restoration of voting rights attitudes.

**PROCEDURE AND SAMPLE**
A self-report questionnaire was administered to college students attending an HBCU. Students enrolled in general education and criminal justice courses, which were open to all majors, were asked to participate in the study. A total of 218 students participated in the survey after the dissemination of information. While some may criticize the use of a HBCU student sample as lacking in generalizability, there has been little empirical research focused on the public perception of felony disenfranchisement. Thus, this study makes a contribution to an under-researched topic. Additionally, Payne and Chappell (2008) assert that college students are a valuable population to study a wide variety of topics including perceptions or attitudes. Finally, this is consistent with both Pinaire et al. (2003) and Heuman et al. (2005), which also utilized the sampling of college students in order to gain some understanding of felony disenfranchisement. Our use of a student population goes beyond the scope of these previous studies, with a focus on HBCU students.

**MEASURES**

**Independent Measures**

**Knowledge Index.** Information on the level of knowledge of college students will contribute to an understanding of their awareness of the issue. Knowledge questions gauged an individual’s ability to identify accurate information regarding the restoration of state felon voting rights. Response categories were originally coded as follows: 0=No, 1=Yes, and 2=Don’t Know. In order to better facilitate interpretation, knowledge questions were constructed into an index, with individual responses scored as 0=Incorrect and 1=Correct. The knowledge index ranged from 0 to 9, with higher scores indicating increased knowledge of the state’s felon policies and had a reliability score of .754. The average score for the knowledge index was 3.669 with a standard deviation 2.547. The average indicated lower levels of knowledge of restoration of voting rights.

**Rehabilitation Index.** Four questions were asked regarding attitudes toward offenders, in order to measure attitudes towards rehabilitation. These questions focused on rehabilitative solutions to criminal justice issues and were designed to measure a respondent’s level of support for such strategies. Because previous studies have shown an inverse relationship between rehabilitative and punitive attitudes, the measure includes only questions related to rehabilitation. The scale ranged from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating more support for rehabilitative measures. The rehabilitation index had a reliability score of .812. The average score for the rehabilitation index was 17.289 with a standard deviation 2.549. The average indicated an overall favorable attitude toward rehabilitation.

Additionally, several demographic measures were utilized in this study. From an open-ended item, the median age of the sample was 22 years old with a range of 17 to 52 years old. Race was initially captured as (1) African-American, (2) White, and (3) Other; this was recoded as (1) African-American (74%) and (0) other (26%). Sex was coded as (0) male (48.2%) and (1) female (51.8%). Major was coded as (1) criminal justice/social science (55.5%) and (0) other (business, education, science and technology, liberal studies, and undecided) (44.5%). Income was coded as (1) Pell grant recipient (65.5%) and (0) non-Pell
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>17-52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>0 = Non-African-American</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = African-American</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0 = Male</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Female</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>0 = Other</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Criminal Justice/Social Sciences</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0 = Pell Grant Non-recipient</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Pell Grant Recipient</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Preference</td>
<td>0 = Democrat</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Other</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Experience</td>
<td>0 = Not currently</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Yes, currently/recently</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Felon Voting Rights</td>
<td>0 = no, should not vote</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = yes, should vote</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar Crime Voting Rights</td>
<td>0 = no, should not vote</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = yes, should vote</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Voting Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.669</td>
<td>2.547</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.289</td>
<td>2.549</td>
<td>5-20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

grant recipient (34.4%). Political affiliation was coded as (1) Democrat (65.1%), and (0) Other (34.9%). Correctional experience or personal interaction with the criminal justice system was coded as (1) yes (i.e., on on probation/parole, just released from prison/jail, awaiting trial for a criminal, or in a pretrial diversion program) (12.8%) and (0) no (i.e., not under any correctional supervision) (87.2%).

**Dependent Measures**

This study had two dependent measures. These measures captured whether the students believed that certain types of offenders should have the right to vote. Specifically, the items were: violent or white collar ex-felons (see Appendix A). The answer choices for these items were dichotomous, specifically, support for the restoration of violent felons was captured using (1) yes (20.6%) and (0) no (79.4%), and support for white collar felons (1) yes (21.6%) and (0) no (78.4%). For each of these items, the responses indicated a small amount of individuals supporting the restoration of voting rights for these types of felons. Table 1 contains all of the measures and their descriptive statistics. Analysis Plan

Regression analysis was used for the analysis of these data. The dependent measure for the data was dichotomous. The
The dichotomy of the data indicated that the assumption of normality of the dependent variable would have been violated if we had used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (Bachman & Paternoster, 2004). Pampel (2000) argued that logistic regression was one of the proper logistic regression techniques when the dependent measure was dichotomous.

The analysis for this study used logistic regression. Following Bachman and Paternoster (2004), the interpretation of the odds ratios was crucial to understanding the effect that the independent measure had on the dependent measure. The odds ratios were interpreted as the likelihood change in the dependent measure by the independent measure. To assist in understanding the size of the effect, Pampel (2000) suggested that the odds ratio may be converted to a percentage, and it is interpreted as the percentage of change of the dependent measure by the independent measure.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the logistic regression analysis for restoration of voting rights. The first logistic regression analysis was to determine the independent measures that had a link with re-enfranchisement for a violent ex-felon. In this analysis, only one measure had a link with re-enfranchisement of ex-violent felons--being African-American. To be clear, African-Americans were 4.58 times more likely to support re-enfranchisement of ex-violent felons than non-African-Americans. Another way of thinking about this result is that African-Americans were 358% more likely to re-enfranchise violent offenders than non-African-Americans. Table 2 showed the second logistic regression analysis was to determine the independent measures that had a link with the re-enfranchisement of ex-white collar offenders. In this analysis, only two measures had a link with re-enfranchisement of ex-white collar offenders--criminal justice majors and gender.

### Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis for Restoration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Violent Offender</th>
<th>White Collar Offender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice Major</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>0.91*</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>16.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 Loglikelihood</td>
<td>205.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell R-square</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R-Square</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specifically, criminal justice majors were 5.57 times more likely than non-criminal justice majors to re-enfranchise ex-white collar offenders. In other words, criminal justice majors were 457% more likely to support re-enfranchisement of ex-white collar offenders than non-criminal justice offenders. We believe that this occurs because they had a better understanding of the criminal justice process than non-criminal justice majors.

In addition, gender influenced the view on re-enfranchisement of ex-white collar offenders. Specifically, females were 4.60 times more likely to re-enfranchise ex-white collar offenders than males. In other words, females were 360% more likely to support the re-enfranchisement of ex-white collar offenders than males. In this instance, we believe that females are less punitive than males.

DISCUSSION

The literature on felony disenfranchisement is limited in scope. Most of this literature is theoretical, largely working from a legal and political theory framework. The few studies empirically examining the topic have been geared toward predicting election outcomes if the disenfranchised could have participated (see Manza, Brooks & Uggen, 2004; Vito, Shutt & Tewksbury, 2009). Due to the constitutional provision outlining felon restrictions in permanently disenfranchising states, it is important to examine the public’s level of support for restoring ex-felon voting rights. Previous studies have assessed the opinions of a predominantly white sample while excluding the population disproportionately impacted. This study sought to include the opinions of a predominantly African-American population by using a convenience sample comprised mostly of African-American college students. This extension of the concepts studied by Manza, Brooks and Uggen (2004) provided important indicators of attitudes towards the restoration of voting rights in a state where one in five African-Americans cannot vote (Manza et al., 2012).

In the current study, the mean scores for knowledge indicate that the survey respondents were moderately knowledgeable about Kentucky’s felon voting policies and overwhelmingly supportive of rehabilitation. First, knowledge is examined in this type of research in order “to fully examine college students’ attitudes towards crime and punishment, it is important to also assess their knowledge on the topic” (Hensley, Tewksbury, Miller, & Koscheski, 2002, p. 305). There is evidence in crime and punishment literature that knowledge can influence respondents’ opinions (Bohm, 1989; Bohm & Aveni, 1985; Bohm, Clark & Aveni, 1990). Knowledge is a related concept to education, as such assessing the level of knowledge and its predictors is consistent with what previous research has suggested regarding education. Applegate et al (2002) reported that education and rehabilitative attitudes are positively related. Similarly, other research found that education and punitiveness have a negative relationship (Payne et al, 2004). This study assumed that those who were more knowledgeable would comport with a rehabilitative ideal and support the restoration of voting rights for ex-felons. This relationship was not discovered and should be further explored in future research.

While this study is exploratory and the findings are not generalizable, this sample does not deviate from other studies that found a lack of knowledge on felon voting policies. Previous research in the state has shown that Board of Election and county clerk employees, probation and parole officers (Keener & Kruessel, 2005), as well
as probationers and parolees (Wahler, 2006), displayed insufficient knowledge of the state’s disenfranchisement policy. This lack of knowledge has clear implications. In order to change the state’s felon voting policy the General Assembly must pass a bill that will allow a ballot initiative whereby voters would be required to vote for or against amending the state’s constitution. The initial proposed legislation would have required automatic restoration for all felon offenders who completed their sentences; however, legislators in the state have displayed discomfort with granting “rapists, [and] murderers” this privilege (Behrens, Uggen & Manza, 2003, p. 572). As representatives, it is important for legislators to understand the opinions of their constituents. The current study showed that 79% of respondents supported the re-enfranchisement of violent ex-offenders and 78% supported restoring voting rights to white collar ex-felons. This is consistent with the Manza et al. study that found a majority of respondents support restoration of violent ex-felon voting rights (66%) and white collar ex-felon voting rights (63%).

The results of the logistic regression analysis revealed a few significant predictors of support for the restoration of felon voting rights. First, African-American respondents were more supportive of violent ex-felons regaining their voting rights than their white counterparts. Previous research found African-Americans to be supportive of rehabilitation as the ultimate goal of the criminal justice system and to be absolutely opposed to the permanent restriction of felon voting rights (Pinaire et al, 2003). There is a lot of speculation but a lack of an empirical connection between African-Americans’ feelings for rehabilitation and its related policy issues, such as the restoration of felon voting rights. However, several studies indicate a significant relationship between race and punishment preferences (Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; Samuel & Molds, 1986; McCorkle, 1993; Rebovich, 1997). Previous research has shown that whites tend to be more punitive (Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; Samuel & Molds, 1986) and less supportive of rehabilitation (McCorkle, 1993), which may help explain why whites are less supportive the voting rights of violent ex-felons.

Recent research on punitiveness found that racial animus is a dominating predictor of American punitiveness (Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Unnever and Cullen (2010) argue that the public links criminality with “well-defined and disliked others,” which polarizes public opinion about crime control (p. 119). The significant difference between African-American and White opinions toward violent ex-felon re-enfranchisement could easily align with this idea. African-American respondents attending an HBCU may not view violent offenders through the same lens as Whites. Whereas members of the dominant group have their animus confirmed when criminality and “otherness” is connected, the African-American respondents may be able to identify and empathize with offenders and thus reject the premise of the “spoiled identity” and support policies that contribute to the successful reentry of offenders who are likely returning to their neighborhoods (Unnever & Cullen, 2010, p. 120).

The second set of findings focus on opinions towards the re-enfranchisement of white collar ex-felons. Much of the extant literature has focused on attitudes towards violent crime, while neglecting perceptions of white collar crime (Holtfreter, Van Slyke, Bratton & Gertz, 2010). This is attributed to a historical perception that white collar crime is less serious than violent crime though some research has found evidence to the contrary (see Rebovich, Layne, Jiandani & Hage, 2000).
In the current study, the respondents almost equally supported the restoration of voting rights for both violent (79%) and white collar ex-felons (78%). Further analysis showed college major and gender to be significant predictors of support for white collar ex-felon voting rights. It is not surprising that criminal justice/social science majors were more likely to support re-enfranchising white collar ex-felons than other majors. Previous research has found college major to be a determinant for punitiveness. While criminal justice majors have been found to be less punitive than non-criminal justice majors (Tsoudis, 2000), they are expected to have a deeper concern for crime-related issues and better access to accurate information (Farnworth, Longmire, & West, 1998). However, the American public more recently has reflected a shift in opinions towards white collar offenders, which could be attributed to highly publicized scandals (i.e. Enron). Other than being less punitive, there does not seem to be a clear connection between criminal justice students and more supportive opinions towards white collar ex-felons.

Female respondents were more likely to support restoring voting rights for white collar offenders than male respondents. This relationship mirrors what was expected, considering previous research has found females to be less punitive than males (Applegate et al, 2002). As it relates to opinions towards certain offenders, Holtfreder and associates (2010) found some gender differences in their study on perceptions of white collar offenders. However, those differences were only evident when respondents were asked about perceived apprehension and sanctions of white collar offenders. When asked about normative sanctions or what should happen to white collar offenders, gender was no longer significant. The subgroup differences are important indicators for targeting public education, which is inherently part of the process of modifying an existing permanent felon disenfranchisement law.

Limitations of the Study

At the outset, this study was described as exploratory. Therefore, the sample size and inability to generalize were forfeited in an effort to examine this topic as never before. The questionnaire items in the survey might be a limitation of the study and should be viewed as such. Though many of the questions have been used in previous research (i.e. the voting questions were used in Manza et al, 2004; the rehabilitation items in Taxman, Young, Wiersema, Rhodes & Mitchell, 2007), these items were not tested for sensitivity to different populations. Due to the fact that the sample under study was predominantly African-American and previous research used the items on samples comprised of mostly White respondents, there is no way to determine whether or not these questions may pose some bias in terms of how the potential respondent read or interpreted the question. For example, the white collar ex-felon item asked for opinions about an individual who was convicted of illegal stock trading, though many other crimes could be considered white collar. Even though Manza et al (2004) used this item in their study, it is unknown whether the respondent pool considers illegal stock trading to be a white collar crime. Further work should be done to consider the impact of the questionnaire item for different populations. Overall, the limitations of this study did not diminish the significance of its contribution to the existing literature on felon voting rights opinions. However, further analysis could be useful in determining what the general public in Kentucky opines about the issue.

CONCLUSION
In this state, where in one in five African-Americans cannot vote due to a felony conviction, the efforts to change the state’s policy have been hampered by legislators who do not want to appear soft on crime. However, the time might be ripe for change. Early in 2011, the General Assembly passed a law that will overhaul the state’s correctional system. House Bill 463 focuses on cost savings by reducing the prison population, incarceration costs, and crime while strengthening public safety. The law estimates a cost savings of $422 million in the next decade. With a focus on reentry, probation and parole is a key element to the reform. Since 2001, the state’s probation and parole officers are already legislatively mandated to assist soon to be ex-offenders with the restoration application. The restoration of ex-felon voting rights has been empirically linked to subsequent criminal activity. While they acknowledge the existence of related factors such as educational attainment, Uggen and Manza (2004) found that voting was negatively correlated to arrest and incarceration, rearrest and subsequent self-reported crime. Further, they argue “voting appears to be part of a package of pro-social behavior that is linked to desistance to crime” (p. 214).

Consistent with how Payne and Chappell (2008) described the use of students in criminal justice research, this study views the respondents as future criminal justice practitioners and policymakers, but more importantly, it reflects the views of current and future voters. Ideally, public opinions should be aligned with public policy. Their educated opinions provide a glimpse into the minds of this country’s near future. While various studies have examined college students’ perceptions of crime and punishment issues (see Gainey & Payne, 2003; Mackey, Courtright & Packard, 2006), none were specific to collateral consequence policies, such as felony disenfranchisement laws. Furthermore, none of them gauged the opinions of a predominantly African-American sample.

Behrens, Uggen and Manza (2003) suggested that policymaking continues to be tainted by racial influences. This is accomplished through the use of “race neutral language and policies [that] remain socially and culturally embedded in the discriminatory actions of the past” (Behrens et al, 2003, p.568). They found that the racial composition of prisons was associated with the historical implementation of felon disenfranchisement laws. However, their analysis did not end there; they also found that modern day disenfranchisement practices continue to exist due to racial ideologies. Racial threat theories would predict that public policies, such as felon disenfranchisement, intend to dilute the voting power of minorities. Behrens and colleagues (2003) found support for this through an event analysis that found racial disparities in punishment to be the driving force for felon voting restrictions.

The findings of this study suggest further analysis is necessary for understanding what the African-American public believes about felon disenfranchisement. The communities most impacted by high incarceration rates are the same that are affected by concentrated disenfranchisement. Ironically, these same communities are afflicted with voter dilution resulting in collective political silence, minimized political input, and lack of true representation by elected officials (see Dawson-Edwards, 2011). Future research should go beyond the views of African-American college students and into the communities that are disproportionately plagued by felon disenfranchisement.

REFERENCES
York, NY.
Delaware Constitution, Article V § 2
Comparative Criminology, 47(2), 196-209.

Green v. Board of Elections, 380 F. 2d 445 (2nd Cir. 1967)


http://www.appstate.edu/~ardoinpj/research/Felon%20Disenfranchisement%20by%20Murphy%20Newmark%20and%20Ardoïn.pdf


APPENDIX A

Retention Items
Now how about people convicted of a violent crime, who have served their entire sentence, and are now living in the community. Do you think they should have the right to vote?

Now how about people convicted of the illegal trading of stocks who have served their entire sentence, and are now living in the community. Do you think they should have the right to vote?

Knowledge Index (Alpha=.701)
- In Kentucky, upon conviction, offenders lose their right to vote.
- In Kentucky, convicted felons on probation can vote.
- In Kentucky, convicted felons on parole can vote.
- In Kentucky, individuals awaiting trial at the time of an election can vote in that election.
- In Kentucky, upon release from prison, convicted felons automatically regain their right to vote.
- In Kentucky, convicted felons need only fill out an “application for restoration of civil rights” to regain their right to vote.
- In Kentucky, convicted felons must be granted a pardon by the governor to regain their voting rights.
- In Kentucky, convicted felons can never regain their right to vote.

CJ Attitudes Index (Rehabilitation subscale, Alpha=.849)
Make sure criminals get effective treatment for addictions and other problems while they’re in prison/jail, or on supervision in the community (CJAttitude2)
Provide criminals with treatment to address addiction, mental health problems, or other problems (CJAttitude6)
Make sure that the treatment provided is matched to the offender’s needs (CJAttitude7)
Provide more treatment, jobs, and educational programs to address problems that often contribute to crime (CJAttitude9)
Responses to Homeless in Nashville, TN: People, Places, and Perceptions

Emily Archer
Department of Human and Organizational Development
Vanderbilt University
Peabody College

Abstract: Although scholars debate over the number of homeless in the United States, there is a substantial population whose vulnerability needs to be addressed. Nashville, Tennessee, is a city that has struggled with effectively combating homelessness. Both public and private initiatives have had limited success. Informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse, this meta-analysis relies on interviews to examine opinions about homelessness from insider and outsider perspectives about one non-profit initiative, The Contributor, an entrepreneurial newspaper sold in Nashville by homeless vendors. This study also considers the implications of a model initiative, House of Hope, implemented in San Antonio, Texas, that provides aid to homeless people. Findings suggest that perceptions among both vendors and students are more favorable when homeless persons are considered entrepreneurs rather than people seeking handouts. Moreover, vendors realize the benefits of selling newspapers, but consider it a short-term job. Although students are more likely to associate homelessness with structural forces such as unemployment and inequality, few mention the lack of affordable housing as an obstacle. Furthermore, despite their overall favorable views of homeless vendors, students tend to suggest that individual initiative is the way to escape homelessness. However, responses from residents of House of Hope suggest the importance of both individual agency and macro-level initiatives to effectively combat homelessness. Results show several short- and long-term strategies that Nashville, TN, and cities like it might adopt to improve the socioeconomic viability of homeless populations.

Keywords: homelessness, entrepreneurs, vendors

1 Please direct all correspondence to Emily Archer, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203-5721; e-mail: emily.r.archer@vanderbilt.edu.
INTRODUCTION

Although scholars debate how to both appropriately define homelessness and account for the number of homeless people in the United States (U.S.), it is indisputable that increasing numbers of people are vulnerable to this situation (Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). A variety of structural forces, such as poverty, healthcare inequities, and a limited stock of low-cost housing can push individuals into homelessness and compound their vulnerability (Barnes & Jaret, 2003).

Despite local initiatives and community group responses, homelessness persists. Efforts by public officials in Nashville, TN, have been largely ineffective in addressing this social problem and non-profit organizations have been unable to combat the issue on a grand scale. How have homeless people responded to this dilemma? What are insider and outsider perceptions about them in Nashville? And are their existing strategies used in other cities that could inform Nashville’s dilemma? I rely on Structure versus Agency as a theoretical framework in this meta-analysis to respond to these three research issues.

Specifically, this study focuses on the presence and some of the experiences of homeless people in Nashville, TN, by closely evaluating one private, non-profit organization, The Contributor that strives to aid homeless persons in Nashville (The Contributor, 2011) and an alternative response to this same social problem in San Antonio, TX. The Contributor is a newspaper sold by street vendors who are either currently or formerly homeless; it aims to provide vendors with income as well as increase awareness of homelessness among non-homeless residents. A purposive sample of fifteen interviews that includes street vendors and students from a private school in the southeast provide perceptions of homelessness in Nashville in general and views about homeless vendors in particular. Moreover, it is important to assess other viable responses to homelessness. Thus interviews with the developer of another response to homelessness, House of Hope in San Antonio, TX, and a purposive sample of five homeless residents of the facility provide insight about varied possible strategies to combat this social problem. To my knowledge, a comparative study of this type has not been performed to consider varied perceptions and responses to U.S. homelessness.

ACCOUNTING FOR HOMELESSNESS IN THE U.S.

There is no definitive answer, but it is estimated that there are between 600,000 to 2.5 million homeless people in the U.S. (McCarty, 2005). Link et al. (1994) find that about 14 percent or 26 million Americans report a lifetime prevalence (i.e., having been homeless at any time in life) of homelessness. Furthermore, 4.6 report 5-year prevalence (i.e., having been homeless sometime in the last five years). This figure equates to about 8.5 million people in the U.S. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Alameda County, CA, over a one-year period, 18 percent of homeless respondents were continuously homeless, 36 percent exited homelessness and maintained a residence, and 46 percent was episodically homeless (Sosin, 2003). This analysis illustrates the varied ways homelessness can be experienced.

According to Archer (2011), when demographic differences are considered, about seventy percent of homeless people are male and 30 percent are female. When race is assessed, about 42 percent are African American, 39 percent are White, 13 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Native American, and 2 percent are Asian (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).
Homeless African Americans and Hispanics are more predominant in urban areas, while Whites and Native Americans who are homeless are more apt to live in rural areas. Moreover, about 40 percent of homeless are former veterans, 16 percent are mental health patients, and 60 percent are substance abusers (Archer, 2011; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). One implication of the juvenilization of poverty is the increasingly growing segments of the homeless that include families with children (Child Welfare League of America, 2011; Hays, 2003; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). On average, families are known to experience more sustained periods of being homeless, suggesting that homelessness among families may be more chronic (Sosin, 2003).

One reason many families are forced into homelessness is the shortage of affordable housing units in the U.S. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). The federal housing policy has continually failed to address the needs of low-income households, making it even more difficult for many poor and/or working class people to locate affordable accommodations (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009b). Unable to afford housing, especially for an entire family, such people may find themselves on the streets or in shelters. Moreover, a growing problem is that shelters are over capacity and cannot accommodate such families. On average, the number of homeless people in a city greatly exceeds the number of spaces in emergency shelters or transitional housing units (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). All factors combined, this impoverished population usually lacks any other option than to live on the streets.

In addition to the lack of low-cost housing stock, other precipitating factors correlated with homelessness are addiction, mental illness, and poverty (Archer, 2011; Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). Sosin (2003) suggests that homelessness is shaped by multiple factors including a deficit in personal resources, the impact of economic market forces on the most financially vulnerable, and individual traits. Research also confirms both the difficulty in determining the number of U.S. homeless and the debates stemming from inconsistent definitions, which vary depending on “the nature of the living arrangements that constitute homelessness and the length of time one must live in such arrangements to be considered homeless” (Toro & Warren, 1999, p. 122). Toro and Warren’s (1999) meta-analysis uncovered major discrepancies. For example, the 1990 U.S. census claimed 230,000 homeless in the U.S. Yet other studies claimed as many as 13.5 million. These results suggest that, despite the inability for accuracy, “homelessness would still be a social problem of catastrophic proportions” (Toro & Warren 1999, p. 126). The above summary also shows that homelessness is a national problem that cuts across race, gender, family type, and location. This study focuses on one response to homelessness in Nashville, TN, as well as another viable option in San Antonio, TX.

THE STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY DISCOURSE

The Structure vs. Agency discourse is a lens through which homelessness can be examined. Structural forces are macro-level institutions, organizations, and ideologies that influence individuals at a micro-level. Agency is free will or the ability to make choices in one’s life. Structural forces can place populations in vulnerable positions; how people invoke their agency influences the ability to combat negative systemic forces. For example, Toro et al. (1991)
introduce the following four ecological principles central to homelessness and discuss implications for policy initiatives; adaption, cycling of resources, interdependence, and succession. Adaption considers social context and the individual's relationship to it. In this study, the social context constitutes the ecological environment in which a homeless person lives and the forces that are at work in their lives. Cycling of resources constitutes the resources that are available to a community and how they are utilized in relation to the homeless of that community. The interdependence principle “suggests that any system can be viewed as a series of interdependent components” that “[involve] various ripples in the life space” (Toro et al., 1991 p. 1212). Finally, the succession principle demonstrates that the situations of the homeless are always transitioning and changing and must be addressed accordingly. Based on these four primary ecological principles, the authors recognize the obligation to address the needs of homelessness through multiple levels of analysis that include interventions, policies, context-specific responses, and efforts to assess and meet individual needs. Two of the most pressing systemic forces tied to continued homelessness in the U.S. are lack of low-cost housing and poverty (Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). Even poor and near poor people, who do not face these problems, must compete for the limited stock of affordable housing in the U.S. The transition from manufacturing to service jobs has also taken its toll on people who are more vulnerable to employment and residential change (Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996, 1999). The former writer describes the domino effect, “one problem leading to another and compounding it, until too many dominoes fall and the situation becomes impossible to manage” (Hays, 2003:411). This tendency is also called interdependence (Toro et al., 1991). In light of the intersectionality of problems associated with housing, employment, family trauma, and in some instances, mental illness, it stands to reason that multiple response methods are needed that require involvement by non-homeless people as well as homeless people at macro- and micro-levels. My analysis attempts to examine several possible strategies and the perceptions of people involved.

STUDY CONTEXT: HOMELESSNESS IN NASHVILLE, TN
The Contributor: Entrepreneurship among the Homeless
Homelessness is prevalent in Nashville, TN.1 Nashville has 8 homeless persons to every thousand people. Comparatively, Los Angeles, CA, has the highest concentration of homeless people of any city in the U.S. with 10 homeless to every thousand people. Although sizably smaller in population, Nashville still has a notable concentration of homeless people (Archer, 2011). In 2005, Nashville pledged to respond through a ten-year plan to eliminate chronic homelessness (Metropolitan Government of Nashville and
Davidson County, 2005). However, by 2009, the homeless population had doubled from 2,000 to 4,000 people (Phillips, 2009). Also, of the 1,944 housing units that the city pledged to construct, only 252 were built. Although this public initiative has fallen behind on its promises, several non-profit organizations have intervened to aid the homeless – including housing via Room in the Inn and Nashville Rescue Mission, and Siloam Family Healthcare.

This study focuses on a non-profit economic initiative that partners Nashville’s homeless with other concerned residents. *The Contributor, Inc.* is a 501c3 non-profit organization that prints a newspaper twice monthly to accomplish the following objectives: “[provide] a diversity of perspectives and information on the condition of homelessness while highlighting the contributions of homeless and formally homeless individuals; [provide] homeless and formally homeless vendors with a source of income; and, [create] community between vendors and customers” (taken from http://theccontributor.org/). Based on its sales arena, *The Contributor* is referred to as a “street newspaper” by its originators; this grassroots effort is largely supported by donor contributions. Similar street papers exist in 80 cities around the world, all striving to give a voice to the homeless and unemployed. However, *The Contributor* is the only street paper of its kind in the city of Nashville (Wiedmer, 2010). The newspaper includes traditional stories, personal interest pieces, and other information directly or indirectly related to homelessness. It is common to also have articles by homeless persons. Vendors purchase *The Contributor* for $0.25 each and can sell them for up to $1.00. Although soliciting for money is against the law in Nashville, selling *The Contributor* is considered an entrepreneurial effort and vendors strategically locate themselves around the city, particularly in high traffic locales. According to its website, as the highest-circulating street newspaper of its kind in North America, *The Contributor* has an average monthly circulation of 100,000 copies and about 400 active vendors each month. Vendors are independent contractors and selling *The Contributor* is a real job. Vendors must complete an interview process and a two-hour training class before receiving their first badge and papers. Selling the paper is done entirely outdoors. Vendors are micro-business owners who are responsible for maintaining their business daily. This includes maintaining a steady stock of newspapers and running their business.²

**Research Methodology and Analytical Process**

The first phase of my research focuses on views about *The Contributor* by vendors and local college students. During the fall of 2011, I conducted a survey of thirteen undergraduate students from a private, medium-sized university in the southeastern United States (an estimated 12,000 students). I also interviewed two newspaper vendors during that same period (no payment or gift was provided for participation). A total of fifteen persons were interviewed during this first phase. These were both convenience and purposive samples because I sought participants based on certain criteria. The homeless population in Nashville is often hidden, transient, and difficult to penetrate, therefore I interviewed the first homeless newspaper vendors that agreed to complete the survey. The students were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their criteria as undergraduate students at a local university. The surveys sought to gain insight on the thoughts of students on homelessness in Nashville in general, as well as their
perceptions of homeless people who both do and do not sell The Contributor.

Six of the participants were male, seven female; nine were White; two were African American; one was Hispanic/Latino; and one self-classified as Other. Surveys included four open-ended and four close-ended questions (a sample survey is provided in the appendix). The two vendors of The Contributor were both male and White, ages 28 and 52 years old. The 52 year old had been selling the newspaper for a little over a month, while the 28-year-old had been selling it for nearly a year. The interviews consisted of conversations regarding their personal experiences selling The Contributor, reasons for doing so, and how selling the paper had affected their lives. I interviewed the vendors while they stood on the streets selling the papers. Both student and vendor responses were analyzed using content analysis to identify and uncover common themes and patterns. This common qualitative approach seeks to uncovered meanings in the interview responses as well as identify emergent representative quotes, patterns, and themes associated with homelessness, agency, and structural forces that influence this social problem (Krippendorf, 1980).

Case Study: A Successful Public Initiative

In the second project phase, after examining the limitations of Nashville’s ten-year plan, I investigated an initiative to aid the homeless in San Antonio, TX. This case study included gathering secondary data about the history of the project and its current profile as well as interviewing Ron Anthony, a principal architect at Overton Partners & Architects in San Antonio. He and his firm designed House of Hope (pseudonym), a homeless center and transitional center in the city. Anthony provided information during an in-person interview that lasted about one hour during which he shared his research findings, a PowerPoint presentation on the homeless and House of Hope, and anecdotal perceptions from his experiences working with homelessness. I also drew upon five interviews conducted by a volunteer at House of Hope (a sample survey is provided in the appendix). She interviewed homeless people who utilized the services at House of Hope. Several persons were official members of their transitional programs. This sample was also purposive and convenient because she specifically interviewed willing House of Hope participants. Content analysis was used to examine interview responses. Both phases of this project enable me to assess short- and long-term strategies to respond to homelessness as efforts to bridge structure and agency. Findings may also facilitate the development of more effective strategies to significantly reduce homelessness in Nashville and cities like it. Research findings are provided below.

OUTCOMES ON HOMELESSNESS: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Vendor Perspectives and Student Perceptions

What are some of the insider perspectives about homeless and personal agency; how do outsiders feel about this dynamic? The Contributor vendor interviews provide insight into the daily experiences of people who are attempting to invoke their agency despite a myriad of personal challenges. First, readers should note that, because selling the papers is their only source of revenue, both vendors requested that the interviews take place while they sold their papers. This decision informs my broader examination of the reality of homelessness as well as the agentic perspectives of the vendors. Both men explain that selling the newspaper provides income to rent inexpensive hotel
rooms or apartments for most nights, purchase food, and occasionally allow for the purchase of items such as cigarettes or clothing. Each of the vendors stresses the fact that selling The Contributor is not their permanent form of employment, but rather a transitional job. According to the 52-year-old vendor, “I can’t find any other work, so this is a good job in the meantime.” His comment informs the reality of the 8 percent unemployment rate in Nashville, the difficulties less formally educated persons can have locating employment in this new global economy – particularly during recessionary times – and the limited low-cost housing in the city (Ehrenreich, 2001; Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; Ravenhill, 2008; Sosin, 2003; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010; Wilson, 1996).

The following quote from the same vendor alludes to the important, yet transitive role The Contributor plays; “I am always looking for other more permanent work with a more stable income.” The other vendor describes the context that led to his current post:

I hiked to Nashville, stayed at a mission a couple of nights, but wanted to get out…I saw people selling it [The Contributor] and looked into it…Income fluctuates, but it is steady work…I meet lots of people, most are indifferent, but some are really generous and supportive. (White male, 28 years old)

The above comment illustrates some of the financial benefits as well as the drawbacks of vendor life. In addition to monetary benefits, the above vendor says that selling newspapers has resulted in valuable work skills such as being able to work with different people. The second vendor (52-year-old White male) explains how he began selling newspapers; “[I have] no permanent address, so it’s difficult.” Yet, he continues, “I like the people I meet [and] it gives me some work to do everyday.” However, when asked about his future as a vendor, this same man describes selling The Contributor as, “somewhat – more of a stepping stone until I am able to get more work.”

Both vendors mention that selling the newspaper provides valuable job experience for their futures and distinguishes them from their homeless peers who are not working to escape homelessness in a similar way. One vendor ends his interview as follows, “I’ve learned so much about interacting with people and how to communicate.” The other comment implies that, in addition to helping Nashville homeless residents in securing basic instrumental needs such as temporary shelter, food, and clothing, the entrepreneurial aspects of selling The Contributor can translate into job skills as well as expressive outcomes such as personal pride and self-efficacy during a difficult time. Although neither vendor considers selling newspapers long-term employment, it represents a short-term employment stop gap to combat long-term homelessness for its vendors. The above comments illustrate the varied and valuable role The Contributor plays in helping homeless vendors structure their day and maintain self-efficacy (Wilson, 1996). As might be expected, the primary theme most commonly mentioned by both vendors is the need for gainful employment in order to locate permanent housing. Although they realize that selling newspapers is a short-term solution, both men seem optimistic about their futures and are appreciative of the funds selling The Contributor provides.

Outsider views about the homeless can be harsh, particularly from persons who believe that each individual determines his or her own destiny; even poor people sometimes hold such views (MacLeod, 1995). To assess these possibilities, I survey undergraduate students from a private liberal arts university in the southeastern U.S. What are their views about The Contributor and its vendors? I am also interested in whether and how their views can be related to the
Structure vs. Agency discourse. First, overall, student responses and opinions are fairly stable across all thirteen participants. Next, the vast majority of students (62 percent or 8 out of 13) associate homelessness with structural forces such as the poor economy, systemic inequalities, and unemployment. Furthermore, of the remaining students whose explanations focus on individual choices such as alcoholism, failure to get an education, or lack of initiative, slightly more females than males associate homelessness with individual initiative. The following representative quote from a 21-year-old White, male junior positions structure over agency as he describes this social problem;

Systemic inequalities such as chronic poverty, mental illness, political/economic factors like a struggling economy, recession, lack of jobs, issues with minimum wage...homelessness can be avoided, or at least alleviated, by support and rehabilitation of the already homeless and the changing of judicial and social systems that lead others toward extreme poverty and homelessness.

This student’s detailed response suggests some understanding of the complexities of homelessness; it also provides remedies that take both social forces and individual agency into consideration. Another student’s response further describes complexities as well as remedies that rely on both changes in social forces and individual decisions;

Lack of access to resources: education, healthcare (and healthy food), stability – starting out at such a disadvantage in the American capitalistic economy: structural violence – the political and economic framework of society: brokenness of the home – lack of father-figure and prevalence of single-parent families. I don’t think homelessness can ever entirely be avoided. While some are externally driven into poverty and homelessness, others are self-inflicted because of lack of: education, male leadership, community cohesion, and support groups. (White male, 20 years old, junior)

The next representative quote points to two common factors and the beliefs among most respondents that it will be difficult to end homelessness;

I think that mental illness and maybe job loss are primary factors. I know that a lot of veterans are homeless. I’m not sure that it can be avoided. Sometimes it just happens. (African American female, 18 years old, sophomore)

Several females comment that the presence and close proximity of homeless people in Nashville somewhat frighten them and causes concern for their personal safety – one so much so that she will not purchase the newspapers. However, another female describes homelessness as follows, “they are not as unlike us as many of us like to think they are.” This latter comment contrasts with some anecdotal perceptions about youth views on homeless in general and those from this specific university in particular. However, the prior views show some of the continued insider-outsider distinctions made about homeless persons. Furthermore, 62 percent of the participants mention, based on their own observations, that homelessness is a prevalent problem in Nashville. Four students believe that homelessness is a phenomenon that can never completely be remedied. Interestingly, despite majority views that social forces are most probably the cause of homelessness, only one student specifically mention inadequate housing as an important factor;

I think homelessness can be caused by unemployment and the difficulty of getting a job, as well as a lack of motivation. [How can it be avoided?] Possibly by programs that give homeless people jobs and provide housing. I’m honestly not 100 percent sure. (White female, 19 years old, sophomore)

The following 19-year-old White female sophomore provides the most common remedy that stresses individual choices: “I think it can be avoided by getting a good
education, having motivation, and understanding the benefits of hard work.” Although she and most of her peers are sympathetic about this social problem, it is still common for them to directly or indirectly “blame the victim” in their responses (West, 1993). Such responses are informed by a common belief in individual choice as an overriding influence of more systemic problems (Ehrenreich, 2001; Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995). In general, the most common solution to prevent homelessness is for persons to get a good education and is likely informed by students’ current presence in college and belief that it will provide them with a stable lifestyle and future.

Another important finding shows that all thirteen students are more likely to purchase The Contributor than to support a homeless person through monetary or food donations. Furthermore, vendors of The Contributor were described as “bold”, “hard-working”, “proactive”, and “motivated.” The following representative quotes illustrate favorable support for varied reasons;

I like it… [I am more likely to] purchase The Contributor. I feel like it is an easier and legitimate way to help the homeless. (African American male, 21 years old, senior)

The next student’s views are informed by additional knowledge and hands on experiences;

I think it’s a really good idea! I took a course over the summer about homelessness in Chicago and got to use the sales from the newspapers we sold to pay for our meals. It’s actually a lot harder than it looks, and I respect them for having to work so hard. [Q: more likely to buy the newspaper rather than give money/food?] I’m probably more likely to purchase The Contributor because it helps the entire organization so that all the employees get a paycheck. (African American female, 18 years old, sophomore)

And the following White male 20-year-old junior associates selling the newspaper with “entrepreneurial endeavors rather than begging.” He continues;

I think homeless people selling The Contributor are bold and proactive. It is a great way to raise awareness of the homeless issue in Nashville both as they are physically selling it and within the articles of the paper itself. These people are acknowledging their need and doing something about it to improve their lives.

Yet another student believes poor choices largely result in homelessness and is concerned that vendors actually can prolong their situation;

A lack of education and proper development at an early age causes social ignorance from which homelessness stems. Improving public education I think is the best course of action to avoid homelessness…[purchasing The Contributor] I think it is double sided – in one way it helps teach the principles of working for a salary, but it also stabilizes the homeless lifestyle, encouraging it in one way. (White male, 20 years old, junior)

The above representative quotes show the varied ways students feel about homelessness and remedies for the social problem. Yet most consider selling The Contributor to be a viable short-term solution to a long-term problem. Thus just as the vendors interviewed here consider themselves more favorably based on their individual-level responses to homelessness, students have similar perceptions. Yet it is important to note that it is uncommon for neither vendors nor students in this study to specifically mention the need for additional low-cost housing to respond to this social problem.

House of Hope as a Long-term Response

Despite the more short-term benefits of non-profit initiatives such as The Contributor, other initiatives are needed to respond to the multiple factors that usually result in homelessness. The House of Hope is considered one such option. Interviewing Ron Anthony about his work with homeless
people reveals many ideas about how one city has created a unique initiative. After providing demographic information on homelessness, Ron explains his work with House of Hope, the largest and most comprehensive homeless center in the U.S. House of Hope is located on a 37-acre campus in downtown San Antonio, TX. According to Anthony, since it opened, the number of homeless people in San Antonio has been reduced from 6,000 to 100 people and crime rates in the downtown area have been reduced by 28 percent. Furthermore, Anthony explains that in the average American city, each homeless person costs taxpayers about $50,000 dollars per year to support – this estimate reflects minimal services to the homeless associated with prison bail, emergency medical care, and damage costs. Therefore, before House of Hope, San Antonio was losing about $300 million annually. Thus the $100 million initial project, including regular maintenance and sustainability costs, is believed to be saving the city an estimated $200 million annually. However, Anthony is quick to comment that, more importantly than monetary savings, he perceives House of Hope as an example of a partnership between homeless persons and other concerned citizens to provide safe spaces as members of the former group transition out of tough times (Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010).

The facility is unique because it is a public-private joint venture; the city funded the project, but the efforts by nonprofit organizations maintain and serve the facility. Anthony expresses that “one of the biggest challenges is to get service providers to work together,” but this effort has been key to the success of House of Hope. The campus provides the homeless with most of the services they need in one location, including but not limited to: mixed gender and age housing; medical, dental, and mental health care; GED courses; legal assistance for reacquiring identification; a pet kennel; and comfortable outdoor spaces. Its design focuses on collaboration and flexibility. Anthony stresses the need to “design flexibly because the needs of the homeless change.” Anthony and his partners planned House of Hope such that the facility could “walk” with homeless persons through their transition, providing housing ranging from outdoor covered spaces to private apartment complexes. Indoor spaces have movable furniture and walls to accommodate the changing populations and services for people who visit the campus. According to Anthony, “housing does not work without the provision of transformational services.” Providing most of the necessary facilities and services in one space has been crucial to the success of this initiative. In addition to partnering with local non-profit organizations, residents of House of Hope partner with each other and facility workers to maintain the property and their personal spaces. By doing so, all persons involved understand their value in helping to sustain the facility.

Interviews with five homeless people involved with the House of Hope reveal how this establishment has affected their lives and enhanced their stability. Their responses indicate how House of Hope’s transitional programs are designed to closely work with homeless people through the entire process of getting off the streets. However, the programs are highly contingent upon involvement by homeless people themselves who must actively participate in their own development. One White male 30-year-old affirms, “one only gets out from the program what they put in.” This statement reveals the importance of homeless people invoking their agency to overcome their situation. It is true that some participants have no desire to participate in
the shelter’s more involved programs, but rather frequent *House of Hope* each night to sleep in outdoor covered spaces and receive free food and showers. However, most interviewees are either already full members of the transitional shelter or are sleeping at *House of Hope* nightly waiting for a program vacancy. The following quote explains this situation:

> There are two parts to the shelter: they offer covered outdoor shelter and tarps for sleeping and also provide food and showers. That’s the first part. The second part requires full membership and that’s when you get in the programs. Most people sleep in the shelter to get the ball rolling for the other part, then they can become a member. (African American male, 35 years old).

The “second part” of *House of Hope* requires members to return to the shelter on a daily basis, swipe in with a membership card and take a breathalyzer test. These participants are placed in more permanent housing, ranging from bunk rooms to personal apartments, and they also are admitted to different transitional and training programs to help them find gainful employment and “get back on their feet.” These services require a lot of commitment on the participant’s part, but ultimately allow homeless people to start down the path to independence. One woman explains the positives and negatives:

> You always have your positives and negatives in living in a shelter, but living here relieves a lot of stress and is a much better place than the streets for my family. Mostly, [House of Hope] does give me opportunities for advancement and gives my family hope for the future. (African American female, 31 years old)

*House of Hope*’s goal is to get their residents in and out of their programs, so that they can move on and be independent members of society. This also creates availability for other homeless people on their waiting list to be admitted to their programs. The project endeavors to both systemically combat homelessness and train homeless people for the work force and for life as contributing members to society. A White female, age 45 states, “*House of Hope* provides me with housing and training as I look for work. Ultimately, it will prepare me for my work and for society.” These findings suggest that faculty and residents are both working together to end homelessness in San Antonio, TX.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The diverse aspects of this study suggest various propositions for addressing homelessness in general but most specifically in Nashville, TN. Although it is difficult to determine the actual number of homeless in the nation, the homeless population is undeniably present and vulnerable. Their vulnerability is heightened by a number of structural forces, as well as the intersection of such forces that work against them. Initiatives by the city of Nashville have proven unsuccessful in alleviating homelessness and private, nonprofit organizations have been unable to provide a viable solution. So, what could be an effective strategy for the city?

*The Contributor* appears to allow for some positive progress in the lives of the homeless. For most students in this study, people who sell the newspaper are believed to have more initiative and drive than their counterparts who do not. Although the majority of the homeless population is in similar economic predicaments, those who sell *The Contributor* may have more favorable reputations and possibly increase their opportunities for gainful employment. In the eyes of the sample students, the fact that the vendors are hard-working people who are trying to provide for themselves is a reminder that they are not unlike other people in society. Interestingly, some students espoused West’s (1993) notion of common humanness and Americanness that
must be evident to effectively respond to social problems tied to race, class, and gender inequality. Yet students’ remedies for homelessness focus more on individual agency (i.e., getting an education, hard work), than structural forces, illustrating the difficulty even empathetic people can have determining comprehensive solutions for social problems like homelessness. Lastly, few students or vendors associate homelessness with lack of low-cost housing. This result suggests the possible tendency to emphasize the role of both broader economic reasons such as limited employment and the recession or individual agency rather than understand and stress important, tangential factors such as housing stock.

Furthermore, vendors of The Contributor interviewed here have aspirations for their futures. They recognize the experience and training that selling the newspaper provides them in regards to future employment, and they are hopeful that such an opportunity will present itself. Scholars such as McLeod (1987) state that aspirations are key to increasing one’s perceptions that, despite current problems, she or he will be able to achieve life goals – in this case, gainful employment and stable housing. Without aspirations, it is often difficult to realize one’s agency. However, The Contributor is not a lasting, sustainable solution. Both vendors recognize this fact and hope that they could find more permanent employment and housing in the future. Despite their initiative, their situations show that aspirations are not enough nor are individual-level entrepreneurial ventures. More long-term systemic responses to homelessness, such as House of Hope, are required (Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010).

According to these findings, success of House of Hope is attributable to a number of aspects of the facility. By providing most of the necessary transitional services in one space, the center attempts to address many of the structural forces that are working against homeless people and increasing their vulnerability. It strives to respond to poverty by providing safe housing, meals, education, and opportunities for employment. It provides needed healthcare services such as dental care, mental health services, intervention programs, and general medical care. Also, it responds to the growing number of homeless families by providing mixed gender and age housing to allow families to remain intact. The center recognizes the intersection of many structural forces, or the nexus of vulnerability, that is often present in the lives of the homeless and attempts to combat it. Finally, the facility is prepared for changes its residents may encounter over time. In other words, House of Hope appears equipped to face the principle of succession that is often an ecological part of the transition process for homeless people (Toro et al., 1991).

A strong argument can be made that the House of Hope has become a meso-level structural force that has potential as a model for other cities to follow. Although it requires homeless people to choose to enter its doors and become member of its programs, such agency is only possible if places like House of Hope exist. This suggests that systemic change, at both the macro- and meso-level are required to combat homelessness. Because Nashville’s current ten-year plan has not reached its goals and non-profit organizations like The Contributor are limited in their effects, a public-private joint venture like the House of Hope may be a possible strategy. Such a venture could be on a smaller scale, considering Nashville is not nearly the size of San Antonio. A comprehensive shelter, funded by the city and run by nonprofits,
could combine the efforts of people who are currently working independently, with minimal success, to combat homelessness.

REFERENCES


Wasserman, J. (2010). At Home on the Street: People, Poverty, and a Hidden
APPENDICES

**Vulnerable Populations: Survey**

I am a student in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations this semester. For my analytical paper and class project, I am analyzing Nashville’s homeless population and [University’s name] students’ perceptions of this population. This survey serves to find out what students think about the homeless population in general and those who sell *The Contributor* newspaper. This is a totally voluntary survey (do not place your name on it). There are no right or wrong answers and your honesty is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

1. Age __________________
2. Gender: _____Female _____Male

3. Classification (check one):
   _____Freshman
   _____Sophomore
   _____Junior
   _____Senior
   _____Other (__________________)

4. Race (check one):
   _____White
   _____Black/African American
   _____Hispanic/Latino
   _____Asian
   _____Other (__________________)

5. What do you think are the primary factors that cause homelessness? How do you think homelessness can be avoided?

6. What are your thoughts about homeless people in Nashville?

7. What are your thoughts about homeless people selling *The Contributor*?

8. Are you more likely to give a homeless person money/food or more likely to purchase *The Contributor* from them? Why are you more likely to do one than the other?
House of Hope Participants: Survey

This survey is for a student in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations. For her analytical paper and class project, she is analyzing how the House of Hope has provided opportunities and chances for advancement. This is a totally voluntary survey (do not place your name on it). There are no right or wrong answers and your honesty is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

1. Age: ______________
2. Gender: _____Female _____Male

3. Race (check one):
   ___White
   ___Black/African American
   ___Hispanic/Latino
   ___Asian
   ___Other (_________________)

4. Time of involvement with House of Hope________

5. How did you come to know House of Hope and decide to participate in its programs?

6. What programs are you involved in? How have they affected your quality of life and/or economic stability?

7. In what other ways has House of Hope influenced your day-to-day life?

8. Do you think working with House of Hope is allowing for your advancement in society? Why or why not?

---

1 In 2010, the 13-county Nashville metropolitan area had a population of about 1,589,934 persons.
2 The vendor survey was a modified version of the student survey that excluded questions 3 and 8.
Responses to Homeless in Nashville, TN: People, Places, and Perceptions

Emily Archer¹
Department of Human and Organizational Development
Vanderbilt University
Peabody College

Abstract: Although scholars debate over the number of homeless in the United States, there is a substantial population whose vulnerability needs to be addressed. Nashville, Tennessee, is a city that has struggled with effectively combating homelessness. Both public and private initiatives have had limited success. Informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse, this meta-analysis relies on interviews to examine opinions about homelessness from insider and outsider perspectives about one non-profit initiative, The Contributor, an entrepreneurial newspaper sold in Nashville by homeless vendors. This study also considers the implications of a model initiative, House of Hope, implemented in San Antonio, Texas, that provides aid to homeless people. Findings suggest that perceptions among both vendors and students are more favorable when homeless persons are considered entrepreneurs rather than people seeking handouts. Moreover, vendors realize the benefits of selling newspapers, but consider it a short-term job. Although students are more likely to associate homelessness with structural forces such as unemployment and inequality, few mention the lack of affordable housing as an obstacle. Furthermore, despite their overall favorable views of homeless vendors, students tend to suggest that individual initiative is the way to escape homelessness. However, responses from residents of House of Hope suggest the importance of both individual agency and macro-level initiatives to effectively combat homelessness. Results show several short- and long-term strategies that Nashville, TN, and cities like it might adopt to improve the socioeconomic viability of homeless populations.

Keywords: homelessness, entrepreneurs, vendors

¹ Please direct all correspondence to Emily Archer, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203-5721; e-mail: emily.r.archer@vanderbilt.edu.
INTRODUCTION

Although scholars debate how to both appropriately define homelessness and account for the number of homeless people in the United States (U.S.), it is indisputable that increasing numbers of people are vulnerable to this situation (Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). A variety of structural forces, such as poverty, healthcare inequities, and a limited stock of low-cost housing can push individuals into homelessness and compound their vulnerability (Barnes & Jaret, 2003). Despite local initiatives and community group responses, homelessness persists. Efforts by public officials in Nashville, TN, have been largely ineffective in addressing this social problem and non-profit organizations have been unable to combat the issue on a grand scale. How have homeless people responded to this dilemma? What are insider and outsider perceptions about them in Nashville? And are their existing strategies used in other cities that could inform Nashville’s dilemma? I rely on Structure versus Agency as a theoretical framework in this meta-analysis to respond to these three research issues.

Specifically, this study focuses on the presence and some of the experiences of homeless people in Nashville, TN, by closely evaluating one private, non-profit organization, The Contributor that strives to aid homeless persons in Nashville (The Contributor, 2011) and an alternative response to this same social problem in San Antonio, TX. The Contributor is a newspaper sold by street vendors who are either currently or formerly homeless; it aims to provide vendors with income as well as increase awareness of homelessness among non-homeless residents. A purposive sample of fifteen interviews that includes street vendors and students from a private school in the southeast provide perceptions of homelessness in Nashville in general and views about homeless vendors in particular. Moreover, it is important to assess other viable responses to homelessness. Thus interviews with the developer of another response to homelessness, House of Hope in San Antonio, TX, and a purposive sample of five homeless residents of the facility provide insight about varied possible strategies to combat this social problem. To my knowledge, a comparative study of this type has not been performed to consider varied perceptions and responses to U.S. homelessness.

ACCOUNTING FOR HOMELESSNESS IN THE U.S.

There is no definitive answer, but it is estimated that there are between 600,000 to 2.5 million homeless people in the U.S. (McCarty, 2005). Link et al. (1994) find that about 14 percent or 26 million Americans report a lifetime prevalence (i.e., having been homeless at any time in life) of homelessness. Furthermore, 4.6 report 5-year prevalence (i.e., having been homeless sometime in the last five years). This figure equates to about 8.5 million people in the U.S. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Alameda County, CA, over a one-year period, 18 percent of homeless respondents were continuously homeless, 36 percent exited homelessness and maintained a residence, and 46 percent was episodically homeless (Sosin, 2003). This analysis illustrates the varied ways homelessness can be experienced.

According to Archer (2011), when demographic differences are considered, about seventy percent of homeless people are male and 30 percent are female. When race is assessed, about 42 percent are African American, 39 percent are White, 13 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Native American, and 2 percent are Asian (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).
Homeless African Americans and Hispanics are more predominant in urban areas, while Whites and Native Americans who are homeless are more apt to live in rural areas. Moreover, about 40 percent of homeless are former veterans, 16 percent are mental health patients, and 60 percent are substance abusers (Archer, 2011; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009b). One implication of the juvenilization of poverty is the increasingly growing segments of the homeless that include families with children (Child Welfare League of America, 2011; Hays, 2003; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). On average, families are known to experience more sustained periods of being homeless, suggesting that homelessness among families may be more chronic (Sosin, 2003).

One reason many families are forced into homelessness is the shortage of affordable housing units in the U.S. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). The federal housing policy has continually failed to address the needs of low-income households, making it even more difficult for many poor and/or working class people to locate affordable accommodations (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009b). Unable to afford housing, especially for an entire family, such people may find themselves on the streets or in shelters. Moreover, a growing problem is that shelters are over capacity and cannot accommodate such families. On average, the number of homeless people in a city greatly exceeds the number of spaces in emergency shelters or transitional housing units (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). All factors combined, this impoverished population usually lacks any other option than to live on the streets.

In addition to the lack of low-cost housing stock, other precipitating factors correlated with homelessness are addiction, mental illness, and poverty (Archer, 2011; Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). Sosin (2003) suggests that homelessness is shaped by multiple factors including a deficit in personal resources, the impact of economic market forces on the most financially vulnerable, and individual traits. Research also confirms both the difficulty in determining the number of U.S. homeless and the debates stemming from inconsistent definitions, which vary depending on “the nature of the living arrangements that constitute homelessness and the length of time one must live in such arrangements to be considered homeless” (Toro & Warren, 1999, p. 122). Toro and Warren’s (1999) meta-analysis uncovered major discrepancies. For example, the 1990 U.S. census claimed 230,000 homeless in the U.S. Yet other studies claimed as many as 13.5 million. These results suggest that, despite the inability for accuracy, “homelessness would still be a social problem of catastrophic proportions” (Toro & Warren 1999, p. 126). The above summary also shows that homelessness is a national problem that cuts across race, gender, family type, and location. This study focuses on one response to homelessness in Nashville, TN, as well as another viable option in San Antonio, TX.

**THE STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY DISCOURSE**

The Structure vs. Agency discourse is a lens through which homelessness can be examined. Structural forces are macro-level institutions, organizations, and ideologies that influence individuals at a micro-level. Agency is free will or the ability to make choices in one’s life. Structural forces can place populations in vulnerable positions; how people invoke their agency influences the ability to combat negative systemic forces. For example, Toro et al. (1991)
introduce the following four ecological principles central to homelessness and discuss implications for policy initiatives; adaption, cycling of resources, interdependence, and succession. Adaption considers social context and the individual's relationship to it. In this study, the social context constitutes the ecological environment in which a homeless person lives and the forces that are at work in their lives. Cycling of resources constitutes the resources that are available to a community and how they are utilized in relation to the homeless of that community. The interdependence principle “suggests that any system can be viewed as a series of interdependent components” that “[involve] various ripples in the life space” (Toro et al., 1991 p. 1212). Finally, the succession principle demonstrates that the situations of the homeless are always transitioning and changing and must be addressed accordingly. Based on these four primary ecological principles, the authors recognize the obligation to address the needs of homelessness through multiple levels of analysis that include interventions, policies, context-specific responses, and efforts to assess and meet individual needs. Two of the most pressing systemic forces tied to continued homelessness in the U.S. are lack of low-cost housing and poverty (Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Ravenhill, 2008; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Toro & Warren, 1999; Wasserman, 2010). Even poor and near poor people, who do not face these problems, must compete for the limited stock of affordable housing in the U.S. The transition from manufacturing to service jobs has also taken its toll on people who are more vulnerable to employment and residential change (Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996, 1999). The former writer describes the domino effect, “one problem leading to another and compounding it, until too many dominoes fall and the situation becomes impossible to manage” (Hays, 2003:411). This tendency is also called interdependence (Toro et al., 1991). In light of the intersectionality of problems associated with housing, employment, family trauma, and in some instances, mental illness, it stands to reason that multiple response methods are needed that require involvement by non-homeless people as well as homeless people at macro- and micro-levels. My analysis attempts to examine several possible strategies and the perceptions of people involved.

**STUDY CONTEXT: HOMELESSNESS IN NASHVILLE, TN**

**The Contributor: Entrepreneurship among the Homeless**

Homelessness is prevalent in Nashville, TN.1 Nashville has 8 homeless persons to every thousand people. Comparatively, Los Angeles, CA, has the highest concentration of homeless people of any city in the U.S. with 10 homeless to every thousand people. Although sizably smaller in population, Nashville still has a notable concentration of homeless people (Archer, 2011). In 2005, Nashville pledged to respond through a ten-year plan to eliminate chronic homelessness (Metropolitan Government of Nashville and
Davidson County, 2005). However, by 2009, the homeless population had doubled from 2,000 to 4,000 people (Phillips, 2009). Also, of the 1,944 housing units that the city pledged to construct, only 252 were built. Although this public initiative has fallen behind on its promises, several non-profit organizations have intervened to aid the homeless – including housing via Room in the Inn and Nashville Rescue Mission, and Siloam Family Healthcare.

This study focuses on a non-profit economic initiative that partners Nashville’s homeless with other concerned residents. The Contributor, Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit organization that prints a newspaper twice monthly to accomplish the following objectives: “[provide] a diversity of perspectives and information on the condition of homelessness while highlighting the contributions of homeless and formally homeless individuals; [provide] homeless and formally homeless vendors with a source of income; and, [create] community between vendors and customers” (taken from http://theccontributor.org/). Based on its sales arena, The Contributor is referred to as a “street newspaper” by its originators; this grassroots effort is largely supported by donor contributions. Similar street papers exist in 80 cities around the world, all striving to give a voice to the homeless and unemployed. However, The Contributor is the only street paper of its kind in the city of Nashville (Wiedmer, 2010). The newspaper includes traditional stories, personal interest pieces, and other information directly or indirectly related to homelessness. It is common to also have articles by homeless persons. Vendors purchase The Contributor for $0.25 each and can sell them for up to $1.00. Although soliciting for money is against the law in Nashville, selling The Contributor is considered an entrepreneurial effort and vendors strategically locate themselves around the city, particularly in high traffic locales. According to its website, as the highest-circulating street newspaper of its kind in North America, The Contributor has an average monthly circulation of 100,000 copies and about 400 active vendors each month. Vendors are independent contractors and selling The Contributor is a real job. Vendors must complete an interview process and a two-hour training class before receiving their first badge and papers. Selling the paper is done entirely outdoors. Vendors are micro-business owners who are responsible for maintaining their business daily. This includes maintaining a steady stock of newspapers and running their business.

Research Methodology and Analytical Process

The first phase of my research focuses on views about The Contributor by vendors and local college students. During the fall of 2011, I conducted a survey of thirteen undergraduate students from a private, medium-sized university in the southeastern United States (an estimated 12,000 students). I also interviewed two newspaper vendors during that same period (no payment or gift was provided for participation). A total of fifteen persons were interviewed during this first phase. These were both convenience and purposive samples because I sought participants based on certain criteria. The homeless population in Nashville is often hidden, transient, and difficult to penetrate, therefore I interviewed the first homeless newspaper vendors that agreed to complete the survey. The students were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their criteria as undergraduate students at a local university. The surveys sought to gain insight on the thoughts of students on homelessness in Nashville in general, as well as their
perceptions of homeless people who both do and do not sell *The Contributor*.

Six of the participants were male, seven female; nine were White; two were African American; one was Hispanic/Latino; and one self-classified as Other. Surveys included four open-ended and four close-ended questions (a sample survey is provided in the appendix). The two vendors of *The Contributor* were both male and White, ages 28 and 52 years old. The 52 year old had been selling the newspaper for a little over a month, while the 28-year-old had been selling it for nearly a year. The interviews consisted of conversations regarding their personal experiences selling *The Contributor*, reasons for doing so, and how selling the paper had affected their lives. I interviewed the vendors while they stood on the streets selling the papers. Both student and vendor responses were analyzed using content analysis to identify and uncover common themes and patterns. This common qualitative approach seeks to uncovered meanings in the interview responses as well as identify emergent representative quotes, patterns, and themes associated with homelessness, agency, and structural forces that influence this social problem (Krippendorf, 1980).

**Case Study: A Successful Public Initiative**

In the second project phase, after examining the limitations of Nashville’s ten-year plan, I investigated an initiative to aid the homeless in San Antonio, TX. This case study included gathering secondary data about the history of the project and its current profile as well as interviewing Ron Anthony, a principal architect at Overton Partners & Architects in San Antonio. He and his firm designed *House of Hope* (pseudonym), a homeless center and transitional center in the city. Anthony provided information during an in-person interview that lasted about one hour during which he shared his research findings, a PowerPoint presentation on the homeless and *House of Hope*, and anecdotal perceptions from his experiences working with homelessness. I also drew upon five interviews conducted by a volunteer at *House of Hope* (a sample survey is provided in the appendix). She interviewed homeless people who utilized the services at *House of Hope*. Several persons were official members of their transitional programs. This sample was also purposive and convenient because she specifically interviewed willing House of Hope participants. Content analysis was used to examine interview responses. Both phases of this project enable me to assess short- and long-term strategies to respond to homelessness as efforts to bridge structure and agency. Findings may also facilitate the development of more effective strategies to significantly reduce homelessness in Nashville and cities like it. Research findings are provided below.

**OUTCOMES ON HOMELESSNESS: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**Vendor Perspectives and Student Perceptions**

What are some of the *insider* perspectives about homeless and personal agency; how do outsiders feel about this dynamic? *The Contributor* vendor interviews provide insight into the daily experiences of people who are attempting to invoke their agency despite a myriad of personal challenges. First, readers should note that, because selling the papers is their only source of revenue, both vendors requested that the interviews take place while they sold their papers. This decision informs my broader examination of the reality of homelessness as well as the agentic perspectives of the vendors. Both men explain that selling the newspaper provides income to rent inexpensive hotel
rooms or apartments for most nights, purchase food, and occasionally allow for the purchase of items such as cigarettes or clothing. Each of the vendors stresses the fact that selling *The Contributor* is not their permanent form of employment, but rather a transitional job. According to the 52-year-old vendor, “I can’t find any other work, so this is a good job in the meantime.” His comment informs the reality of the 8 percent unemployment rate in Nashville, the difficulties less formally educated persons can have locating employment in this new global economy – particularly during recessionary times – and the limited low-cost housing in the city (Ehrenreich, 2001; Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; Ravenhill, 2008; Sosin, 2003; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010; Wilson, 1996).

The following quote from the same vendor alludes to the important, yet transitive role *The Contributor* plays; “I am always looking for other more permanent work with a more stable income.” The other vendor describes the context that led to his current post;

I hiked to Nashville, stayed at a mission a couple of nights, but wanted to get out…I saw people selling it [*The Contributor*] and looked into it….income fluctuates, but it is steady work…I meet lots of people, most are indifferent, but some are really generous and supportive. (White male, 28 years old)

The above comment illustrates some of the financial benefits as well as the drawbacks of vendor life. In addition to monetary benefits, the above vendor says that selling newspapers has resulted in valuable work skills such as being able to work with different people. The second vendor (52-year-old White male) explains how he began selling newspapers; “[I have] no permanent address, so it’s difficult.” Yet, he continues, “I like the people I meet [and] it gives me some work to do everyday.” However, when asked about his future as a vendor, this same man describes selling *The Contributor* as, “somewhat – more of a stepping stone until I am able to get more work.”

Both vendors mention that selling the newspaper provides valuable job experience for their futures and distinguishes them from their homeless peers who are not working to escape homelessness in a similar way. One vendor ends his interview as follows, “I’ve learned so much about interacting with people and how to communicate.” The latter comment implies that, in addition to helping Nashville homeless residents in securing basic instrumental needs such as temporary shelter, food, and clothing, the entrepreneurial aspects of selling *The Contributor* can translate into job skills as well as expressive outcomes such as personal pride and self-efficacy during a difficult time. Although neither vendor considers selling newspapers long-term employment, it represents a short-term employment stop gap to combat long-term homelessness for its vendors. The above comments illustrate the varied and valuable role *The Contributor* plays in helping homeless vendors structure their day and maintain self-efficacy (Wilson, 1996). As might be expected, the primary theme most commonly mentioned by both vendors is the need for gainful employment in order to locate permanent housing. Although they realize that selling newspapers is a short-term solution, both men seem optimistic about their futures and are appreciative of the funds selling *The Contributor* provides.

Outsider views about the homeless can be harsh, particularly from persons who believe that each individual determines his or her own destiny; even poor people sometimes hold such views (MacLeod, 1995). To assess these possibilities, I survey undergraduate students from a private liberal arts university in the southeastern U.S. What are their views about *The Contributor* and its vendors? I am also interested in whether and how their views can be related to the
Structure vs. Agency discourse. First, overall, student responses and opinions are fairly stable across all thirteen participants. Next, the vast majority of students (62 percent or 8 out of 13) associate homelessness with structural forces such as the poor economy, systemic inequalities, and unemployment. Furthermore, of the remaining students whose explanations focus on individual choices such as alcoholism, failure to get an education, or lack of initiative, slightly more females than males associate homelessness with individual initiative. The following representative quote from a 21-year-old White, male junior positions structure over agency as he describes this social problem:

Systemic inequalities such as chronic poverty, mental illness, political/economic factors like a struggling economy, recession, lack of jobs, issues with minimum wage...homelessness can be avoided, or at least alleviated, by support and rehabilitation of the already homeless and the changing of judicial and social systems that lead others toward extreme poverty and homelessness.

This student’s detailed response suggests some understanding of the complexities of homelessness; it also provides remedies that take both social forces and individual agency into consideration. Another student’s response further describes complexities as well as remedies that rely on both changes in social forces and individual decisions;

Lack of access to resources: education, healthcare (and healthy food), stability – starting out at such a disadvantage in the American capitalistic economy: structural violence – the political and economic framework of society: brokenness of the home – lack of father-figure and prevalence of single-parent families. I don’t think homelessness can ever entirely be avoided. While some are externally driven into poverty and homelessness, others are self-inflicted because of lack of: education, male leadership, community cohesion, and support groups. (White male, 20 years old, junior)

The next representative quote points to two common factors and the beliefs among most respondents that it will be difficult to end homelessness;

I think that mental illness and maybe job loss are primary factors. I know that a lot of veterans are homeless. I’m not sure that it can be avoided. Sometimes it just happens. (African American female, 18 years old, sophomore)

Several females comment that the presence and close proximity of homeless people in Nashville somewhat frighten them and causes concern for their personal safety – one so much so that she will not purchase the newspapers. However, another female describes homelessness as follows, “they are not as unlike us as many of us like to think they are.” This latter comment contrasts with some anecdotal perceptions about youth views on homeless in general and those from this specific university in particular. However, the prior views show some of the continued insider-outsider distinctions made about homeless persons. Furthermore, 62 percent of the participants mention, based on their own observations, that homelessness is a prevalent problem in Nashville. Four students believe that homelessness is a phenomenon that can never completely be remedied. Interestingly, despite majority views that social forces are most probably the cause of homelessness, only one student specifically mention inadequate housing as an important factor;

I think homelessness can be caused by unemployment and the difficulty of getting a job, as well as a lack of motivation. [How can it be avoided?] Possibly by programs that give homeless people jobs and provide housing. I’m honestly not 100 percent sure. (White female, 19 years old, sophomore)

The following 19-year-old White female sophomore provides the most common remedy that stresses individual choices: “I think it can be avoided by getting a good
education, having motivation, and understanding the benefits of hard work.” Although she and most of her peers are sympathetic about this social problem, it is still common for them to directly or indirectly “blame the victim” in their responses (West, 1993). Such responses are informed by a common belief in individual choice as an overriding influence of more systemic problems (Ehrenreich, 2001; Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995). In general, the most common solution to prevent homelessness is for persons to get a good education and is likely informed by students’ current presence in college and belief that it will provide them with a stable lifestyle and future.

Another important finding shows that all thirteen students are more likely to purchase The Contributor than to support a homeless person through monetary or food donations. Furthermore, vendors of The Contributor were described as “bold”, “hard-working”, “proactive”, and “motivated.” The following representative quotes illustrate favorable support for varied reasons;

I like it… [I am more likely to] purchase The Contributor. I feel like it is an easier and legitimate way to help the homeless. (African American male, 21 years old, senior)

The next student’s views are informed by additional knowledge and hands on experiences;

I think it’s a really good idea! I took a course over the summer about homelessness in Chicago and got to use the sales from the newspapers we sold to pay for our meals. It’s actually a lot harder than it looks, and I respect them for having to work so hard. [Q: more likely to buy the newspaper rather than give money/food?] I’m probably more likely to purchase The Contributor because it helps the entire organization so that all the employees get a paycheck. (African American female, 18 years old, sophomore)

And the following White male 20-year-old junior associates selling the newspaper with “entrepreneurial endeavors rather than begging.” He continues;

I think homeless people selling The Contributor are bold and proactive. It is a great way to raise awareness of the homeless issue in Nashville both as they are physically selling it and within the articles of the paper itself. These people are acknowledging their need and doing something about it to improve their lives.

Yet another student believes poor choices largely result in homelessness and is concerned that vendors actually can prolong their situation;

A lack of education and proper development at an early age causes social ignorance from which homelessness stems. Improving public education I think is the best course of action to avoid homelessness…. [purchasing The Contributor] I think it is double sided – in one way it helps teach the principles of working for a salary, but it also stabilizes the homeless lifestyle, encouraging it in one way. (White male, 20 years old, junior)

The above representative quotes show the varied ways students feel about homelessness and remedies for the social problem. Yet most consider selling The Contributor to be a viable short-term solution to a long-term problem. Thus just as the vendors interviewed here consider themselves more favorably based on their individual-level responses to homelessness, students have similar perceptions. Yet it is important to note that it is uncommon for neither vendors nor students in this study to specifically mention the need for additional low-cost housing to respond to this social problem.

House of Hope as a Long-term Response

Despite the more short-term benefits of non-profit initiatives such as The Contributor, other initiatives are needed to respond to the multiple factors that usually result in homelessness. The House of Hope is considered one such option. Interviewing Ron Anthony about his work with homeless
people reveals many ideas about how one city has created a unique initiative. After providing demographic information on homelessness, Ron explains his work with House of Hope, the largest and most comprehensive homeless center in the U.S. House of Hope is located on a 37-acre campus in downtown San Antonio, TX. According to Anthony, since it opened, the number of homeless people in San Antonio has been reduced from 6,000 to 100 people and crime rates in the downtown area have been reduced by 28 percent. Furthermore, Anthony explains that in the average American city, each homeless person costs taxpayers about $50,000 dollars per year to support – this estimate reflects minimal services to the homeless associated with prison bail, emergency medical care, and damage costs. Therefore, before House of Hope, San Antonio was losing about $300 million annually. Thus the $100 million initial project, including regular maintenance and sustainability costs, is believed to be saving the city an estimated $200 million annually. However, Anthony is quick to comment that, more importantly than monetary savings, he perceives House of Hope as an example of a partnership between homeless persons and other concerned citizens to provide safe spaces as members of the former group transition out of tough times (Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010).

The facility is unique because it is a public-private joint venture; the city funded the project, but the efforts by nonprofit organizations maintain and serve the facility. Anthony expresses that “one of the biggest challenges is to get service providers to work together,” but this effort has been key to the success of House of Hope. The campus provides the homeless with most of the services they need in one location, including but not limited to: mixed gender and age housing; medical, dental, and mental health care; GED courses; legal assistance for reacquiring identification; a pet kennel; and comfortable outdoor spaces. Its design focuses on collaboration and flexibility. Anthony stresses the need to “design flexibly because the needs of the homeless change.” Anthony and his partners planned House of Hope such that the facility could “walk” with homeless persons through their transition, providing housing ranging from outdoor covered spaces to private apartment complexes. Indoor spaces have movable furniture and walls to accommodate the changing populations and services for people who visit the campus. According to Anthony, “housing does not work without the provision of transformational services.” Providing most of the necessary facilities and services in one space has been crucial to the success of this initiative. In addition to partnering with local non-profit organizations, residents of House of Hope partner with each other and facility workers to maintain the property and their personal spaces. By doing so, all persons involved understand their value in helping to sustain the facility.

Interviews with five homeless people involved with the House of Hope reveal how this establishment has affected their lives and enhanced their stability. Their responses indicate how House of Hope’s transitional programs are designed to closely work with homeless people through the entire process of getting off the streets. However, the programs are highly contingent upon involvement by homeless people themselves who must actively participate in their own development. One White male 30-year-old affirms, “one only gets out from the program what they put in.” This statement reveals the importance of homeless people invoking their agency to overcome their situation. It is true that some participants have no desire to participate in
the shelter’s more involved programs, but rather frequent *House of Hope* each night to sleep in outdoor covered spaces and receive free food and showers. However, most interviewees are either already full members of the transitional shelter or are sleeping at *House of Hope* nightly waiting for a program vacancy. The following quote explains this situation:

> There are two parts to the shelter: they offer covered outdoor shelter and tarps for sleeping and also provide food and showers. That’s the first part. The second part requires full membership and that’s when you get in the programs. Most people sleep in the shelter to get the ball rolling for the other part, then they can become a member. (African American male, 35 years old).

The “second part” of *House of Hope* requires members to return to the shelter on a daily basis, swipe in with a membership card and take a breathalyzer test. These participants are placed in more permanent housing, ranging from bunk rooms to personal apartments, and they also are admitted to different transitional and training programs to help them find gainful employment and “get back on their feet.” These services require a lot of commitment on the participant’s part, but ultimately allow homeless people to start down the path to independence. One woman explains the positives and negatives:

> You always have your positives and negatives in living in a shelter, but living here relieves a lot of stress and is a much better place than the streets for my family. Mostly, *House of Hope* does give me opportunities for advancement and gives my family hope for the future. (African American female, 31 years old).

*House of Hope*’s goal is to get their residents in and out of their programs, so that they can move on and be independent members of society. This also creates availability for other homeless people on their waiting list to be admitted to their programs. The project endeavors to both systemically combat homelessness and train homeless people for the work force and for life as contributing members to society. A White female, age 45 states, “*House of Hope* provides me with housing and training as I look for work. Ultimately, it will prepare me for my work and for society.” These findings suggest that faculty and residents are both working together to end homelessness in San Antonio, TX.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The diverse aspects of this study suggest various propositions for addressing homelessness in general but most specifically in Nashville, TN. Although it is difficult to determine the actual number of homeless in the nation, the homeless population is undeniably present and vulnerable. Their vulnerability is heightened by a number of structural forces, as well as the intersection of such forces that work against them. Initiatives by the city of Nashville have proven unsuccessful in alleviating homelessness and private, nonprofit organizations have been unable to provide a viable solution. So, what could be an effective strategy for the city?

*The Contributor* appears to allow for some positive progress in the lives of the homeless. For most students in this study, people who sell the newspaper are believed to have more initiative and drive than their counterparts who do not. Although the majority of the homeless population is in similar economic predicaments, those who sell *The Contributor* may have more favorable reputations and possibly increase their opportunities for gainful employment. In the eyes of the sample students, the fact that the vendors are hard-working people who are trying to provide for themselves is a reminder that they are not unlike other people in society. Interestingly, some students espoused West’s (1993) notion of common humanness and Americanness that
must be evident to effectively respond to social problems tied to race, class, and gender inequality. Yet students’ remedies for homelessness focus more on individual agency (i.e., getting an education, hard work), than structural forces, illustrating the difficulty even empathetic people can have determining comprehensive solutions for social problems like homelessness. Lastly, few students or vendors associate homelessness with lack of low-cost housing. This result suggests the possible tendency to emphasize the role of both broader economic reasons such as limited employment and the recession or individual agency rather than understand and stress important, tangential factors such as housing stock.

Furthermore, vendors of The Contributor interviewed here have aspirations for their futures. They recognize the experience and training that selling the newspaper provides them in regards to future employment, and they are hopeful that such an opportunity will present itself. Scholars such as McLeod (1987) state that aspirations are key to increasing one’s perceptions that, despite current problems, she or he will be able to achieve life goals – in this case, gainful employment and stable housing. Without aspirations, it is often difficult to realize one’s agency. However, The Contributor is not a lasting, sustainable solution. Both vendors recognize this fact and hope that they could find more permanent employment and housing in the future. Despite their initiative, their situations show that aspirations are not enough nor are individual-level entrepreneurial ventures. More long-term systemic responses to homelessness, such as House of Hope, are required (Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Todd, 2006; Tompkins, 2009; Wasserman, 2010).

According to these findings, success of House of Hope is attributable to a number of aspects of the facility. By providing most of the necessary transitional services in one space, the center attempts to address many of the structural forces that are working against homeless people and increasing their vulnerability. It strives to respond to poverty by providing safe housing, meals, education, and opportunities for employment. It provides needed healthcare services such as dental care, mental health services, intervention programs, and general medical care. Also, it responds to the growing number of homeless families by providing mixed gender and age housing to allow families to remain intact. The center recognizes the intersection of many structural forces, or the nexus of vulnerability, that is often present in the lives of the homeless and attempts to combat it. Finally, the facility is prepared for changes its residents may encounter over time. In other words, House of Hope appears equipped to face the principle of succession that is often an ecological part of the transition process for homeless people (Toro et al., 1991).

A strong argument can be made that the House of Hope has become a meso-level structural force that has potential as a model for other cities to follow. Although it requires homeless people to choose to enter its doors and become member of its programs, such agency is only possible if places like House of Hope exist. This suggests that systemic change, at both the macro- and meso-level are required to combat homelessness. Because Nashville’s current ten-year plan has not reached its goals and non-profit organizations like The Contributor are limited in their effects, a public-private joint venture like the House of Hope may be a possible strategy. Such a venture could be on a smaller scale, considering Nashville is not nearly the size of San Antonio. A comprehensive shelter, funded by the city and run by nonprofits,
could combine the efforts of people who are currently working independently, with minimal success, to combat homelessness.

REFERENCES
Wasserman, J. (2010). At Home on the Street: People, Poverty, and a Hidden
APPENDICES

Vulnerable Populations: Survey

I am a student in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations this semester. For my analytical paper and class project, I am analyzing Nashville’s homeless population and [University’s name] students’ perceptions of this population. This survey serves to find out what students think about the homeless population in general and those who sell The Contributor newspaper. This is a totally voluntary survey (do not place your name on it). There are no right or wrong answers and your honesty is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

1. Age ________________
2. Gender: _____Female _____Male

3. Classification (check one):
   ______ Freshman
   ______ Sophomore
   ______ Junior
   ______ Senior
   ______ Other (________________)

4. Race (check one):
   ______ White
   ______ Black/African American
   ______ Hispanic/Latino
   ______ Asian
   ______ Other (________________)

5. What do you think are the primary factors that cause homelessness? How do you think homelessness can be avoided?

6. What are your thoughts about homeless people in Nashville?

7. What are your thoughts about homeless people selling The Contributor?

8. Are you more likely to give a homeless person money/food or more likely to purchase The Contributor from them? Why are you more likely to do one than the other?
House of Hope Participants: Survey

This survey is for a student in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations. For her analytical paper and class project, she is analyzing how the House of Hope has provided opportunities and chances for advancement. This is a totally voluntary survey (do not place your name on it). There are no right or wrong answers and your honesty is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

1. Age: ______________ 2. Gender: _____Female _____Male

3. Race (check one):
   ____White
   ____Black/African American
   ____Hispanic/Latino
   ____Asian
   ____Other (_________________)

4. Time of involvement with House of Hope________

5. How did you come to know House of Hope and decide to participate in its programs?
6. What programs are you involved in? How have they affected your quality of life and/or economic stability?

7. In what other ways has House of Hope influenced your day-to-day life?

8. Do you think working with House of Hope is allowing for your advancement in society? Why or why not?

---

1 In 2010, the 13-county Nashville metropolitan area had a population of about 1,589,934 persons.
2 The vendor survey was a modified version of the student survey that excluded questions 3 and 8.
The Heart Wants What the Heart Wants: A Student Survey on Same-Sex Relationships

Kortnea Colbert
Department of Sociology
Vanderbilt University

Abstract: Opinions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage are varied and often vitriolic. Yet some studies suggest that views about gays and lesbians are becoming more favorable. This study examines such views for an ethnically diverse group of sixteen college students from a private, liberal arts university in the southeastern region of the United States. Findings show that beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation are informed by the “nature versus nurture” discourse. Although certain students view same-sex relationships unfavorably, the vast majority support a person’s right to choose a partner and believe that laws should be changed to allow same-sex marriage. Explanations about how sexual orientations originate tend to be more elaborate than specific views about gay and lesbian relationships. Furthermore, students with less favorable views on the subject as well as males in general, regardless of the latter groups’ level of support, tend to provide short, cursory responses when queried about homosexual relationships and their possible legalization. My findings suggest that, despite increased support among students for same-sex relationships in general, ambivalence and politically correct responses may still be common based on gender differences.

Keywords: same-sex marriage, sexual orientation

1 Direct all correspondence to Kortnea Colbert at kortnea.colbert@vanderbilt.edu.
INTRODUCTION
As of late, the issue of same-sex relationships has become a very pressing and controversial one. Although same-sex relationships are not a new phenomenon, gays and lesbians are increasingly demanding to be able to legalize their romantic relationships. According to the United States (U.S.) census, the number of people who reported residing in a household with a same-sex partner increased 51 percent from 2009 to 2010 (US Bureau of the Census, 2010). This increase suggests that either the gay and lesbian community is growing or becoming more comfortable openly acknowledging its lifestyles. However, this community is still quite vulnerable. In 1996, after a gay rights activist claimed that Hawaii’s constitution allowed for same-sex marriage, Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that defined marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman;

In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulations, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife. (Senate of the United States, 1996)

Thus the federal government does not recognize same-sex marriages and the vast majority of the 50 states have either instituted laws that ban same-sex marriage or define marriage as a union between a man and woman (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011). The homosexual community is thus denied many privileges that come with marriage such as tax cuts, shared health insurance benefits, and the ability to sponsor one’s spouse for entry into the country. Furthermore, Brewer (2003) reports that workplace discrimination and hate crimes are concerns among the gay and lesbian community. Such worries in addition to political disenfranchisement based on their delegitimized relationship status illustrate this community’s very real vulnerability. Despite previous studies about continued homophobia and discrimination of sexual minorities (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Brewer, 2003), how do college students feel about this subject? Informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse, this analysis examines survey responses for a sample of sixteen undergraduate students at a private liberal arts university in the southeast on the topic of same-sex relationships and the implications that those opinions will have on the future empowerment of the homosexual community. As potential future leaders in society and given their pivotal involvement during the last presidential election, the opinions of college students on this subject will be important. Moreover, this subject is salient in light of legislative changes most recently in Maine and Maryland that suggest increasing support of same-sex marriage (Brumfield, 2012).

LITERATURE SUMMARY: SENTIMENTS ABOUT SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS
The DOMA and the subsequent state bans on same-sex marriage illustrate a reluctance to accept same-sex relationships in the U.S. Some studies show that these attitudes vary based on race and gender. For example, according to Negy and Eisenman (2005), Black Americans are, generally, more homophobic and less apt to support same-sex relationships than their White peers. However, the same study shows that the former group is more open to affording legal rights to gays and lesbians than the latter group. Furthermore, their results showed that for Black Americans, gender along with frequency of church attendance is a significant predictor of negative responses
to homosexuality, and gender and religious commitment is a significant predictor of negative responses for Whites (Negy & Eisenman, 2005).

Herek’s (2003) results suggest that respondents’ opinions of homosexuality differ based on gender and that attitudes about gay men tend to be more negative than those about lesbians largely because of traditional views about masculinity. Furthermore, the same scholar finds that when asked about non-discrimination laws, heterosexuals are more positive when responding to abstract ideas rather than if the enactment of real laws is considered. Also, most heterosexuals, regardless of gender, do not support same-sex marriage, despite generally more positive views about homosexuality among females. Brewer’s (2003) secondary analysis examines possible explanations for an increase in support among Americans for gay rights between 1992 - 2000. Respondents were asked whether they oppose employment discrimination laws and the ability of homosexuals to serve in the US military. The author finds that support for employment discrimination policies rose over the years under examination as well as support for homosexuals in the military. Also, opposition for the two topics decreased over time as a result of increased support for egalitarianism and more favorable views about gays and lesbians. The above summary parallels other studies that show how support of homosexuality varies based on factors such as religion, gender (male or female depending on the study), age, and race (Barnes, 2009, 2012; Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Cohen, 1999). As described in the subsequent section, choices people make on the subject are also influenced by broader social dynamics.

**STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is informed by the Structure vs. Agency discourse that posits the existence of structural forces or macro-level institutions in society that are heavily influential in the trajectory of the lives of groups and individuals. Some examples of structural forces are: the government/legal system, the family, and the economy. These respective entities can have incredible sway in the day-to-day lives of citizens. For example, the family is the first and most influential socializing agent in an individual’s life. Most of one’s principles and beliefs originate from one’s upbringing. However, according to this framework, one’s behavior and beliefs are a choice where agency is the power invoked by an individual to make decisions and have some control over his or her life. The choices that he or she makes and the principles that he or she espouses reflect agency. In this analysis, I consider some of the structural forces that can influence how people feel about gays and lesbians as well as the ability people have to make such decisions.

The legal system and the prevailing cultural views in society about sexual identity are two salient structural forces that influence attitudes and actions about the subject of same-sex couples. The legal system is central to many of the inequities in the homosexual community. As noted above, because of DOMA, same-sex couples are denied countless beneficial rights. Chambers (1996) analyzes some of the benefits the homosexual community stands to gain from marriage rights and characterizes these legal benefits into three categories: regulations acknowledging emotional attachment, regulations regarding parenting, laws regulating the economic relationship between the couple and the state as well as within the couple. Chambers details the legal ramifications when same-sex partners do not have the benefits of marriage. In the first category, same-sex
couples cannot refrain from testifying against each other in court. Furthermore, the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows spouses to take off work to care for their significant other does not apply and a foreign-born spouse cannot be sponsored for American citizenship by their native-born significant other. Additionally, the decisions about medical care for ill partners too sick to make competent decisions cannot be made by a same-sex significant other, who is often the likeliest person to know their wishes. Also, when a partner dies, his or her estate does not automatically transfer to his or her same-sex significant other.

In regard to parenting, female artificial insemination and the process for the associated male to receive parental status is relatively straightforward. However, this same process does not apply for same-sex couples that must treat the process as an adoption, including a home study, home visits, and application process. As well, being granted status as a parent is not guaranteed upon completion of the process. Financial privileges associated with marriage include: social security benefits for a non-working spouse after retirement age and including spouses on employment health insurance. Although same-sex couples can choose to work around these legal challenges by orchestrating power of attorney, establishing specific clauses in their wills, foregoing raising children, and purchasing private insurance, such options point to an unequal and unfair system. Moreover, such options may be difficult for less affluent couples. More recent research by Battle and Barnes (2009) suggest that differential marital options based on sexual orientation tend to impact racial and ethnic minorities more negatively because, among gay men and lesbians, such groups are more likely to be economically challenged and more apt to either adopt children or be raising children who are biologically theirs.

Their empirical analysis illustrates how denial of same-sex marriage ultimately undermines the quality of life of children and homes of gays and lesbians of color.

Secondly, culture as a structural force is quite pervasive. It reflects and affects accepted norms in society, behaviors, principles, and ideologies. Because of its subtleties, American culture’s influence on the lives of its citizens makes it inescapable. For example, the federal government can extend marriage rights to the homosexual community. However, it cannot police the streets and keep citizens from staring at a same-sex couple as they walk down the street holding hands or protect them from negative remarks. Nor can the government prevent certain forms of discrimination against them in terms of adoption services, housing, and hate crimes. Such crimes can be prosecuted after the fact, yet I contend that they take place based on tacit acceptance in the wider society.

In his seminal text, Race Matters, West (1993) describes some of the difficulties Americans have when addressing issues of sexuality in general. Because the subject is taboo, many persons, particularly White Americans, avoid the subject and fear it. However, West contends that the absence of sexuality in the public discourse does not preclude abuses of the bodies and identities of women, Blacks, and sexual minorities. West’s premise can be broadly applied in this study because it informs our understanding of the cultural constraints that may undermine candid conversations about sexuality – including discourses about homosexuality (Barnes, 2009; Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Cohen, 1999). Some Americans’ views about gays and lesbians appear to be changing as evidenced by Maine and Maryland’s 2012 legislative support of same-sex marriage and the upcoming Supreme Court decision to hear several same-sex cases (Ho, 2012; Liptak,
2012; Serwer, 2012). Yet debates continue around subjects like; whether persons are born gay/lesbian or chose sexual orientation; whether tolerance is sufficient or acceptance of homosexuality is required; and, should gay men and lesbians have the same rights as straight people. These types of questions reflect dynamics such as religious beliefs, familial socialization, and experiences, which are often influenced by cultural values, traditions, and norms in society. Based on these and other dynamics not presented here, it is important to continue the discourse on this important subject. I hope to add to existing literature by considering some of the views and suggestions of college students about same-sex relationships.

METHODS AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

This study was based on a voluntary survey of an upper level sociology class during fall 2011 at a private liberal arts university in the southeast. A convenience sample was used. Respondents were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study. The course focused on grassroots social movements. Due to the elective nature of the class and the subject matter, it is reasonable to infer that the students were more likely to be familiar with social problems, inequality, and controversial subjects. The class itself was also very ethnically diverse. Sixteen completed surveys were received. The ratio of male to female respondents was exactly 1:1. There were eight male responses and eight female responses. Of the respondents, four self-identified as African American, five as Caucasian, two as Hispanic/Latino, two as Asian, two as Other (African and Indian), and one as multiracial (specified as African American and Caucasian).

In addition to providing demographic information such as race, classification, sex, and age, students were asked their general thoughts about sexual orientation, followed by more specific questions about gay/lesbian relationships and legal options for such groups (survey provided in the appendix). The data were examined using content analysis, which included a close reading of responses to compare and contrast beliefs and suggestions that emerged. I was specifically interested in how students understood sexual orientation and how those views translated into decisions about changes in laws (Krippendorf, 1980). I consider this study to be the first step in future investigations about student views on controversial, potentially sensitive subjects.

EMERGENT THEMES ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Findings from this study often parallel the varied, sometimes ambiguous views about this sensitive subject that are currently evident in the wider society. Most of the sampled students have thought about how one’s sexual orientation manifests. Many are supportive of the legalization of same-sex marriage. Yet others appear reticent to fully embrace this stance based on personal factors such as religion and views about what should constitute marriage. Themes summarized here as “Nature vs. Nurture: I Just Don’t Know”, “Yes…and No”, and “Same and Equal” illustrate the nuanced nature of their comments. Representative quotes and corresponding analyses are provided in the next sub-sections.

Nature vs. Nurture: I Just Don’t Know

Although two broad themes emerged about definitions and thoughts about sexual minorities, students overwhelmingly are in support of legalizing same-sex marriage. Despite consistent views about legalities, students are varied in their understandings of sexual orientation. Six respondents believe that the origin of homosexuality is
genetically or biologically based; two believe people make choices in terms of their orientation. And six students are unsure and reference both biology and agency. Two failed to comment on this question. As illustrated by the following representative quotes, the comments are often informed by the “nature versus nurture” discourse. Interestingly, the above pattern is the same whether one considers the views of females or males and shows that male students in this study are no more likely than female students to associate sexual orientation with nature or nurture.

When the subject of nature is considered, a female 19 year-old Hispanic sophomore describes sexual orientation based on a broad biological view of organisms; “this occurs naturally. It’s a minority, but sometimes happens just like some different variations of sexual orientations in the rest of the animal kingdom.” Another female has similar views; “people are born with their sexual orientations – they can’t help how they feel” (female 19 year-old Indian sophomore). However, another female has a contrasting view that suggests support of a nurture-based perspective; “I think that it is a choice. I don’t think anyone is born a certain way” (female 20 year-old African American sophomore). When their male peers are considered, a 20 year-old African American sophomore notes; “I think it is not a choice, but the way people are born. People are just born to be their sexual orientation.” The following 20 year-old White junior uses biological descriptions to explain his belief in nature over nurture; “I think it is just a sort of natural variation in preference.” Lastly, another male 20 year-old White junior provides a succinct response, “They are born with it.” However, several males point to the socialization process for cues; “I think that it has to do with various environmental factors such as the type of relationships that you have with your parents, etc.” (21 year-old African American senior). However, a 21 year-old African American senior suggests an explanation informed by the Structure vs. Agency discourse; “People always need labels. It is the way our society operates. Without a label, people have a tough time identifying with anything.” This latter comment also refers to support of the social construction of reality and its implications for placing people in categories and interacting with them based on such groupings.

However, just as many students believe sexual orientation is a result of both nature and nurture than support biological rationales. I do not interpret this pattern as an example of indecisiveness, but rather examples of people who are still in the process of understanding complex issues and who are attempting to be open-minded about them. The following representative quotes from males illustrate this theme;

Development and voluntary associations create a psychological preference toward one gender or the other based on emotional and other forms of compatibility. (18 year-old White freshman)

Some sort of biological difference, social preference, or psychological difference. (22 year-old African American senior)

It’s not proven, but I think it’s a mix of nature and nurture (genetics and how you are raised). (21 year-old White senior)

In one of the above instances, a student actually refers to the nature vs. nurture discourse; others use different terminology to allude to the same theme. In each case, male students suggest a certain amount of uncertainty about the cause of one’s sexual orientation as well as belief in the complexity of the trait. A similar thematic pattern emerged among female students;

I’m still not sure if its nature or nurture, but I’m learning toward nature more – that is
they feel that way naturally since they are young. (21 year-old Asian senior)

They are a combination of both natural environment as well as nurture. (19 year-old Asian sophomore)

In addition to the above more succinct responses, the following female student details the two-fold process from which she believes sexual orientation emerges:

I think that sexual orientation is a combination of biology and social factors. For instance, some people may be homosexual although their society’s religious and cultural views disagree strongly. Other people may be naturally heterosexual but experiment with other socially acceptable sexual orientations and may then have that orientation. (19 year-old African sophomore)

Like their male counterparts, the above female students believe multiple factors shape one’s sexual orientation. In addition to providing varied interpretations, responses tend to be longer and more detailed when compared relatively with responses for later survey questions. As suggested in the next section, the above views do not necessarily influence thoughts about gay and lesbian relationships specifically.

VIEWS ABOUT GAY AND LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Two themes emerge when students are asked their thoughts about gay and lesbian relationships and whether such persons should be able to marry and have the same rights as heterosexual couples. The first illustrates some of the difficulties some persons have separating their desire to support equality from specific beliefs about what constitutes marriage.

Yes…and No

Contrary to existing studies on continued unfavorable views on the subject (Barnes, 2009; Herek, 2002; Negy & Eisenman, 2005), the vast majority of respondents view gay and lesbian relationships favorably and support same-sex marriage. However, several students had mixed feelings. Although they do not seem to want to be a part of a process that discriminates against sexual minorities, their religious beliefs and up-bringing appear to make it difficult to wholeheartedly support same-sex marriage;

I have mixed feelings [same response to both questions]. (19 year-old African female sophomore)

The above student believes sexual orientation is a result of both nature and nurture, yet her uncertain views about homosexual relationships are evident in her two short responses to my queries. According to the following 21 year-old White male senior, sexual orientation is largely a result of nurture and inadequate familial relationships. Yet his somewhat ambivalent views about gays and lesbians inform beliefs that although such persons should have equal rights in terms of romantic relationships, it does not require a synonymous definition;

I really don’t think that much about them to be honest. They don’t bother me…marriage – no, civil unions - yes.

And the following student’s religious beliefs preclude support for same-sex marriage. However, he ultimately supports a couple’s decision to make choices that make them happy;

Personally, it goes against my religion so I find it morally wrong, but people should ultimately do what makes them happy, so if they want to be in a homosexual relationship, then I am indifferent to it…Well in my opinion, there is still a sanctity of marriage that is clearly defined between a man and a woman, so I don’t think marriage is the correct term to use for it. Civil union is more correct. They should be allowed to include each other in their wills, on insurance and things like that. (21 year-old African American male senior)
The above detailed statement is an anomaly among the short responses the majority of students with less favorable views provide. Unlike the above views on homosexual relationships the following students are much more direct and certain about their sentiments.

**Spreading Love and Happiness: Same and Equal**

The final theme associates the importance of equality as a requisite for happiness. According to the following students, gay and lesbian couples deserve the same chance at happiness as straight couples. Furthermore, they support legal changes to make such marriages a reality;

*Everyone deserves to be happy. They are doing what makes them happy. Yes. These couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples.* (19 year-old Hispanic female sophomore)

*If people are happy with them then they should be free to lead their lives as they please. Yes – everybody should have equal rights.* (19 year-old White female sophomore)

*I think they are just like heterosexual relationships – having love and arguments. Yes [support equality] because they are partners, no different than straight people.* (21 year-old Asian female senior)

The above three quotes associate relationships with happiness and love. The first two quotes specifically refer to the former concept and the two students emphatically give their support (“Yes”). Moreover, their remarks suggest that the current illegal status of same-sex unions reflects more than a legislative constraint, but prevents gays and lesbians from experiencing emotional and psychological well-being, contentment, and fellowship the two students seem to associate with marriage. The third student’s remarks expand this premise because she considers same-sex couples to be the same as opposite-sex couples in their tendency to have positive and negative experiences. For her, this similarity means same-sex couples deserve the same rights. The subjects of equal rights and equal treatment are more directly evident for the following students. It is common for students to refer to the constitution or the government as they describe deservedness;

*More power to them! Absolutely. The constitution doesn’t mention excluding gays from rights.* (18 year-old White male freshman)

*I think they are legitimate and should be viewed the same as heterosexual relationships. Yes! Sexual orientation is a personal matter and government should not be able to deem what is acceptable.* (20 year-old bi-racial male sophomore)

In addition to their support, both of the above students question whether the structural forces associated with the legal system should have the right to enter individual’s personal, intimate lives. Their comments also suggest that personal agency (i.e., “more power to them” and “sexual orientation is a personal matter”) does or should influence such decisions. Next, the latter two comments continue the pattern where students consider same-sex relationships to be the “same” as their heterosexual counterparts;

*Yes! I think they should be treated the same way that heterosexual relationships are treated.* (21 year-old White male senior)

*I don’t really mind. They exist the same as heterosexual relationships exist. I have a few gay/lesbian friends who talk to me about their relationships, it is very similar to heterosexual relationships. It makes no difference to me. Yes, they should have equal rights.* (19 year-old White female sophomore)

The first White male student above provides a more succinct, emphatic response.
However, the female student renders much more detail, corroborated by comments from gay/lesbian friends, to support legalization of same-sex marriage.

Despite diversity in terms of school classification, race, age, as well as sex, and despite varied views about the origins of sexual orientation, students overwhelmingly support same-sex relationships and their right to wed. Females were no more or less supportive of same-sex relationships or their right to marry. However, a review of response patterns show that, female students tend to provide longer, more detailed explanations than their male counterparts. Although both sexes are in support of the two issues, females are more likely to explain why, while male responses tend to give short phrases or when questioned about support for legal options, provide single words (i.e., “yes” or “absolutely”).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Responses, while varied in format, generally affirm that same-sex couples should have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. These findings parallel existing studies and mainstream reports that suggest opinions about same-sex relationships are becoming more positive (Brewer, 2003; Ho, 2012; Liptak, 2012; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Serwer, 2012). Moreover, students’ support of same-sex marriage is consistently favorable despite sample heterogeneity. Even ambivalent and more negative views about homosexuality do not prevent students from supporting the legal rights of same-sex couples to wed and be treated equally. Thus the sampled students appear able to transcend various beliefs and uncertainties to recognize the common humanness of same-sex couples (West, 1993).

However, female students in this study are more likely to provide detailed explanations to justify their support than are male students. Furthermore, male students often provide “one word or one phrase” affirmations for the legalization of same-sex marriage. Although I cannot fully explain these differences, I provide several possibilities. Given that all respondents completed their surveys during the same class period, this prevents attributing differences in response lengths to time constraints. During the same period, females are able to provide substantially more detailed responses. Furthermore, both males and females provide similar types of responses, in terms of format and length, when asked to explain a more esoteric question—the origins of sexual orientation. However, male students may not have been as comfortable expressing their views when asked direct questions about gay and lesbian relationships and possible legalities. For some males, the possibility of politically correct responses must be considered. Rather than question the validity of their support, these findings suggest the need for additional studies in more informal spaces or mail-in surveys to elicit additional information from males on the subject (Brewer, 2003; Negy & Eisenman, 2005).

These findings are also interesting given that they suggest possible heightened student tolerance at a school in a locale associated with intolerance. However, their presence in a course on grass roots social movements suggests the possibility that they selected such a university to affect change in its culture. Based on these findings, I contend that increased tolerance and reasoning based on common humanness appears evident for many of the sample students (West, 1993). Some young people such as college students may be seeing past the ideologies of their families as well as structural forces such as religion and conservative culture to use their agency to determine what is right and wrong to them. However, federal legislation to recognize
and legitimize same-sex relationships is still necessary. Like-minded individuals must unite to collectively call for legal change. This study reflects a small group’s opinions about a large, controversial issue. The findings are very intriguing. However, at the very least, a study with a more representative, national sample that includes additional questions about issues such as personal ideology, religion, and family history will be necessary to draw more comprehensive conclusions about this important topic.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

**Vulnerable Populations – Sexual Orientation**

I am in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations this semester. For my project, I am performing a survey to find out what [University’s name] students think about sexual orientation. This is a confidential survey (do not place your name on it). There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer honestly. Thank you for your help.

1. Age ________________  
2. Gender: _____Female _____Male

3. Classification (check one):
   _____Freshman  
   _____Sophomore  
   _____Junior  
   _____Senior  
   _____Other (______________)

4. Race (check one):
   _____White  
   _____Black/African American  
   _____Hispanic/Latino  
   _____Asian  
   _____Other (______________)

5. What do you think about people who have different sexual orientations (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and lesbianism)? Please explain.

6. What do you think about gay/lesbian relationships?

7. In your opinion, should gays and lesbians be afforded legal options such as: marriage, the ability to include their partner in their wills, ability to adopt children as a couple, and the ability to include their partner on their insurance?

Please contact Dr. Sandra L. Barnes in the Dept. of Human and Organizational Development (sandra.l.barnes@vanderbilt.edu) with questions or comments about this survey.
Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology

Barefoot Children Have No Bootstraps

Kirsten Floyd1
Department of Human and Organizational Development
Vanderbilt University
Peabody College

Abstract: The popular film, Slumdog Millionaire, provides the basis of what many people in the United States know about Indian culture in general and Indian street children in particular. But is this the reality? In this paper, I compare and contrast Slumdog Millionaire and the documentary, Chasing Childhood, in their portrayals of Indian street children. Structure vs. Agency as a theoretical framework is utilized in my analysis of the vulnerability of street children in India. Several themes emerge from both the movie and documentary such as escapism as an example of agency, lack of trust of adults, and physical and mental neglect and abuse of street children. Finally, I posit several possibilities for alleviating some of the structural forces negatively impacting street children and for increasing their agency.

Keywords: homeless children, India, street children

1 Please direct all correspondence to Kirsten Floyd at kirstendfloyd@gmail.com.
INTRODUCTION

“Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20 million rupees. How did he do it? (A) He cheated, (B) He’s lucky, (C) He’s a genius, and (D) It is written” (Boyle, 2008). Jamal Malik, the main character from the popular film, Slumdog Millionaire (2008), attributes his success on the game show, Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, to destiny. Throughout the film, Jamal escapes exploitation, avoids or outsmarts the police, cheats death, and even wins 20 million rupees. Although this rags to riches story is moving, inspiring, and entertaining, most stories about the street children of India are nothing like Jamal’s story. For example, Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta is a 2009 documentary set in Calcutta, India, that examines the lives and challenges of street children based on their interviews. In contrast, Slumdog Millionaire (2008) is a mainstream British romantic drama that premiered in 2008 that focuses on the lives of three impoverished homeless children from the slums of Mumbai. Both portrayals of the life of an Indian street child are informed by reality, but they have dramatically different endings. In this paper, I compare and contrast the suggested experiences presented in Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and the documentary, Chasing Childhood (2009). This comparative analysis of secondary data (movies) using content analysis to uncover themes that emerge from them is used to consider the following research questions - What is the life of a street child in India really like? What are potential solutions to increase the agency of Indian street children and alleviate some of the structural forces that negatively affecting their lives? This research note, informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse, examines the lives and experiences of some of the most vulnerable children in the world as well as their attempts to survive despite dire circumstances.

The Lives of Indian Street Children

With over 1.2 billion inhabitants, The Republic of India is the second most populated country in South Asia. Studies show that the British had economic and political dominion over India from 1858 – 1947, largely through military control and trade. Rule by British East India Company, Queen Victoria, a series of wars, as well as internal cultural friction provide the backdrop for a country that is now considered the world’s tenth largest economy and one of the fastest-growing economies. However, despite its rapidly industrializing state, India continues to face challenges associated with poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, and poor public healthcare (Chandra, 2009; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006).

Sharma et al. (2011) describe India as having one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Within the global community, they contend that, along with China, India is on its way to becoming one of the world’s economic superpowers. Although the two countries are compared in this article, thus far, India is known more for its growth than for its social and economic support for many of its residents, particularly the poor. Sources suggest that in the 1990s, India began its steady growth in the international market largely due to corporate investing (The Hindu, 2011). Despite its impressive growth, Balakrishnan (2004) compares India to China based on Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). India’s FDI is about 0.5% of their GDP, while China’s is 5.0%. To further consider both countries monetarily, China’s FDI exceeds $50 billion, compared to India’s $4 billion. Therefore, although India is experiencing substantial economic growth, its role as an economic superpower is debatable.
The daily lives of Indian street children play out in this growing, yet precarious economic setting. There are an estimated eighteen million street children in India (Gupta, 2008). Such children are classified by Nigam (1994) as “any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults” (p. 1). This population is particularly vulnerable because of their lack of protection and supervision. Some scholars suggest that such children should be divided into two categories, including children on the street and children of the street (Nigam, 1994). According to the same scholar, the United Nations (UN) refers to the latter group as “homeless children who live and sleep on the streets in urban areas. They are totally on their own, living with other street children or homeless adult street people” (p. 1). And the former group is children who earn a living or beg for money on the street and return home at night. Some children overlap and therefore fit into both categories. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, I will examine children in both categories because both groups lack the same basic human needs and are vulnerable in similar ways. The most common profile of a street child is a boy aged 10 to 14 years old. Children who are most vulnerable for becoming street children are those whose families have abandoned them or those whose families have moved into the city because of their impoverished situations. This often forces children to work on the streets during the day to help support their families. Children also leave their families because of physical, mental, and/or sexual abuse (Gupta, 2008; Kanth & Harris, 2004; Nigam, 1994). These are just a few of the innumerable reasons that children end up living on the streets in India. The struggle of Indian street children is a very important issue because of the deleterious conditions in which they live in addition to the structural forces that have forced them to become street children. This analysis presents several of the more common forces that push Indian children onto the streets as presented in the above mentioned films and help illustrate some of the more sobering ways in which art imitates life.

Research Methodology and Film Analysis Process

In order to analyze aspects of the media’s presentation of Indian street children, one popular movie was chosen due to its widespread influence. Slumdog Millionaire was premiered or screened internationally in locations such as London, Toronto, Mumbai, and the United States (U.S.) and won eight Academy Awards in 2009. Because of its extensive exposure and influence, Slumdog Millionaire was the first film to be analyzed here. In an attempt to compare and contrast the reality of a documentary with the media’s portrayal of Indian street children, Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta was chosen for its candid depiction of daily experiences and challenges a child’s life on the streets. Many documentaries focus solely on abuse or economic conditions, or health problems for street children. However, Chasing Childhood analyzes their difficult situations from a multitude of perspectives, including those of children themselves and police officers, two perspectives which are often ignored. Despite their fundamental differences as a mainstream movie and a documentary, respectively, both films attempt to present the experiences of Indian street children.
from multiple perspectives and to include the voices of children.

I acknowledge that I could have used a variety of methods to study this subject, including examining a larger sample of films. However, I elected to select and focus my attention on two films in order to go into more detail during the comparison and contrasting process as well as to closely consider the diverse points of view used in each film. Content analysis is used to examine how each film presents the lives and experiences of Indian street children. Interviews are analyzed to determine meanings for speakers as well as uncover representative patterns and themes (Krippendorf, 1980). Although my findings cannot be generalized, results from this explorative project may foster future studies about this important subject.

Summary of the Two Films: Chasing Childhood and Slumdog Millionaire

Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta is a 2009 documentary set in Calcutta, India, that analyzes the plight of street children mainly through interviews with street children themselves. Other perspectives are provided through interviews with police officers and healthcare officials. In addition to providing insight from various points of view, this documentary provides actual footage of the everyday lives of Indian street children. Some clips show children abusing drugs and discussing their drug use. Such troubling, raw subject matter is seldom explored in many documentaries. Journalist Aafreen Alam spent a month capturing the lives of the over fifty thousand children who permanently live on the streets of Calcutta. The film also attempts to question how a country that is experiencing economic growth in the international market seems to ignore street children and almost accept their existence. The film presents the 15 million residents of Calcutta, the 2nd largest city in India, and its estimated 300,000 street dwellers, of which 25 percent are children. The street-smarts that such children must acquire to survive are shown as well as the overcrowdedness, poverty, pollution, and malnourishment they face.

Slumdog Millionaire is a British romantic drama directed by Danny Boyle that premiered in 2008 and grossed over $377 million worldwide. It was adapted from the novel Q & A (2005) by Indian author Vikas Swarupet. The film details the experiences of three Indian street children from the slums of Mumbai, brothers Jamal and Salim Malik and their female friend, Latika, as told retrospectively by Jamal as he appears on the Indian version of the popular game show, Who Wants to be a Millionaire. Full of romance, crime, and adventure, the film was screened worldwide and has offered a perspective from popular media on how street children live. The movie won eight Academy Awards in 2009 and was applauded for its presentation of the harshness of street life of children. However, the film also had its critiques who felt that it romanticized and over-dramatized the plight of Indian street children (Hornaday, 2008; Lane, 2008; Phillips, 2008; Singh, 2009).

The following section contains a comparative analysis of both films’ presentation of the lives and experiences of Indian street children.

STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY AND THE LIVES OF INDIAN STREET CHILDREN

The Structure versus Agency framework is a theoretical perspective that can be used to describe and explain society and human behavior. Structural forces, also known as social forces, are commonly defined as macro-level beliefs, institutions, and organizations that shape people’s lives. Structural forces are prevalent in society and
can push or pull a person many ways. For example, the economy, social values and norms, and the legal system are just a few examples of structural forces that may impact our lives. Structural forces such as poverty, racism, classism, and sexism are negative; other structural forces can result in negative outcomes, such as healthcare inequality as a result of global economic competition. On the other hand, agency is defined as the ability to make choices or free will. It reflects a person’s ability to make individual decisions to impact his or her life. Although structural forces can be extremely influential due to their historical existence in society and because it is difficult to fully understand and dismantle them, individuals still have the ability to make certain choices. For example, a person influenced by economic depression may invoke his agency by interviewing for jobs or attempting to locate employment in the informal sector. Furthermore, people can choose to unite and act as a structural force to cause change in society. Both structure and agency are contrasting forces and are used to explain aspects of society. Yet scholars often debate about the merits of each line of reasoning and whether each can adequately explain society. However, I contend that the Structure versus Agency discourse can help us better understand the lives of Indian street children. The following sections summarize my findings about some of the economic, legal, and cultural forces the affect such children, some of the choices they make to survive, and possible strategies to respond to this social problem.

**Economic Vulnerability in the Land of Millionaires**

What are some of the macro-level forces that negatively influence the lives of Indian street children and what choices do such children make as a result? I contend that the experiences and depictions presented in both *Chasing Childhood* (2009) and to a lesser degree, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), help us understand how the Structure versus Agency discourse can play out in real life.

A strong argument can be made that the lives of Indian street children are one of the more negative outcomes of global capitalism where groups like children in general and poor children in particular are often the most vulnerable to economic changes (Marx, 1963; Wilson, 1996). Although they use different terminology, both of the aforementioned scholars describe instances of exploitation and alienation of vulnerable groups in society. Furthermore, both illustrate society’s often divergent views about how to address economic-based social problems. The structural nature of global capitalism is also evident in world systems that divide core countries from periphery ones in terms of international relations (Wallerstein, 2008). This framework delineates periphery countries as mainly developing countries that have lower wages, worse working conditions, and relatively more vulnerable people than their counterparts in core countries. Because street children of India are located in a periphery country, they are among the most vulnerable residents based on their position as members of the *poorest of the poor*.

Although both Marx’s (1963) and Wallerstein’s (2008) descriptions do not perfectly explain the complexities of our global society, their arguments can be broadly applied to life among the disenfranchised in India – particularly when one considers poverty. For example, Nigam (1994) suggests that, “In India, 90% of street children are working children with regular family ties who live with their families, but are on the streets due to poverty and their parents’ unemployment. The remaining 10% are either working children with few family ties who view the streets as their homes or abandoned and neglected children with no
family ties” (p. 1). If his assessment is correct, most street children live with their families, but are forced to live and work on the streets because of poverty. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (2009), over 25 percent of Indians live in poverty. This means that no matter how strong familial bonds are, they are insufficient to combat the realities of poverty for Indian street children.

Similarly, Kanth and Harris (2004) state, “children who are vulnerable to street life include those who have been abandoned by their families or sent into cities because of a family’s intense poverty, often with hopes that a child will be able to earn money for the family and send it home” (p. 3). Therefore, family poverty usually means that their children are vulnerable economically, educationally, and in terms of healthcare. A poor family means children often have less food, less access to formal education, and less access to clean water. This dynamic is an example of the domino effect, as vividly described in Hays’ Flat Broke with Children (2003) when one negative event, such as job loss, often leads to others such as loss of housing and healthcare. For Indian children, the domino effect can lead to a life on the street;

Street children in India are of moderate health status, suffering from various chronic diseases and undernourishment. They are deprived of all health programs, but seem to prefer government hospitals in case of dire need. Street children often have to pay for water. Almost 97% in Calcutta, 99% in Bangalore, and 90% in Madras reported having no access to toilet and bathing facilities… almost 40,000 children die every day in developing countries, 25% of whom are in India. (Nigam, 1994: 1)

Classism as a result of poverty in a global economy is particularly evident in Slumdog Millionaire (2008). For example, Jamal is consistently referred to as “the chai wallah” (term for someone of a lower class who sells or brings tea) instead of by his name. When Jamal is being investigated by the police, he says, “Because I’m a slumdog chai wallah, I’m a cheat, right?” to which the officer replies, “Most of you are” (Slumdog Millionaire 2008). Although he was able to locate a job, his apparent class position targeted him for negative comments and stereotypes. Despite economic abundance around them, the rigidity of class structure means little chance for upward mobility for most Indian street children. Information from the above noted scholars provide insight into the contrasting existences of the wealthy and Indian street children who co-exist in the same spaces.

No Protection from the Law

The second major structural force that impacts child homelessness and poverty in India is the legal/police system. Laws in India to protect children are inadequate. Indian police are often described as corrupt and are known to treat street children poorly (Gupta, 2008). In Slumdog Millionaire (2008), the opening scene depicts a police officer chasing street children off private property. Although this is a legitimate offense in the US, it may be shocking to many people to imagine 5- and 6-year-old children chased with bats by officers on motor bikes who plan to beat the children. Therefore, although US police may be associated with safety for many people, their Indian counterparts are not considered as such for many street children. In another scene from the movie, Muslims are being attacked by a group of Hindus. Jamal and Salim run over to the police, who simply continue their card game and tell the children to leave, despite the fact that a man in front of them is engulfed in flames. In this example, the police do not seem to care about the plight or the concerns of street children. According to both scenes in
Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and interviews in Chasing Childhood (2009), both laws and street children themselves are often ignored.

The latter film emphasizes the lack of trust in the police; “children complain that they are often beaten up by the police. The police regard all street children as criminals. As a result, most children believe that the police are a threat” (Chasing Childhood, 2009). For street children, the lack of trust for law enforcement appears to be a direct result of abuse at the hands of the police. According to the documentary, “the general feeling amongst them is law enforcement is not going to help us. Every element of society is against us”. This statement is similarly illustrated throughout Slumdog Millionaire (2008) when street children are chased by the police in the opening scene as well as when Jamal is tortured by the police based on his continued success on the popular television game show. However, in contrast, Debashis Roy, Police Officer of the Kolkata Police, states in the documentary, “we hardly wield the baton unnecessarily” and another officer comments more openly that in order to “avoid the kids who pickpocket or loot people, we chase them away” (Chasing Childhood, 2009). Yet neither officer acknowledges any abuse of street children by police officers. However, research by Nanjunda (2008) describes police abuse of street children;

They were held for excessive periods of time in police lockups, for days and even weeks, usually mixed with adults. In jails they were sometimes further beaten by police, or forced to pay bribes in order to be released. Girls were sometimes coerced into providing sexual services to police in exchange for release, or were raped. (P. 426)

Thus both academic research and the documentary examined here are reflected in the popular movie – and illustrate the challenges Indian street children face and their expectation of neglects and/or abuse at the hands of persons expected to provide protection and safety.

A Culture of Neglect

Each of the following sources further illustrates a culture of neglect in which many Indian street children find themselves. Such a culture appears to reflect norms and values that ignore street children or tacitly condone their ill treatment. Their existence and lives of squalor seem socially acceptable. According to Veena Lakhumalani, Director of the Calcutta Branch of the Child In Need Institute;

People come to the big cities in search of work from the rural areas and they have nowhere to stay so the street is a place where children are with their families . . . There are also children who run away from home, in search of either work opportunities or they run away because they have problems at home. (Chasing Childhood, 2009)

These problems suggested by Lakhumalani often include abuse. Moreover, according to the Consortium for Street Children (2009), “the overall incidence of physical abuse among street children, either by family members or by others or both, was 66.8% across the states. Out of this, 54.62% were boys and 45.38% were girls” (p. 4).

Furthermore, street children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than other children. For example, in Slumdog Millionaire (2008), the three main characters, all street children, are abused by their teacher, by the police, as well as by Maman, the leader of a street gang who exploits children throughout the movie. Chasing Childhood (2009) also describes a broader culture in Indian society that indirectly or directly condones the mistreatment and neglect of street children.

Because of neglect and/or abuse, street children tend to generally distrust adults (Chasing Childhood, 2009). During a specific interview in this documentary, a 14
year old street child named, Govind, describes how abuse caused him to leave home. In addition to beatings from his father, school supplies are withheld from him, which result in Govind’s poor treatment by his teacher. Ultimately he stops attending school. According to Govind, he ran away from home because of both his grandmother’s and father’s mistreatment. He states, “My grandmother never used to give me proper food. Whenever I asked for food she used to bully me. When my father got back from work she used to say false thing about me and then my father would beat me.” Govind’s continued abuse finally results in life on the streets. Another aspect of a broader culture of neglect appears to be the beliefs that street children do not deserve to have their needs met like the rest of Indian society (Gupta, 2008).

According to one UN report, “about 60 million Indian children under the age of 6 live below the poverty line. The problem has become particularly acute for homeless children, one-fifth of who receive no education” (Slumdogs, 2011). Furthermore, despite a mandate by the Juvenile Justice Act that all children should be educated, laws are not enforced and about 20 percent of street children do not receive an education at all (The Gazette of India, 2011). Street children also lack basic education about safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases. For example, a survey of 100 street children at the New Delhi Railway Station in India shows that, “86% of boys in the age group 14 - 18 years were sexually active; however a very low number of them knew about safe sex protection and condom usage. Not one of them reported having ever used a condom” (Consortium for Street Children, 2009). If this report is accurate, street children are also vulnerable as a result of increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases which compound their challenges.

Research is clear that sexual abuse causes many negative repercussions for children. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2006), “A child who is the victim of prolonged sexual abuse usually develops low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, and an abnormal or distorted view of sex. The child may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults, and can become suicidal” (p. 1). Children who are sexually abused must deal with the effects long after the assaults are over. The long-term consequences of sexual abuse and neglect are honestly presented in Slumdog Millionaire (2008) as Latika is sexually abused by Salim. Although she ultimately overcomes her abuses and establishes a relationship with Jamal, such “happy endings” do not appear common for most Indian street children (Chasing Childhood, 2009).

Exploitation as an example of neglect and abuse is evident in Slumdog Millionaire (2008). For example, the antagonist Maman recruits children who are rag-picking to sing for him. They believe he is a good man because he provides them with food and shelter. However, once Salim realizes that Maman also blinds children and cuts off their limbs so that they can make more money for him, he convinces Jamal to escape before they are seriously injured. Although Maman is initially believed to be their leader, the three children quickly learn that he does not have their best interest at heart. According to (Chasing Childhood, 2009) exploitation of children is common in India because they lack supervision and are already vulnerable. Abuse by both family members and police officers were depicted throughout the documentary and provide the real backdrop for many of the scenes presented in the above noted popular movie. The above economic, political, cultural, and health-related problems illustrate some of
the common challenges most Indian street children face as a result of negative structural forces and adult neglect in varied societal arenas (Gupta, 2008; Kanth & Harris, 1004; Nigam, 1994).

**Choices Indian Street Children Make in Response to Challenges**

How do street children in India combat the many challenges they face? What choices do they make to stay alive in the face of poverty and danger? And what insights can be gained from their stories in academic, documentary, and mainstream sources? I contend that these sources provide evidence of the adaptive, resilient nature of many Indian street children as they establish networks to care for each other and locate work as well as engage in forms of escapism during particularly difficult times. Examples of these themes are provided below.

In *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the three street children take care of each other by forming a coalition to help them become stronger than the forces acting against them. And in doing so, they help each other survive. Although the story is romanticized, their alliance enables them to escape nearly every dangerous situation they encounter. Despite limited agency against social forces and many adults, the three children strategically rely on each other for food, shelter, protection; as well as to create a non-traditional sense of family (MacLeod, 1995). Similarly, *Chasing Childhood* (2009) discusses work that street children do to survive. Informal jobs include selling trinkets, rag-picking to find recyclables, and performing. These types of jobs are also depicted in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). The movie also attempts to illustrate the anxiety, fear, and uncertainty of life on the street. Although similar types of informal jobs are common in the U.S. (Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996), their dire nature appears to be compounded when performed by children who are often without homes and adults to care for them.

The culture of neglect towards Indian street children has resulted in the tendency for them to engage in literal and mental escapism in order to survive. According to Gupta (2008) the public in India view their own children positively, but often consider street children to be little more than *rats* who are simply criminals. Because of the public’s negative view of street children, they have become the *Other* in society – outcasts to be devalued, ignored, and mistreated (Hays, 2003). According to this same author, Indian adults often view street children as *them* and believe that they are significantly different from normal people and therefore deserve poor treatment. According to *Chasing Childhood* (2009), street children often use drugs to mentally escape the cruelties of the street as well as to forget about their problems and mask their hunger. Although drug use is not as evident in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the film depicts a variety of instances in which the three street children have to physically escape abusive situations such as Jamal and Salims’ escape from the antagonist Maman and their escape from the religious confrontation during which their mother is killed. Although their choices are extremely limited, street children do attempt to evoke agency in response to negative structural forces in society. Their attitudes and actions are examples of everyday resistance common among vulnerable groups who face many problems, but who tap into existing resources and group strengths to fight back (Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; West, 1993).

**SOLUTIONS: TURNING HURT TO HAPPILY EVER AFTER**

The issues affecting Indian street children are complex and cannot be described or solved in the scope of this
paper. However, I offer two suggestions, one short-term and one long-term, for supporting street children of India by providing them more choices and combating structural forces that are working against them. These two suggestions are the following - providing basic rights to street children of India (i.e., shelter, food, health, education) and enforcement of laws to protect them. Short-term, construction of community toilets would prevent many diseases. As noted in Chasing Childhood, many children drink from dirty water in the same places where they also use the bathroom. Separate facilities would reduce the likelihood of both getting and spreading diseases. Nigam (1994) contends;

Extending extra health facilities, establishing nutrition programs, providing vocational training, protecting children from abuse, distributing dry-food polypacks, providing night shelters, providing ration cards, and creating bathing and toilet facilities would go far in improving the quality of life and the future of street children in India. (P. 8)

Furthermore, most street children in India must pay for clean water, which they are usually cannot afford (Kanth & Harris, 2004). Thus they are forced to drink dirty water that makes them sick. Some of the other basic necessities that should be supplied to street children are bathing facilities, clothing, rehabilitation and counseling services, education and vocational training, shelter, and family reunification, therapy and support. All of these things could be provided by establishing comprehensive shelters throughout India, especially in urban areas, where more street children reside. One such organization that has responded to this challenge is Udayan, located outside of Jaipur, India. As noted in its mission statement, children are able to maintain familial relations if possible and if they are not abusive. Families are allowed time with their children such that bonds are maintained. Udayan also provides education and vocational training so that once children graduate, they are able to support themselves (refer to www.udyancare.org). Additionally, as members of the global society and a core country, the U.S. should provide increased economic and political support in response to this social problem (Wallerstein, 2008).

A long term solution requires the UN to become more involved in the laws of India. The Juvenile Justice Act is in place, but is not consistently enforced such that abusive police are identified, criminally tried, and appropriately punished. Long-term public education to change views about street children is also needed to undergird UN efforts to enforce laws. Systemic changes mean better laws against slumlords who exploit children, better laws against parents who abuse their children, and more enforcement of the laws already in place. Because many police officers abuse street children, it will be necessary for governmental leaders, politicians, and non-poor residents in India to become part of a coalition to advocate for the rights of street children. Furthermore, if the public, including law enforcement officials, are educated about the plight of street children, perhaps they will stop blaming street children for their situations and begin to help them. If more children’s shelters are established short-term, fewer children will be on the streets - which will ameliorate some of the public’s negative views about them. Increased advocacy for the poor in general and for poor children in particular is also essential (The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2009). Lastly, community organizing around the issues street children face and their families face will help provide more attention to this social problem. This analysis does not do justice to the complexities of this issue. Both
Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and Chasing Childhood (2009) only provide glimpses into the deleterious reality of life on the street for poor children in India. Barefoot children have no bootstraps. If they are to experience better lives, it will require united efforts at the international, national, and local levels to replace the poverty, neglect, vulnerability, and abuse Indian street children experience with the love, support, and nurturance all children deserve.

REFERENCES

film-festival-vikas-swarup-slumdog-millionaire.

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse: 
Perceived Vulnerability Differences Between Students and Professionals

Samantha Winer
Vanderbilt University
Human and Organizational Development
Peabody College

Abstract: Research cites the prevalence of mental health disorders with co-occurring substance abuse and that substance use poses even greater threats to the prospect of recovery for psychiatric patients. Research has also examined different types of treatment programs and their effectiveness. Using the Structure versus Agency discourse and interviews, this study builds on existing research to analyze student beliefs about persons who are mentally ill and who abuse substances as compared to views of professionals who care for such groups. First, results show that a disproportionate percentage of respondents from both groups have been intimately connected to people with mental health disorders or substance abuse challenges. These experiences inform their views about vulnerability. However, results reveal that populations previously identified as vulnerable such as children and African Americans are perceived less so, but that professionals generally have broader understandings about what constitutes vulnerability and how to more effectively respond. The findings suggest that direct experience is crucial to understanding vulnerable populations.

Keywords: mental illness, substance abuse, vulnerable groups

1 Please direct all correspondence to Samantha Winer, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203-5721; e-mail: samantha.winer@gmail.com.
INTRODUCTION

Until recently, mental health disorders and substance abuse problems have been identified and treated as two independent syndromes. In the general population, 22.5 percent of individuals have a lifetime mental health disorder, and these include but are not limited to depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (Regier et al., 1990). The prevalence of substance abuse, which includes alcohol and illicit drugs, is 13.5 percent of the population (Regier et al., 1990). Research has repeatedly shown that individuals with mental illnesses, compared to those without, are more than twice as likely to have a co-occurring substance use disorder (Clark, Samnaliev & McGovern, 2007; Dickey & Azeni, 1996; Hartwell, 2004; RachBeisel, Scott & Dixon, 1999; Regier et al., 1990). The intersectionality of multiple factors acting together intensifies the negative effects of having a mental health disorder or a substance abuse problem, increasing one's vulnerability. The majority of research cites the prevalence of co-occurring disorders. Further studies examine the different types and effectiveness of treatment for co-occurring disorders.

This study will add to the existing body of research on co-occurring disorders by answering a central question about what some members of the general population think: To what extent do undergraduate students and healthcare professionals differ in their views of those with mental health disorder and substance abuse problems? I use surveys to examine views of two unique groups, undergraduate students from a private, liberal arts university in the southeast and professionals in the field of substance abuse treatment, through the theoretical framework of the Structure versus Agency discourse. Race, class, and gender will also be considered as factors potentially impacting one’s vulnerability to mental illness and substance abuse. Findings from this study will have academic and applied implications for the healthcare arena as well as for our general understanding of forms of vulnerability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental illnesses and substance use disorders have a clearly negative impact on the individual and her/his immediate social circle, but the larger community and nation as a whole are impacted as well. Literature has focused on three main ramifications of dual diagnoses: the costs of care are increased partially due to multiple hospitalizations (Dickey & Azeni, 1996; RachBeisel, Scott & Dixon, 1999); the odds that the individual is detached from his or her family and homeless; and the likelihood of incarceration and consequently the costs of the legal system are amplified. Research consistently illustrates that substance use poses even greater threats to the prospect of recovery for psychiatric patients. It complicates treatment and adversely affects their already poor mental health and psychosocial functioning as well as other health conditions like heart disease (Dickey & Azeni, 1996; Ding et al., 2010; RachBeisel et al., 1999).

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA) 2010 national survey, only 11.5 percent of people who needed treatment for alcohol or drug abuse received any treatment. Although individuals with multiple disorders are more likely to receive some form of treatment than those with single diagnoses (Regier et al., 1990; RachBeisel et al., 1999), treatment is usually insufficient for the complexity of the comorbidity (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Hartwell, 2004). Once in a facility, such patients are less compliant, often exhibit disruptive behaviors such as hostility and negativity, and require multiple acute services, leading to excessive costs for care (Dickey & Azeni, 1996; RachBeisel et al., 1999). Studies find that patients with co-
occurring disorders are hospitalized more frequently (Clark et al., 2007), have longer periods of hospitalization and are in need of more urgent care (Ding et al., 2010). Despite the movement to deinstitutionalize care and create more community-based facilities, public tolerance and services remain limited (Hartwell, 2004).

There is a strong correlation between mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness, reflecting the intersectionality experienced by this population (Bassuk et al., 1998; Dickey & Azeni, 1996). One explanation is that individuals with mental illnesses and substance use problems are stigmatized and induced with guilt; this is particularly true for females, who, compared to males, experience higher rates of comorbidity (Clark et al., 2007; Ding et al., 2010; Hartwell, 2004). In treatment, a large proportion of females report traumatic life events during childhood such as abuse by a family member (Ashley, Marsden & Brady, 2003; RachBeisel et al., 1999). This can create what Hays (2003) refers to as a “domino effect”, when negative life events repeatedly occur and are compounded by one another. Abuse can lead to psychological problems, substance abuse, family detachment, poor academic outcomes, children out of wedlock, jobless poverty, and homelessness (Ashley et al., 2003; Bassuk et al., 1998; RachBeisel et al., 1999, Wilson, 1999). SAMHSA’s national survey (2010) reports that the majority of individuals who abuse substances are unemployed and have earned a high school degree or less. Literature also shows that treatment should be aimed at increasing the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), or improving the education, experiences, and skills, to empower people and create more opportunities for success and improvement.

The elevated incarceration rate for this population furthers the domino effect and intensifies the effects having a dual diagnosis. Hartwell (2004) found that nearly 70 percent of mentally ill offenders were also classified as having a substance abuse problem. This pattern was stable across ethnicities, though incarcerated females had slightly higher rates than males. Comorbidity increases the time spent in jail and the chances the inmate serves his or her full sentence, raises the odds of being homeless after release, magnifies the probably of being rejected by the family, and heightens the prospect of being institutionalized after a period of time in the community (Hartwell, 2004). Upon release, persons with co-occurring disorders are often further stigmatized and ostracized by the community as criminals, mentally ill, and substance abusers, making it exponentially more difficult to successfully reintegrate into society (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Hartwell, 2004). Also, offenders with co-occurring disorders have far more difficulty finding jobs and housing. The criminalization of offenders with co-occurring disorders is a result of changes in the legal system to create more stringent criteria and inadequacies of the healthcare system to provide alternatives (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Hartwell, 2004). Unlike members of the general population who generally understand the implications of the correctional system and its consequences, dually diagnosed individuals usually do not interpret incarceration as retribution for their illegal actions (Hartwell, 2004). Imprisoning people with co-occurring disorders rarely helps such individuals, nor does it benefit society to add to the already over-crowded jails. This suggests that policies need to be amended to help this vulnerable population, which would simultaneously enhance society. But the question remains – do members of society understand how vulnerable such people are?

STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY

The Structure versus Agency discourse is a widely used theoretical framework through which one can analyze and view society. A
structural force can be defined as a macro-level institution, organization, or ideology that influences us at a micro-level. In this framework, agency refers to our ability to make choices independently, or our free will. A strong argument can be made that certain structural forces are acting simultaneously against one’s agency to prevent some people with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders from rejoining society and living healthy lives. Three significant structural forces that do not function independently include the health care system, the broader culture, and the legal system. I will expand on each of these in more detail.

The healthcare system is the most important structural force that impacts those with co-occurring mental health disorders and substance use disorders. As the literature reveals, deinstitutionalization has had opposite consequences than intended. For example, today there are fewer hospital beds available and the healthcare system remains largely fragmented in terms of treatment services (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Dickey & Azeni, 1996; Hartwell, 2004). The facilities capable of dealing with the complexity of co-occurring disorders are scarce. Most facilities treating either type of disorder will not admit those with dual diagnoses because of the unique and more elaborate treatment interventions required, and the higher levels of behavioral problems (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Dickey & Azeni, 1996). High quality, integrated services at all phases of treatment must be established that are specifically aimed at healing both disorders and increasing cultural capital through life skills training and education to improve the quality of life for these individuals. The financial benefits to society in the form of more active and healthy adults, fewer and shorter hospitalizations, lower rates of homelessness, higher employment rate, and fewer incarcerations would outweigh the increased costs of these psychiatric services (Clark et al., 2007; Dickey & Azeni, 1996; Ding et al., 2010; Steadman et al., 2009).

Changes in the healthcare system should correspond with changes in our overall culture about mental illness and substance abuse. Society’s tendency to classify individuals with mental illnesses and substance abuse problems in negative ways often furthers their maladaptive behaviors and creates barriers as they work to receive treatment (Hartwell, 2004). For example, depressive symptoms may be amplified or drinking and drug use may escalate. Individuals may deny or hide part of their disorder during the admission process and once admitted (Alexander, 1996). In communities, employers are less likely to hire someone with a history of mental illness or substance abuse (Hartwell, 2004). The tendency for such bias to exponentially increase with each adverse condition parallels the domino effect; dually diagnosed, homeless offenders have more difficulty finding employment (Hays, 2003).

Families are affected by this stigma to the extent that they often resign to them – despite the reality that families are considered a key socializing agent and individuals are considerably more vulnerable when they are isolated. Studies on the effectiveness of different treatments show that involving family members holds the greatest promise (Ashley, Marsden & Brady, 2003). Cultural stigma often leads persons to blame victims, such as abused women who have mental health disorders and substance use problems. The subtlety of this structural force often means that people are less likely to consider the mentally ill and persons with substance abuse disorders worthy of protection, interventions, and other services they so need (Alexander, 1996; Ashley et al., 2003; Hartwell, 2004). Yet systemic change would mean altering our common cultural paradigm such that people see the common humanness and Americanness (West, 1993) of individuals with co-occurring disorders.
and support the development of integrative treatment facilities.

Lastly, inmates have a constitutional right to adequate healthcare, including treatment of mental health and substance use problems (Steadman et al., 2009). In this context, the legal system is loosely connected to the healthcare system. This suggests that jails, prisons, and healthcare providers must do a better job at forming relationships to identify and respond to mental illnesses and substance abuse (Abram & Teplin, 1991) to fulfill their constitutional obligation to provide adequate services and not just manage symptoms. Increasing the availability of treatment facilities for those with dual diagnoses could lower the incarceration rate (Abram & Teplin, 1991; Hartwell, 2004). Stigma associated with incarceration, despite the cause for incarceration, can lead to a variety of progressively more adverse situations and outcomes such as joblessness and homelessness. In addition to altering our perceptions about mental and substance use disorders, policies within the legal system can be adjusted for those with mental health or substance use disorders to possibly curtail incarceration until there are more treatment centers available.

Yet structural forces can overpower an individual’s sense of agency. Specifically, multiple problems associated with the above types of disorders can mean that agency becomes significantly impaired, if not altogether diminished, by nihilism: a severe lack of love, lack of meaning, and lack of hope that results in a “numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition towards the world” (West, 1993, p. 23). According to this scholar, without hope, individuals have no future goals and nothing to fight for; without meaning, they have no reason to fight; and without love, they have no support or motivation to try. Applying this dynamic here suggests that the poor healthcare system with limited treatment options for dual diagnoses can foster hopelessness as individuals have nowhere to go for help. The overarching cultural stigma often associated with mental health disorders and substance abuse can create a lack of love for oneself. This nihilistic threat has negative implications for individuals and the larger society. For individuals with co-occurring disorders, support groups are the most effective way to become a structural force and overpower nihilism.

As part of a cohesive group, individuals are united due to the similar situations and comparable hardships and may experience feelings of love, which West (1993) states is the most powerful force. The bonds within the group can cultivate strong ties based on the close emotional relationships that are established within these immediate social circles (Granovetter, 1973). And a tight social group may foster increased agency on the part of diagnosed persons as they experience support, love, and hope from such persons. Other examples of agency germane here include challenging the healthcare system to establish more treatment centers for co-occurring disorders and creating local alliances and networks to educate others and show our common humanness. Individuals can use their agency to increase their knowledge about disorders and treatment. Through education, persons with co-occurring disorders as well as their peers can combat the stigma surrounding this subject and lessen some of the vulnerability members of the former group experience.

DATA AND METHODS

During the fall of 2011, I administered a survey to fourteen individuals: seven undergraduate students at a private, liberal arts university in the southeast, and seven professionals in the field of substance abuse treatment in that same city. The latter group was employed at the recovery facility, Helping Hands that treats women who would otherwise be homeless due to
substance use and who consistently have co-occurring mental health disorders. All staff persons are females and about two thirds of them have undergone recovery themselves. The sample was selected in two ways. A purposive sample of students was surveyed in a Cognitive Psychology course. The sample of students included five females and two males; all the females were White and the males were Asian. The age range was from 19 to 23 years old. Helping Hands workers were surveyed via email. Respondents from Helping Hands were all White females with ages from 22 to 62 years old. Persons participated without receipt of payment or gift. Although purposive, the sample was selected to provide a cross-section of responses based on factors such as age, education level, work experience, potential exposure to co-occurring disorders, and race. Participants were told that the study was on vulnerable populations and, specifically, people with addictions and mental illnesses. The definition given of a vulnerable population was, “people who are more susceptible to negative experiences in society. They have a high likelihood of having problems in their lives due to various challenges” (survey provided in the appendix).

Participants were first asked to rate the vulnerability of six different populations: children, people addicted to alcohol, African Americans, people with mental illnesses, poor people, and people addicted to drugs. The additional three populations have been consistently found to be vulnerable and were included for comparison purposes (Hays, 2003; West, 1993; Wilson, 1999). The rating scale was: “0” means “not vulnerable”; “1” means “somewhat vulnerable”; “2” means “vulnerable”; and, “3” means “very vulnerable”. They were then asked to explain their reasoning for the groups they rated as “very vulnerable”. The intent was to assess views about different types of possible vulnerability and some reasons for their views. Participants were also asked about any personal experiences and what they think could be done to improve the lives of people with mental illnesses and addictions.

**FINDINGS**

**Personal Experiences with Mental Illnesses or Substance Abuse**

Undergraduates report mixed experiences with individuals with mental illnesses or substance abuse. Although three of the seven students had no personal experience with either population, particularly the two Asian respondents, the majority of students had familial or personal exposure to these issues, particularly mental illnesses such as depression and bipolar disease. However, none report personally struggling with such disorders. For example, a White female 21 year-old student comments, “Yes, depression runs in my family. [and] My brother was addicted to pot last year.” Other student responses include:

- Yes, my father was an alcoholic, mother had depression, and a close friend has PTSD/depression. (White female, 23 years old)
- Yes, I had a cousin with a heroin addiction and an uncle with bipolar disorder. (White female, 22 years old)
- I have multiple friends who have suffered from severe depression and drug abuse. I have also worked with mental health while interning in a behavioral health clinic. (White female, 19 years old)

It is unclear whether this pattern is a result of the presence in the selected course (i.e., Cognitive Psychology) or reflects a broader societal pattern. Next, Helping Hands staff all report having personal experience with addictions. Six of the seven persons have a family member with a substance abuse problem and three of the seven women are in recovery themselves. Recordings of mental illness are less common; three women report both family and personal struggles with mental illness and two of these three women
report having friends with mental illnesses as well. Their comments often parallel those of the student respondents, yet are usually more personal. For example, a 62 year old clinical director notes; “Personally, I was married for many years to a practicing alcohol/drug addict who never received treatment. Professionally I have worked in the field of mental health and addictions for the last 25 years.” Another staff person notes; “Yes, I have worked as a counselor in the addictions field since May 1997. I am a recovering addict since Feb. 1993” (57 year old therapist). Next, a 43 year old case worker provides additional detail;

Yes, my father was an alcoholic, and it’s suspected that my grandfather was as well. I became an addict as well (most of my friends in college and beyond were at the very least substance abusers if not addicts) and am in recovery myself from substance abuse, ED, PTSD and depression. Through recovery I have come to know and be friends with several addicts who are also diagnosed as bi-polar, and thru my work I have met many addicts diagnosed with various other mental illnesses.

It is more common for staff persons to initially identify substance abuse more than mental illness in their pasts. Yet they often associate their addictions to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders. Common addictions are to drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. Although over-representation by staff persons with ties to such disorders is expected to be tied to their occupational choices, the pattern of exposure to such challenges is important as I consider the issue of vulnerability further in the analysis.

Vulnerability Ratings
What are respondents’ views when asked to rate groups of people along a vulnerability scale? Certain results are unexpected and inform our understanding about the nature and scope of personal experiences and cultural influences. As presented in Table 1, mean scores for both groups show that people with mental illnesses and people addicted to drugs are considered most vulnerable (mean = 2.79 based on a range from 0.00 - 3.00). This figure is followed by people addicted to alcohol (mean = 2.71). Research has found that these groups are extremely vulnerable to negative life events, often evident in a domino effect that occurs for those with addictions or mental health disorders in terms of such compounded factors as lower education, homelessness, and poverty (Clark et al., 2007; Ding et al., 2010; Hartwell, 2004). Although children, African Americans, and poor people have been widely identified as vulnerable populations in numerous studies (Hays, 2003; West, 1993; Wilson, 1996), respondents tend to rate these three groups the lowest in terms of perceived vulnerability.

The lowest rating is African Americans (mean = 1.64). Respondents rate children the second lowest, followed by poor people. With one exception, the groups rated most vulnerable also tend to have smaller response differences in these ratings (i.e., standard deviations get increasingly smaller as the rating of vulnerability increases). This suggests that groups considered most vulnerable are more highly agreed upon by respondents in general than groups considered less vulnerable. The exception occurs when children are rated. Although they are considered relatively less vulnerable as compared to the five other groups, standard deviations for their ratings (and for those of African Americans to a lesser degree) reflect more disagreement about children’s perceived vulnerability.
Table 1. Mean Scores of Vulnerability Ratings for the Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerable Group</th>
<th>Mean Rating and SD (Highest to Lowest)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to drugs</td>
<td>2.79 (SD = 0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with mental illness</td>
<td>2.79 (SD = 0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to alcohol</td>
<td>2.71 (SD = 0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people</td>
<td>2.14 (SD = 0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2.07 (SD = 1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>1.64 (SD = 0.93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD = standard deviation, N=14, highest three ratings in bold italics

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores of Vulnerability Ratings Between Students and Helping Hands Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerable Group</th>
<th>Students (n=7)</th>
<th>Helping Hands (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1.71 (SD = 1.25)</td>
<td>2.43 (SD = 0.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to alcohol</td>
<td>2.57 (SD = 0.79)</td>
<td>2.86 (SD = 0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>1.29 (SD = 1.11)</td>
<td>2.00 (SD = 0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with mental illness</td>
<td>2.57 (SD = 0.79)</td>
<td>3.00 (SD = 0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people</td>
<td>2.00 (SD = 1.15)</td>
<td>2.29 (SD = 0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to drugs</td>
<td>2.71 (SD = 0.49)</td>
<td>2.86 (SD = 0.38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD = standard deviation, highest three ratings for each group in bold italics

As documented in Table 2, findings for the subject groups provide more detail about perceptions about vulnerability in general and for persons with mental illnesses or substance abuse challenges in particular. First, both students and Helping Hands staff consider African Americans to be least vulnerable (means of 1.29 and 2.00, respectively). Students ratings are, in order of increasing vulnerability: African Americans; children; poor people; people addicted to alcohol and the mentally ill (equally vulnerable); and people addicted to drugs. The latter group has an average vulnerability rating of 2.71 (st. dev. = 0.49). In contrast, the ratings of Helping Hands staff are, in order of increasing vulnerability: African Americans, poor people, and children. Furthermore, Helping Hands staff rate the mentally ill the highest (rating of 3.00 and st. dev. = 0.00). The latter result reflects complete agreement that mentally ill persons are the most vulnerable and probably reflects the realities staff experience as they work with such groups daily. Overall, Helping Hands staff has higher mean ratings and lower standard deviations for each of the six populations. This means that they tend to consider each of the six groups more vulnerable than not and there is less variability in their beliefs as compared to students in the study.
Lastly, I examine ratings for the entire group based on age groupings (Table 3). The first group consists solely of students (ages 18 to 20 years). They have the greatest variation in average scores (mean range of 1.25 - 3.00 and st. dev. range from 0.00 - 1.50). The second age group (21 to 30 years) consists of half the students and half the professionals. Ratings are much more mixed (1.67 - 2.83), but with the smallest standard deviation range (0.41 - 0.84). The oldest group (ages 31 years or more) are Helping Hands personnel. They have ratings from 2.00 to 3.00 and similar patterns of agreement. These findings suggest that increased experience with and exposure to various forms of vulnerability (and one’s age) can lead to heightened empathy and generally more response agreement. Findings based on age group parallel those presented in Tables 1 and 2. Lowest ratings are given to children, African Americans, and poor people. The lowest mean score is given to African Americans in all three groups, although ratings tend to increase with each age group.

Next, the group consisting of 18 to 20 year-olds believe that people with mental illness are very vulnerable (mean = 3.00), followed by people addicted to drugs and alcohol. The group consisting of 21 to 30 year-olds show different results. They rate groups with addictions similarly (mean = 2.83) and their next highest rated group is the children. Interestingly, the oldest population does not differentiate between mental illness and alcohol and drug usage – all reflect means of 3.00 (st. dev. 0.00). I contend that their occupations, exposure to the co-occurring nature of disorders, and personal challenges with addictions inform their understanding of vulnerability and result in more consistent responses. In contrast, the youngest group feels those addicted to drugs are more vulnerable than persons addicted to alcohol, quite possibly due to the illegal nature of the former drugs and use and/or acceptance of the latter drug on college campuses.

**Reasons and Vulnerability**

In addition to ascertaining ratings about vulnerable groups, I am interested in getting respondents’ opinions about why groups they consider most vulnerable are such. Student views vary and reflect rationales informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse. For example, a 20 year-old Asian male provides the following abbreviated list of reasons; “children - easily influenced; alcohol – they’re addicted already, high likelihood to be influenced; mental illness – they’re not in a stable mental state; drugs – same as alcohol.” Despite his brief comments, this respondent’s views suggest that vulnerability is largely a result of one’s

### Table 3. Age-Group Comparison of Mean Scores of Vulnerability Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-20 Years (n=4)</th>
<th>21-30 Years (n=6)</th>
<th>31 + Years (n=4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1.25 (SD =1.50)</td>
<td>2.67 (SD = 0.52)</td>
<td>2.00 (SD = 0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to alcohol</td>
<td>2.25 (SD = 0.96)</td>
<td><strong>2.83 (SD = 0.41)</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.00 (SD = 0.00)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>1.25 (SD =1.50)</td>
<td>1.67 (SD = 0.82)</td>
<td>2.00 (SD = 0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with mental illness</td>
<td><strong>3.00 (SD =0.00)</strong></td>
<td>2.50 (SD = 0.84)</td>
<td><strong>3.00 (SD =0.00)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people</td>
<td>1.75 (SD = 1.26)</td>
<td>2.33 (SD = 0.82)</td>
<td>2.50 (SD = 0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People addicted to drugs</td>
<td>2.5 (SD = 0.58)</td>
<td><strong>2.83 (SD = 0.41)</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.00 (SD =0.00)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD = standard deviation, highest ratings for each group in bold italics
inability to make sound choices and productive decisions. A White female 21 year-old thinks similarly, “Children and people with addictions have poor judgment, kids because they are still learning. People with addictions will do anything for drugs and alcohol.”

Interestingly and contrary to existing literature, although children are considered vulnerable by student respondents, the reasons for this susceptibility is usually attributed to the children themselves, rather than to adults who fail to provide care or take advantage of children (Hays, 2003; West, 1993; Wilson, 1999). Another less often noted perspective provided by a White 20 year-old female student reflects existing research on continued challenges associated with race as well as mental illness; “African Americans still experience a great deal of racism and do not have equal opportunities. Mental illness – I think they are more stigmatized rather than some other addictions although it may be considered a mental illness.”

On average, Helping Hands professionals give more detailed reasons for their vulnerability rankings and explicitly state that there are multiple problems that can be emotional, physical, or social (RachBeisel et al., 1999). Similar to students, the largest overarching theme present in five of the staff rationale for vulnerability is a higher susceptibility to be taken advantage of. However, their representative responses provided below illustrate the complexities when vulnerability is considered. For example, according to a 62 year old clinical director;

Poor people do not have the resources available such as good health care, legal representation, adequate housing, etc., which can lead to many negative experiences. Persons with a mental illness are more susceptible to be taken advantage of as well as not having the capabilities at times to care for issues that arise. Persons addicted to alcohol and/or drugs (because of the very nature of the disease) display behaviors and flawed cognitions that can lead to many negative consequences.

As she explains her rankings, a 57 year-old therapist also describes how vulnerability can influence varied dimensions of one’s life;

Addiction increases multiple life problems, physical, emotional, and social. Mental illness creates problems with coping and in a society that promotes taking something or drinking something to feel better anyone with impaired coping skills has an increased risk factor. Drugs create even greater problems in physical, emotional, and social arenas as most drug addicted individuals eventually have to resort to illegal or dishonest means for maintaining their level of addiction.

The above explanation shows how intersections of vulnerability can make persons even more susceptible to poor decisions, abuse by others, and risky behavior. Her comment also alludes to society’s complicity in addictive behavior based on a culture that seems to condone use of prescription drugs and other methods of self-medication. The last quote informs the beliefs of a 43 year-old case manager who generally considers all six groups vulnerable;

I ranked poor people and African Americans with a “2” because they are subject to prejudice and many would benefit from specialized social services. I ranked “3” for children, people with addictions (alcohol and drugs), and people with certain mental illnesses – they have in common potential inabilities to perceive their own situations and/or protest themselves and/or care for themselves.

Overall, five staff persons associate the inability to care for oneself or harming oneself with vulnerability, which is the nature of addictions and mental illnesses. Moreover, four respondents mention macro-level societal dynamics associated with limited education and lack of opportunities and social services, as well as prejudices. Their theme of increased susceptibility
appears to be part of a larger, more complex understanding of the many factors that can result in vulnerability, particularly for the mentally ill and persons coping with drug addictions.

**How to Improve the Lives of Mentally Ill or Addicts**

Lastly, respondents are asked to specifically provide suggestions about how to improve the lives of people with addictions and/or mental illnesses. As is the case when reasons for vulnerability are cited, student suggestions for improvement are thoughtful, but tend to provide less detail than staff personnel. Furthermore, student responses center on micro-level, individual changes rather than broader societal changes. One male, 20 year old Asian student responds, “I don’t know.” The remaining six respondents all give broad, traditional responses. Four are about treatment such as: “long-term intervention programs”, “therapy”, “support groups”, and “making resources more available”. The remaining two suggestions focus on increasing awareness for the general population and those that need services. Responses are somewhat egocentric because despite no expertise in this field, students’ responses are vague and focused on micro-level remedies that are most apparent to them.

In contrast, Helping Hands staff provide multiple solutions as well as details to explain their thoughts more fully. For example, one 22 year old executive assistant acknowledges the complexity of this population’s situation, and writes;

That’s a hard question. I think every person’s situation is so different and it’s difficult to generalize about things that should be done for addicts or the mentally ill. However, a couple of things that can help some alcoholics get better is – getting inspired to hold themselves accountable, pull themselves back, and not slip back into drinking and having a really good support team of family and/or friends to confide in and cheer them up – continuing to increase public knowledge about the causes of the addiction, the symptoms, and what they can do to recover, and what actions are counterproductive. The other thing that’s hard about generalizing is that a lot of mental illnesses and addictions can be concurrent in an individual so that makes it more complicated.

Her response also requires individual initiative and involvement by a network of other persons. Professionals precisely identify ways to combat the specific challenges suggested in research such as homelessness, fragmented treatment, ostracism, and hostility of patients and to simultaneously better cultural capital (Bassuk et al., 1998; Dickey & Azeni, 1996; Hartwell, 2004). The majority of them, including each of the older professionals, identify macro-level social policy improvements that enhance cultural capital. For example, the following 57 year old therapist suggests;

Step down phase of treatment based on ASAM [American Society of Addiction Medicine] assessment of needs would be the most appropriate. There are other assessment tools that may also be helpful. However a good and thorough ASAM assessment is the most global form I have ever used. Most often basic education, like skills training, and job readiness/placement programs are also going to be integral to healing the lives of the dually diagnosed individual.

It is common to name specific types of treatment and programs that should be used such as long-term, inpatient and outpatient facilities, case management, life skills training, basic education, and help with housing and job search. Holistic care is central as they mention providing support for the individual; the key socializing agent, the family, is recognized; and changing the culture by educating the population and increasing awareness. Three other Helping Hands respondents (two of whom are at least aged 50 years) emphasize improving quality
of life, evident by phrases like “good quality”, “healing the lives”, and “assessment of needs”. Overall, their comments suggest that in order to be successful, comprehensive, holistic services are needed for persons struggling with addictions in addition to increased knowledge and involvement by persons and groups at varying levels of society.

CONCLUSION

Results from this research inform our understanding of the views of a group of students and professionals about vulnerable groups in general and persons with mental health disorders and substance abuse problems in particular. In response to my research question, both groups tend to associate vulnerability with mental health and addictions more than with the other groups identified – and as expected, personnel who work with such persons more than students. Both groups provide similar strategies that suggest that people should be accountable and actively involved in their treatment process. However, Helping Hands staff tend to include the importance of systemic change in health care, economic, and social arenas. Additionally this same group tends to provide more detailed commentary on the subject in general. Yet most students have been exposed to mental health and addictions among their families and friends. This exposure may have minimized ethnocentric responses and suggest that some students may be better prepared than older persons might imagine to learn about such social problems and participate in societal change.

Several general conclusions are important. Findings reveal that both groups consider children, African Americans, and the poor to be relatively less vulnerable, which is contrary to the last body of literature that details the continued challenges the three groups, particularly children, face (Hays, 2003; West, 1993; Wilson, 1999). These populations’ primary features are largely ascriptive in nature (for example, children do not have control over the reality of their age, African Americans cannot alter their race, and persons born into poverty can have difficulty escaping it), yet these traits influence life chances and quality of life. The pattern that emerges in the current study is all the more intriguing because respondents are not precluded from identifying each group as vulnerable if they believe them to be so. Yet relative rankings emerge that help us better understand how awareness and empathy may be increasing for some vulnerable groups, but less so for others. It is also important to note the more consistently high rankings and lower standard deviations for Helping Hands staff (i.e., older respondents), which suggests the possible influence of exposure and experiences that can inform our understanding about the complexities associated with varied types of vulnerability. These findings suggest the need for additional studies based on larger, more diverse samples as well as focus groups and in-depth interviews using more detailed surveys. Although my results cannot be generalized, I contend that they provide important insights for social policy in terms of preventive and intervention programs, increased national education efforts about vulnerability, and heightened advocacy.

REFERENCES


Ashley, O. S., Marsden, M. E. & Brady, T. M. (2003). Effectiveness of Substance


U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Retrieved from (http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10NSDUH/tabs/Sect5peTabs1to56.htm#Tab5.52B)


APPENDIX

I am a student in HOD-2690-03: Vulnerable Populations this semester. Vulnerable populations are broadly defined as people who are more susceptible to negative experiences in society. They have a higher likelihood of having problems in their lives due to various challenges. For my class project, I am performing a survey to see what [University’s name] students think about the subject of addictions and mental illness compared to health care professionals. This is a confidential survey (do not place your name on it). Please answer honestly, and thank you for your help.

1. Age __________________

2. Job (check one):
   ______Student
   ______Case Manager
   ______Therapist
   ______Administrator
   ______Other (________________)

3. Race (check one):
   ______White
   ______Black/African American
   ______Hispanic/Latino
   ______Asian
   ______Other (________________)

4. Gender: ______Female ______Male

5. Do you have any personal experiences with and connections with people with addictions and/or mental illnesses? If yes, please explain.

6. Below is a list of different groups of people. Identify those you think are more of less vulnerable by circling the appropriate number.

   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
   | Not Vulnerable | Somewhat Vulnerable | Very Vulnerable |

   a. Children
   b. People addicted to alcohol
   c. African Americans
   d. People with mental illness
   e. Poor people
   f. People addicted to drugs

For those you identify as “3”, very vulnerable, please explain why you believe they are very vulnerable.

7. What do you think should be done to improve the lives of people with addiction and/or mental illnesses?

---

1 Throughout this paper I refer to the concepts “substance/drug abuse” and “substance/drug use”. They are not used interchangeably, but rather to reflect the terminology used by the cited authors or to illustrate the subjective nature in often determining when “abuse” rather than “use” occurs.

2 A pseudonym is used here.

3 I acknowledge the absence of other racial/ethnic groups such Latinos and African Americans in both groups as well as the lack of White males in general. Despite these limitations, the existing diversity is expected to still provide important results about the research topic.
It will be important to determine whether changes in views about problems for some African Americans is partly due to the election of Barack Obama as U.S. President. Many Whites believe that Obama’s election singles that racism is no longer a problem in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emily Archer is a student in her third year at Vanderbilt University. She is studying Spanish and Human & Organizational Development with an international concentration. Her primary interests include traveling and researching international development and vulnerable populations around the world. In the near future, she is moving to Australia to work for Opportunity International, a microfinance non-profit. After graduation from Vanderbilt, she hopes to pursue a career in non-profit work or to seek a graduate degree in international development.

Sandra L. Barnes is a joint-appointed Professor in the Department of Human and Organizational Development (HOD) and the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. Her research and teaching interests include: the Sociology of Religion; race, class, and gender inequality; religious and spiritual organizations; urban sociology; and, statistics and methods. In addition to her books, *Live Long and Prosper: How Black Megachurches Address HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Age of Prosperity Theology* (Fordham University Press 2012), *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment* (Peter Lang Press 2010), and *The Cost of Being Poor: A Comparative Study of Life in Poor Urban Neighborhoods in Gary, Indiana* (SUNY Press 2005), her research has been published in *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, the *Journal of African American Studies*, and *Sociological Focus*.

Emily Blout is a 2012 graduate of the Dept. of Human and Organizational Development in Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University. Some of her areas of interest include youth empowerment and educating vulnerable populations.

Kortnea Colbert is a Vanderbilt University alumnus and Nashville, TN native. After graduating from Vanderbilt in May of 2012 with a BA in Sociology, she moved to Atlanta, GA where she plans to attend the University of Georgia and work towards her MPA in Public Policy concentrating in Non-Profit organizations. Her interests include human relations, phenomenology, and film.

Cherie Dawson Edwards is an Associate Professor of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. Dr. Edwards has a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University. In addition, she holds bachelor’s degrees in Sociology and Journalism from Western Kentucky University and a MS in Justice Administration from the University of Louisville where her research concentration was racial profiling. She has taught a variety of criminal justice courses, but her research and teaching interests center on the intersection of public policy and criminal justice with a specific focus on the field of corrections. In addition to a career in teaching, Dr. Edwards has held positions in probation and victim services.

Preston Elrod is currently Professor and Division Chair, Undergraduate Studies, School of Justice Studies at Eastern Kentucky University. He has published articles on a variety of criminal and juvenile justice topics and he is the co-author of *Juvenile Justice: A Social, Historical and Legal Perspective, 3rd* edition. He is presently involved in writing projects focusing on social control and the threat to democratic decision making, developing a more humane juvenile justice process, and critical pedagogy.
**Kirsten Floyd** is a 2012 Vanderbilt University graduate. She had a double majored in Elementary Education and Human & Organizational Development with an emphasis in Community Leadership and Development. She is currently a 1st grade teacher at Buena Vista Elementary in Nashville, TN, and hopes to open a nonprofit organization in the future.

**John F. Frana**, received a M.A. in Criminology & Criminal Justice from Indiana State University. Having spent numerous years of incarceration he brings a unique and refreshing perspective to the studies of sociology and criminology. His research interests include desistance from criminal behavior, alternatives to incarceration, and employment opportunities of former prisoners.


**David C. May** is an Associate Professor and Criminology Program Coordinator in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Mississippi State University. He has published a number of articles and books in the areas of responses to school violence, perceptions of the severity of correctional punishments, fear of criminal victimization, and weapon possession and use among adolescents.

**Ryan D. Schroeder** is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Louisville. His research interests include desistance process, with a particular focus on the role of emotional development, family functioning, and religious process.

**Samantha Winer** received her Bachelor of Science from Vanderbilt University in 2012. She was a student in the Peabody College of Education and Human Development where she was a Human and Organizational Development major and Cognitive Studies minor. Samantha will attend the New York University Silver School of Social Work in fall 2013 to receive her master’s degree. She plans to pursue clinical social work with a focus on children, adolescents and families with a sub-area of interest in mental health.