TRANSIENCE AND HOMELESSNESS IN THE RIVER DISTRICT:
EXPLORING THE MAGNET MYTH

A Thesis

by

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Abstract

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Abstract:

This research seeks to explore the complex realities underpinning the ‘magnet myth’ of social services, “the notion that a city’s progressive politics, forgiving nature, and the increasing access to services attracts more homeless to a region” (OMG 2015). Some argue that resources and certain services attract a large number of homeless individuals to metropolitan regions (Tsai et al. 2015). Others suggest that individuals fall into a life of transient homelessness for complex and convoluted reasons (Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). This research contributes to this literature on homelessness, through a qualitative study of transient youth in Northern California, traveling by bus stations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 respondents that self-identified as homeless at a bus depot in Northern California, and who had traveled to the current city within the last 30 days. Open-ended questions explored how individuals made sense of their own transience, their strategies for survival, and the issue of homelessness more broadly. Additional interviews (29) were also collected with community stakeholders,
including local residents, business owners and employees, representatives from the Business Improvement District, and social service providers.

Findings from the qualitative study shed light on the nuanced reasons that may contribute to transient homelessness around Northern California, particularly with respect to adults who are housing-insecure and traveling by bus. The majority of respondents spoke to the themes of needing a “change of scene/fresh start” (56%) from their previous locations, while others reported that their home city “lacked resources” (44%). A third of respondent also discussed that their transience was a result of a “sudden loss/significant life event,” or that they were moving “in search of job opportunities.” With respect to why transient homeless individuals were traveling to the specific city in which the interviews were conducted, 38 percent reported that they had come “for family,” 28 percent had “plans fall apart,” 22 percent thought there might be “more jobs in the area,” and 19 percent perceived the area to have “more resources for the poor.” When asked about their prior perceptions of the city before they had traveled, the majority of respondents knew little of the city (approximately 60%); while others could discuss both positive and negative aspects.

In terms of how community members perceived the homeless in the area, 52 percent believed that this population affects business in one way or another, 41 percent discussed how homelessness has changed over time, 34 percent held either positive or neutral sentiments toward the homeless, 31 percent mentioned negative attitudes toward the homeless, and 28 percent discussed services when prompted about their perceptions of the homeless. When community members were asked about what they believed to be
most difficult for the homeless, about half of the respondents mentioned that not having their own place is most difficult (48%), while fewer participants discussed structural issues that limit the homeless in the area (38%). About a quarter of community members mentioned that psychological barriers limit the opportunities of the transient homeless in the area (28%). When community members were asked about what the homeless needed most, a majority of community members mentioned that housing/shelter would be of the most assistance (76%), about half of the respondents discussed services as being the most important in assisting the homeless (48%), and a little less than a quarter of community members discussed various levels of support that they believed would assist the homeless the most (24%).

Many transient homeless individuals found themselves in the River District area after traveling through the bus depot, with the eco-system of services offered in the area keeping many nearby because of the resources available to the poor. There is consistency between community members in terms of their lack of ownership of the homelessness issue in the River District. Many feel empathetically toward the homeless, but fail to mention how they are personally assisting with this issue. The implications of the findings for policy and service provisions for transient homeless individuals are discussed.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Charles Varano, PhD

_______________________
Date
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The homeless population in the United States is a growing issue that should not persist in a society with so much wealth and prosperity. Flawless counts are nearly impossible to come by and the transient nature of homeless populations presents a major difficulty to researchers. The number of homeless individuals in the United States is staggering. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, in January 2014, nearly 600,000 people are experiencing homelessness on a given night in the United States. Of this number, nearly 220,000 people are in families and 365,000 are individuals (NAEH 2015). The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that 57,849 veterans are homeless on any given night (AHAR 2013). In particular, California has a very large homeless population, with the state accounting for 20 percent of the nation’s homeless population. According to McIntyre (2014), 20 percent of the homeless population in California equates to 113,952 individuals experiencing this vulnerable state. Media attention had increased after the recession of 2008, with Oprah Winfrey, Al Jazeera, and other news outlets around the world bringing notice to the homeless encampments along the American River in Northern California (Seelye 2009). Much of the homeless population in this area resided in tent cities, much like the “Hoovervilles” of the Great Depression. According to a New York Times article posted in 2009, “Many have sprung up elsewhere around the country, but Sacramento, with one of the highest foreclosure rates, has one of the biggest, with a population of ‘easily 300,’
and it is ‘definitely growing. It’s an unfortunate sign of the times,’ said Sacramento city
councilman, Rob Fong” (McKinley 2009). More recently, there have been various
protests that have occurred outside of Sacramento’s City Hall. More than 60 homeless
rights activists descended on City Hall in Sacramento demanding the city to repeal its ban
on urban camping, saying the law violates the human rights of the homeless (Lillis 2016).

Since the recession of 2008, transient homeless adult issues have begun to slowly
dissipate. However, homelessness in the region is still an ongoing issue because
homeless persons anchor the low end of a vast and growing wealth disparity in the United
States. While they share manifestations of disadvantage (such as health deficits and
exposure to crime) with their non-homeless but impoverished counterparts, the homeless
are qualitatively different in many respects. Most obvious is their lack of permanent
residence, which makes their marginality visible to all (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010).

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, one of the
main goals in preventing, reducing, and ending homelessness is to improve community-
based social services (HHS 2007). However, the worry for many social service providers
is that the better quality and increased quantity of social services offered in a particular
city, the more that individuals who are in need will decide come to those cities in search
of services (Tsai et al. 2015). Cities in Northern California are concerned with this issue
and the increasing number of transient homeless individuals coming from outside of the
region.

To combat the issue of homelessness in the region, a grant of $14,439,365 was
obtained from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
in 2013 to support 27 projects in the area’s *Continuum of Care* (SSF 2013). Continuum of Care is a concept involving a system that guides and tracks patients over time through a comprehensive array of health services spanning all levels and intensity of care. The Continuum of Care covers the delivery of healthcare over a period of time, and may refer to care provided from birth to end of life. Healthcare services are provided for all levels and stages of care (HIMSS 2014). The grant awarded to a local non-profit organization that works with the homeless seeks to support a wide range of programs including permanent housing for people with disabilities, transitional programs that assist people in moving to self-sufficiency, and a wide array of counseling and case management services to ensure long-term housing stability (SSF 2013). A local non-profit organization who works with the homeless, our community service provider for the present study, utilizes a Continuum of Care model.

This research is a Community Needs Assessment of the River District in Northern California, with a focus on transient homeless adults residing in the area and the different service needs that they may represent. The research will be conducted in conjunction with a local non-profit organization and their deployment of outreach efforts and resources in and around the bus depot located in the River District, between November-December of 2015. The project is, in part, a Program Evaluation of these and other services provided by the non-profit organization.

The Community Needs Assessment will also be conducted with community members, including local residents, business owners and employees, landowners, representatives from the Business Improvement District (BID), as well as social service
providers. Individuals that reside in and around the River District may have drastically different perceptions of the homeless because of the various statuses they hold in society. Business and property owners throughout the River District have a unique disposition in attracting paying customers to the area, whereas managers and employees are mainly interested in making a paycheck and going home. In an interview with the Business Improvement District (BID) president of New York City, Duneier (1999) quotes BID President Honi Klein’s by stating, “Where I think that there should be a change in the law is that I don’t think that the First Amendment should protect people who are street people. They are not homeless. These people never had homes” (1999:252). Representatives from the Business Improvement District may have the perception that the transient homeless in the River District detract from business by affecting property values and rental rates. On the other hand, local social service providers that work with the homeless may have a completely different perspective about the homeless because their employment field tends to believe that this population needs to be close to services in order for these individuals to climb their way out of this vulnerable state. The perceptions that transient homeless individuals have of their own reality and the perceptions that various community members have of the homeless in the area can be understood on a spectrum. Perceptions of one’s own reality is ingrained in the societal position that an individual holds, which shapes the perceptions that individuals have of themselves and of others. Because perceptions of the homeless are dramatically different depending on one’s social status within society, this research seeks to create a sociological dialogue or a “conversation that never occurs” between the experiences of
the homeless residing in and around the River District and community members in the area.

**Problem Statement**

The majority of homelessness has and continues to be centered in urban areas throughout the country (Tsai et al. 2015). In order to understand why metropolitan areas attract more homeless individuals, a discussion of the migratory nature of homeless individuals and their motivations to do so must first be addressed. Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) assist in understanding the specific methodology used to analyze the migrant and non-migrant homeless. They considered homeless individuals to be migrants (“movers”) if they have been a resident of an area for less than five years, whereas non-migrants (“stayers”) were those who stayed in an area for five years or more. The researchers found that the primary reason that many homeless individuals move is in search of a job or to improve life opportunities in some other way. Some quantitative research has found that migratory patterns of the homeless are not completely explained by the availability of social service resources in some cities. Many homeless individuals decide to travel because it assists with coping with life on the streets, like meeting daily needs for food, shelter, and other life necessities (Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). Others use social networks as coping mechanisms, because the sharing of resources figures prominently into mobility decisions and movement becomes a means to meet social ties that can provide assistance (Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel 1993). On the other hand, a study conducted by Rowe and Wolch (1990) suggests that social ties can have
both positive and negative effects on self-definition and morale... but far more common are the devastating impacts on identity and self-esteem.

Tompkins et al. (2003) conducted another quantitative study and found that alcohol and drug use amongst the homeless population determined how far an individual would travel. The researchers found that alcohol use is associated with an increased likelihood of migration from place of birth at time of accessing care services. On the other hand, a history of drug use is associated with a reduced possibility of migration from the place of birth. One quantitative study by Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel (1993) actually found that mobility patterns amongst the urban homeless are less tied to individual characteristics and more related to availability and location of resources. There is, however, little consistent evidence indicating that transient homeless individuals travel to cities and towns to receive services. Very few broad quantitative studies have found that this is a common generalizable trend.

On the other hand, a few qualitative studies have found that access to resources, including social services, have influenced whether transient homeless individuals travel to certain cities and towns (Peters and Robillard 2009). However, the reasons that transient homeless individuals decide to travel are very multifaceted and it is difficult to pinpoint a single motivation. Some research has attempted to analyze the transitory nature of ex-servicemen and how they are disposed to, and equipped for, a life on the road, and may be “addicted” to traveling and fleeting fixedness to place. In this study, the ex-servicemen whom may romanticize their lives “on the open roads” view it as a choice (Higate 2000). Other studies have found that traveling can be used as a coping
mechanism to deal with the stressors of being homeless (Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992; Rowe and Wolch 1990). Additionally, May (2003) conducted a qualitative study by exploring recently and long-term homeless men who had become homeless elsewhere and moved to the cities of Brighton and Hove, England. In December 2001, Brighton and Hove City Council introduced a set of Local Connection Criteria aimed at stemming the flow of homeless people making their way to the city in search of services. This ordinance is rooted in the fear that the operation will produce some kind of ‘magnet myth,’ which will attract more homeless from out of town. However, these studies provide evidence that motivations to travel are often embedded and secondary to other goals, like looking for work (Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992), coping with the stressors of being homeless (Tompkins et al. 2003), or traveling to flee fixedness to place (Higate 2000). It is difficult to formulate a consensual paradigm that encompasses the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals’ decisions to travel to certain cities and towns. It is also not entirely clear the extent to which transient homeless adults do travel to cities in search of programs and services.

Moreover, there has been no quantitative or qualitative research done locally that has explored why transient homeless individuals come from out of town. There is a perception that the region attracts homeless individuals because of the growing number of programs and organizations that now exist in the city, especially after the national media coverage of area’s tent city of homelessness. The present study hopes to shed light on the various motivations and factors that might contribute to transient homelessness in the region, particularly with respect to adults who are housing-insecure and traveling by bus,
and the complex challenges these individuals experience accessing services and support.

Purpose Statement

The various factors and motivations that transient homeless individuals cite for deciding to travel to Northern California may be drastically different from the perceptions that community members have of why transient homeless decide to move to the area from out of town. Property and business owners have a unique disposition that contributes to their perceptions of why transient homeless individuals come to the region. Because business and property owners, as well as representatives from the Business Improvement District (BID) are attempting to generate capital within the River District, they may perceive that the transient homeless population in the area is detracting from business. For example, Mitchell (2003) investigated the 1989 riots that transpired between citizens of Berkeley, California and the University of California campus. The contention included the transformation and seizure of control over a local public space where many homeless individuals resided, called People’s Park. He states that, “While many merchants attributed the decline to the physical hazards that People’s Park and some of the people who used it posed to middle-class shoppers, officials of the Telegraph Avenue Merchants Association conceded that it was in fact the image of the park (and the avenue) that was threatening business success” (2003:125). Business employees and managers may also have a unique disposition regarding the homeless, since their capital is not being compromised by the transient homeless residing in the area. Additionally, local residents of the River District area may also have distinct attitudes regarding the transient homeless in the area. Mitchell (2003) states that, “Many students simply
avoided the ‘untamed land’ of People’s Park. Others students who lived in apartments or
dorms neighboring the park strongly supported the university’s plans to take control over
it” (2003:125). These sentiments regarding transient homeless individuals in the River
District area can be especially prominent amongst local residents because they are living
in the same area as this population on a daily basis. However, local social service
providers are mainly interested in assisting the homeless and connecting them with
services and supports, which contradicts the purpose of revenue generating business
owners, landowners, and the Business Improvement District. A local non-profit
organization that works with the homeless has the vision, “To end homelessness by
providing people experiencing homelessness with a permanent, safe home, and access to
education, employment and other services as needed. Our innovative, collaborative and
data-driven approach will end homelessness in our region” (SSF 2016). The present
study seeks to bridge the gaps of knowledge between various community members and
their unique dispositions toward the homeless and the realities of the transient homeless
individuals that reside in the area.

Drawing on qualitative data collected from a Community Needs Assessment
conducted with individuals who participated in a homeless outreach program, various
stakeholders in the River District, and members of the community, the study hopes to
contribute to a broader understanding of the social phenomenon of “transient
homelessness” in Northern California. Particularly because transient homelessness is
understudied, and often understood as a rational cost-benefit analysis by individuals to
access more resources (Tsai et al. 2015), the research hopes to document more nuanced
reasons, and the broader social context, in which some individuals choose to travel to the region and the implications that may follow.

Qualitative methods will be utilized to explore the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals’ decisions to travel to the area from out of town. Qualitative methods are understood as, “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell 4:2014). The use of a qualitative approach will provide a unique and detailed understanding of why transient homeless individuals decide to travel to the area more than quantitative methods alone.

Research Questions

This study will explore the following empirical research questions:

1. What are the various motivations that transient homeless individuals report for traveling?

2. What are the perceptions that transient homeless individuals have of Northern California, with respect to available services and supports?

3. What are the perceptions that land and business owners have of the homeless in the region?

4. What are the perceptions that local business managers and employees have of the homeless in the region?
5. What are the perceptions that community stakeholders have of the homeless in the region?

*Significance of the Study*

This study may potentially assist in better understanding the specific issues associated with transient homelessness in the region. The findings will further contribute to ongoing discussions in the literature regarding the increasing levels of marginalization in society, especially among poor and disadvantaged communities. In particular, the study will explore the various survival strategies and techniques employed by the traveling poor in the United States, and the limited opportunities that individuals must burden under a policy context of decreasing social supports and services. In this way, the study will highlight the structural limitations that transient homeless experience in their decisions to travel.

More broadly, the project hopes to shed light on the nuanced motives and factors that might contribute to transient homelessness in the region, particularly with respect to adults who are housing-insecure and traveling by bus, and the complex challenges these individuals experience accessing services and support. The findings of this study will also help local social service providers better understand the unique needs of transient homeless adults. Insights gleaned from the research will help agencies more effectively tailor their outreach services to address the short and long term needs of clientele, particularly those that travel to the area via the local bus depot.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Transience and Homelessness in the United States

Homelessness has been an issue in the United States since the late 19th century. Jacob Riis was one of the first journalists to bring about public awareness of the issue by photographing and writing about the impoverished community of New York City. Public acknowledgement of the issue of homelessness increased during the Great Depression of the 1930s. “Hooverville” became a common term for shacktowns and homeless encampments during the Great Depression, and was a deliberately politicized label, emphasizing that President Herbert Hoover and the Republican Party were to be held responsible for the economic crisis and its miseries (Gregory 2009). On October 31, 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Community Mental Health Act, which deinstitutionalized patients from state psychiatric hospitals, precipitating homelessness in urban areas of major cities. During the Reagan administration, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was authorized to provide federal funds for homeless shelter programs. Although the United States government has brought some attention to the issue of homelessness through federally subsidized homeless shelter programs, little is still known about the transient homeless that move from city to city in search of services. One of the first documented occurrences of individuals deciding to travel for certain social services transpired during the mid- to late 1960s. The San Francisco Diggers, known as a radical community-action group of activists provided food (Sebald 1975), medical care, transportation (Krah 2009), and temporary housing in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park in Haight-Ashbury. Many of
the individuals who decided to travel to Haight-Ashbury during the 1960s were homeless travelers.

**Typologies of Transience and Homelessness**

*Typologies of Homelessness*

In order to fully understand the distinction between homeless and transient individuals, Rossi (1989:247) clearly defines a state of being homeless as, “not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling.” The typology of homelessness is important because these individuals anchor the low end of a vast and growing wealth disparity in the United States, with their lack of permanent residence making their marginality visible to all (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). In a book review on homelessness in America between 1880 and 1930, Sheil (2004) describes a typology of homeless individuals. The label of “hobo” is described as a person who moved or wandered frequently according to the seasons, job opportunities, and community ties. He describes the hobo as a necessity to the community as a worker who took on undesirable or difficult jobs, and at the same time marginalized by the community for tendencies toward gambling, drinking, and other unsavory behaviors. The hobo was differentiated from other types of homeless individuals, such as “tramps,” who worked temporarily, gathering money to be able to aimlessly wander, and “bums,” who did not work and tended to stay in the same place.

Three distinct typologies of homelessness are detailed to give an even broader understanding of the issue of this vulnerable population. Culhane et al. (2007) argues
that some homeless individuals experience *transitional* or temporary patterns of homelessness, where they are in transition between stable housing situations and their brief spells often amount to once-in-a-lifetime events. There are also individuals that experience *episodic* homelessness, which entails cycling in and out of homelessness over short periods of time. The final form of homelessness is considered *chronic* homelessness, and is considered a permanent condition, as opposed to experiencing transitional or episodic homelessness.

*Typologies of Transience*

On the other hand, a state of transience has four related dimensions: migration, duration, intention, and involvement. Migration separates transient from non-transient individuals and is defined as whether an individual has ever moved from his or her community of origin. Duration is defined by how long an individual has been in the current community. Intention addresses distinctions in reported purpose of transience at the beginning of residence. Involvement is related to duration in that the development of supports suggests increased commitment to the community in which the individual currently resides (Pollio 1997). The three most common profiles of transient homelessness found throughout the literature include the young, transient, mentally ill male (Solarz and Bogat 1990), the “transient substance abuser” (Koegel and Burnam 1987; Martino et al. 2011), and the “economic relocator” (Hall and Maza 1990; Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). Although the typologies of homeless and transient individuals is important in understanding the distinctions between each group, these
definitions do not explain why a transient homeless individual may decide to travel to a particular area.

A few studies suggest that transient homeless individuals who are eligible for public entitlements, but who do not receive these benefits tend to be young, transient, mentally ill males (Solarz and Bogat 1990; Schwartz et al. 1983). Some additional research proclaims that the transient substance abuser tends to move from city to city to avoid dealing with an underlying substance abuse problem (Koegel and Burnam 1987; Martino et al. 2011). In another study, Tompkins et al. (2003) found that traveling homeless youth were more likely than non-travelers to exhibit heavy drinking and drug abuse. He discovered that alcohol use is associated with an increased likelihood of migration from their place of birth at time of accessing care services, whereas a history of drug use is associated with a reduced possibility of migration from their place of birth.

Some additional literature proposes that the economic relocator tends to move because of the perception of a potentially better economic situation in a different location (Hall and Maza 1990; Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). These findings mainly associate a state of migration with the use of drugs and alcohol, as well as attempting to find a better economic situation in another location. However, these findings fail to address the reasons for why transient homeless individuals decide to travel from out of town and whether they are seeking certain services and supports. The variety of different factors and motivations that contribute to homelessness and transience is difficult to understand within a single paradigm. Just like homeless and transient individuals, public perception
of transient and homeless issues is multifaceted, and can be influenced by a variety of different factors and motivations as well.

**The Magnet Myth of Social Services**

The worry for many community members, and social service providers in particular, is that the greater quantity and better quality of services offered in a particular city, the more that individuals who are in need will travel to those regions in search of those services (Tsai et al. 2015). Duneier (1999) describes an environment where homeless individuals tend to find themselves in niches throughout cities and towns, where services, mixed land use, access to transportation, a tolerant atmosphere, and other related elements foster the idea of a sustaining habitat. The relegation of the homeless to a limited number of niches is a spatial manifestation of their more general marginality. This marginality, in turn, reflects *life chances*, the ability to benefit from the opportunities while avoiding the pitfalls of a class-based society (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010).

Transient homelessness is often understood as a rational cost-benefit analysis by individuals to access more resources (Tsai et al. 2015). A plethora of anecdotal literature addresses the ‘magnet myth’ of social services, but there has yet to be any empirical data to corroborate these claims. A newspaper in Portland chronicles this issue of the ‘magnet myth.’ Griffin (2015) argues that, “It’s a pretty uniform talking point in a lot of cities: ‘If you build it, they will come. If you provide services, you will have more homeless people.’” Portland is a city that fosters this particular environment, with its compact downtown and ample public transit, it is easy to navigate. More than a dozen
organizations offer homeless men and women free meals, clothing swaps and, if not shelter, at least easy access to sleeping bags and tarps. Ed Blackburn is the executive director of the nonprofit Central City Concern in Portland and he tends to problematize the rationality of transient homeless individuals moving strictly in search of services. He stated, “Any city that has a large in-migration is going to attract all kinds of people—rich people, middle-class people, poor people… I don’t think I have ever met anyone who came here to be homeless. They came to find a job, and that didn’t work out.” The real challenge, advocates say, isn’t that Portland attracts homeless men and women. It’s that Portland, an appealing destination to so many, lacks the services to support those whose luck turns bad or who make poor, sometimes life-altering decisions (Griffin 2015).

A report published in 2015 by Applied Survey Research detailed the homeless population of San Francisco. The report found that 71 percent of respondents reported they were living in San Francisco at the time they most recently became homeless. Of those, nearly half (49%) had lived in San Francisco for 10 years or more. Only 11 percent had lived in San Francisco for less than one year (Connery and Green 2015).

According to an article by Bolster (2011), 75 percent of homeless people are still living in the city in which they became homeless. In other words, these people had not come to the city “as a homeless person.” Bolster argues that recent research tells us that less than one percent of all 2010 recipients of public benefits came to Maine from another state. From 2008 through July 2010, the number of aid recipients who left Maine each month was double the number who moved to Maine. Thomas McLaughlin from the University of New England has been compiling data on the ‘magnet myth’ for six years. Of those
who do come to Portland, Maine from other states, most of them come to Portland to find work. Many travel between Portland and Florida for seasonal jobs. The number of people that are receiving services that move out is almost double or triple compared to those people moving in. Swan of Preble Street states the myth of Maine being a magnet for people in need of services is, “the most pervasive myth that social services have to deal with, not only in Maine but all over the country.” Because there is very little empirical data that documents transient homeless individuals traveling to cities and towns in search of certain services, this research hopes to document more nuanced reasons, and the broader social context, in which some individuals choose to travel to the region and the implications that may follow.

**Perceptions of Transience and Homelessness**

*General Public Perceptions*

The general public has relatively consistent attitudes regarding the issue of homelessness. Large national surveys of the general population indicate that age, gender, and political affiliation are consistent predictors of attitudes about the homeless. However, race, religion, income, and socio-economic status are less reliable predictors of attitudes toward the homeless (Toro et al. 2007). Another study found that levels of sympathy toward the homeless appears to mediate attitudes and opinions about the homeless in such a way that those with increased sympathy toward the homeless blamed them less and saw structural barriers as more likely causes of homelessness compared to unsympathetic people. Also, increased levels of sympathy was best predicted by lower levels of education, a view that homelessness is a serious problem and getting worse, as
As well as a greater likelihood of personally experiencing a bout of homelessness in the past (Agans et al. 2011). This could be the case because many lower educated individuals tend to have a lower socioeconomic status, and therefore are closer and tend to interact with impoverished groups more often compared to somebody with a higher socioeconomic status.

A Gallup Poll published in 2007 found that 51 percent agree that communities are safer when people do not have to live on the streets, 41 percent completely agree that communities should construct more affordable housing to serve all of its citizens, 27 percent completely agree that people who are properly housed use fewer public services and reduce burdens on police and hospitals, 19 percent completely agree that homeless people can get back on their feet and become self-sufficient if only they could receive proper housing, and 15 percent completely agree that communities should enforce laws to prohibit the homeless from public areas such as parks and libraries (Gallup 2007). In one study, degrees of sympathy amongst the general population seem to mediate attitudes toward the homeless. However, in the same study, less than half of the respondents believed that communities should construct more public housing (Agans et al. 2011). Unfortunately, however, these large, quantitative polls do not examine the attitudes and perceptions that business owners, landowners, business employees and managers, as well as community stakeholders have of transient homeless individuals that travel to the respondents’ cities or towns.
In terms of the causes of homelessness, the general public tends to agree that drug and alcohol abuse, as well as mental health issues are the strongest contributing factors to homelessness. Drug and alcohol abuse tops the list amongst the general public as a major factor for why some people might be homeless, with 85 percent believing it is a major factor. Mental illness or related mental disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder are cited by 67 percent of the general public (Gallup 2007). In the same study, only 54 percent say that they would be willing to pay additional taxes to fund programs that help the homeless. There seems to be a stigma attached to homeless individuals, with only half of the respondents believing that their tax dollars should not be allocated to that particular vulnerable population. These results highlight a lack of personal engagement with and ownership of the issue. Homelessness is viewed as a problem for individuals, their families, and governments, but not for the general community (Batterham 2009). Public perception polls on homelessness can contribute to the discussion of how transient homeless are viewed by members of a community that are experiencing an influx of transients to a region. However, unlike qualitative methods, national, quantitative public opinion polls on homelessness do not elicit the more nuanced attitudes that community members have of transient homelessness in their city or town.

Perceptions of Stakeholders

Business and landowners, as well as various community stakeholders may have drastically different attitudes toward transient homeless individuals compared to the general public. If an individual is not contributing to a capitalist economy in some way, business and landowners, as well as the general public at large tend to view transient
homeless individuals as a drain on society’s resources, especially if they are traveling from city to city in search of services and supports. Brennan (2013) reported that businesses throughout the country tend to consider the available pool of college-educated workers when deciding on where to relocate or expand in downtown business districts. Also, there’s only one place that this desired demographic of college-educated professionals between the ages of 25-34 tends to want to live: tight-knit urban neighborhoods that are close to work and have lots of entertainment and shopping options within an easy walk. In the same article by Brennan, the mayor of Louisville, Kentucky unveiled a public-private initiative to restore downtown Louisville’s Whiskey Row. Buildings were rescued from scheduled demolition by an investment group that promised, with the help of government aid, to preserve the façades of the area’s cast iron buildings. The result of such restoration projects and business districts expanding into urban areas is that homeless individuals get pushed out of regions where business is conducted, and farther away from available services. When transient homeless individuals are pushed farther away from available resources, the rational choice for many individuals is to travel to other regions in search of resources.

There are also some additional issues that arise with revitalizing downtown spaces. In Birmingham, Alabama, the perception of crime is in the forefront of many resident’s minds. Brennan (2013) wrote that David Fleming, chief executive of REV Birmingham, a local economic development organization stated that, “Despite the positive, there are still people who have a negative view about downtown, particularly around the perception of crime” (2013:5). Crime is an issue that detracts from businesses
moving to downtown areas. Within a capitalist economy, the most impoverished groups
tend to reside in high-crime areas and eventually get pushed out of regions where
business districts decide to expand. Many business owners and city officials often concur
with the notion that increased services tend to equate with an increased number of
homeless individuals, and they oppose this potential influx (Forte 2002). Honolulu
Mayor Kirk Caldwell signed a law that made it illegal to sit or lie on public pavement
from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., ordering police to increase how frequently they sweep transient
camps and described his city’s approach to homelessness as “compassionate disruption.”
Caldwell stated, “We cannot let homelessness ruin our economy and take over our city.
It’s time to declare war on homelessness” (Griffin 2015). It is evident that community
perceptions of the homeless are closely tied to one’s social status within society. The
mayor of Honolulu has an attitude that homelessness is destroying his city and seeks to
combat this issue like any form of warfare; with sheer destruction.

On the other hand, some business owners hold differing sentiments regarding
homeless and transient individuals. Kemmick (2014) detailed the homeless and
transience issue in Billings, Montana. Rudi, the owner of Clark Marten Photography,
decided to move his business to downtown Billings, next door to the St. Vincent de Paul
charity office, one of the biggest downtown gathering spots for transients, homeless
people, and poor families. Rudi stated, “In an odd way, many of the street people seem
to respect what we’re doing on the avenue, and they’ll sleep in front of St. Vincent de
Paul or the building next door, but not in front of my business” (2014:2). Depending on
where business districts are located and the community attitudes regarding transient and
homeless individuals, perceptions of this issue tend to be multidimensional and far from consensual. Although these articles are detailed in their accounts of community members’ perceptions of transient and homeless individuals, unfortunately, they do not address the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals deciding to travel to certain regions, and whether certain transient homeless individuals are moving in search of available services and supports in the area.

Combine the fear of crime with the national trend of criminalizing homelessness, it is easy to see where perceptions are being bolstered by the passing of more laws in more American cities criminalizing homelessness (Lizard 2014). A report published in 2014 by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty details a startling rise in laws criminalizing homelessness across America, with more and more U.S. cities criminally punishing homeless people for engaging in necessary, life-sustaining activity in public places, even when they have no other options. Mitchell (2014) asserts that Maria Foscarinis, the Executive Director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty stated, “There is a severe shortage of affordable housing and a lack of emergency shelter options in our communities, leaving homeless people with no choice but to perform basic acts of survival in public spaces… Despite a lack of any available alternatives, more cities are choosing to turn the necessary conduct of homeless people into criminal activity. Such laws threaten the human and constitutional rights of homeless people, impose unnecessary costs on cities, and do nothing to solve the problems they purport to address” (2014:1). Because laws are continuing to push transient and homeless individuals out of certain regions, these individuals’ migratory
patterns continue to expand into other regions, with state and local governments being forced to burden the cost of this vulnerable population.

Furthermore, a study published in 2011 by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty surveyed 187 cities and found that over half of the cities have laws restricting or prohibiting sitting or lying down in public, and 43 percent of cities prohibit sleeping in vehicles, an increase of 119 percent since 2011 (Bauman et al. 2011). The Law Center’s research also shows a 60 percent increase in city-wide bans on basic activities, suggesting that the nature of criminalization is changing. Rather than limiting criminalization laws to certain parts of the city, like downtown commercial districts or tourist areas, more cities are banning these activities throughout the entire community, effectively making it illegal to be homeless *anywhere* in the city (Mitchell 2014). Tristia Bauman, Senior Attorney at the Law Center stated that, “Criminalization laws are the least effective and most expensive way for cities to address homelessness in their communities… Instead of wasting limited public resources on strategies that do nothing to address the underlying causes of homelessness, and are often illegal, cities would be much better served by pursuing sensible cost-effective, and humane constructive alternatives to criminalization” (Mitchell 2014). Cities making homelessness illegal further limits an individual’s ability to climb their way out of poverty and get back on their feet. The criminalization of poverty is a structural issue perpetuated by the capitalist mode of production, and exacerbates society’s most marginalized population’s already vulnerable state. Criminalizing homelessness comes closer to explaining why transient homeless individuals may decide to migrate to other cities or towns, but it does not
completely explain why transient homeless decide to travel to Northern California, and whether they are in search of services and supports.

Demographics of Transience and Homelessness

Racial/Ethnic Differences

Coupled with the criminalization of homelessness by city governments, an individual’s racial/ethnic background can have a dramatic impact on one’s life chances and their general marginality within society. Life chances can be dependent on the potential solidarity formulated between similar group members. Baker (1994) found that non-Hispanic White homeless individuals tend to have larger social networks than homeless Latinos and homeless African-Americans. These differences are due to these non-Hispanic White networks including unrelated members, like friends and colleagues, whereas minority networks largely reflect family based ties. Latino and African-American social networks are more alike than they are different, which may limit possibilities of associating with other groups and can potentially contribute to higher rates of homelessness compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Also, both African-Americans and Latinos seem to experience more frequent spells of homelessness for shorter durations than do non-Hispanic Whites… implying that they may avoid homelessness far longer on inadequate incomes. However, once homeless, both minority groups are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to slip into numerous episodes of homelessness.

Another study by Tsai, Mares, and Rosenheck (2011) found that White homeless individuals reported greater community satisfaction in areas where there is a higher level
of education. Additionally, Black homeless individuals also reported living in areas with higher population densities and larger Black populations. Similarly, Carter (2006) found that prior housing situations between blacks and whites were similar before becoming homeless. Both groups lived more in apartments than other residences and most did not live alone prior to their current homelessness stint. Also, black homeless clients living in central city areas were slightly more likely to live with others in all other types of prior residences. Despite the effects that social marginalization and differing living arrangements may have on homeless racial and ethnic minorities, these findings still do not explain why transient homeless individuals may decide to migrate to certain regions, and whether they are moving in search of available services and supports in a particular area.

Racial and ethnic disparities also exist within public shelter utilization for homeless and transient groups. In a study of one-year rates of public shelter utilization in New York City in 1990, Culhane and Metraux (1999) found that black children and their mothers, as well as black men in their 30s and 40s used public shelters more than any other demographic group. Similarly, Baker (1994) found that over half the homeless with children (56%) were African-American women and an additional 22 percent were of Hispanic-origin compared to male totals of 40 percent and 9 percent respectively. The heavy representation of African-Americans amongst homeless women mirrors their heavy concentration in the ranks of the extremely poor. In another study, Castaneda, Klassen, and Smith (2014) surveyed 670 people in El Paso, Texas and found 445 (66%) were Hispanic and 225 (34%) were non-Hispanic. They also found that almost identical
percentages of Hispanic and non-Hispanics (24.0% and 24.7% respectively) reported currently sleeping in a shelter.

In terms of health disparities between different racial and ethnic homeless groups, a study conducted by Horvitz-Lennon et al. (2009) examined 6,829 Black, Latino, and non-Latino White participants in the Access to Community Care and Effective Services and Support Study. They found that Blacks have lower intensity of psychiatric outpatient utilization than Whites, indicating a service disparity. Latinos also had a higher intensity of case management utilization than Whites. In another study, Milburn et al. (2010) assessed a sample of 254 newly homeless adolescents in Los Angeles, California, with measures of perceived discrimination and racial/ethnic identification. They found that those sampled with a greater sense of ethnic identification experienced less emotional distress. Shelter utilization and health disparities amongst racial and ethnic minority homeless individuals can assist in understanding their reality, but does little to address the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals deciding to travel from out of town. These findings also fail to address whether transient and homeless individuals travel to certain regions in search of particular services and supports.

*Gender Dynamics of Homeless and Transient Individuals*

In a similar article pertaining to homeless adolescents and the effects that gender has on their experiences, Chapple, Johnson, and Whitbeck (2004) found that boys were more likely than girls to be arrested, especially if they had been arrested prior to running
away and if they associated with deviant peers. This finding was perplexing because the girls in the sample reported very traumatic home environments that would likely include early contacts with the juvenile justice system. However, these findings are suggestive of the idea that boys are arrested more because they are engaged in more criminal activity. Boys who engaged with more deviant peers were arrested more often, and boys who had been arrested prior to first running away from home reported a greater number of arrests.

Another study by Brunette and Drake (1998) interviewed 108 patients with schizophrenia or schizophrenia affective disorder involved in a study of treatment for homeless persons. They examined substance use, social functioning and support, comorbid disorders, victimization, medical illness, and legal troubles. The researchers found that women had more children and were more socially connected than men. Women also had higher rates of sexual and physical victimization, comorbid anxiety and depression, and medical illness than men. They also found that women who use substances do so at similar levels of severity as dually diagnosed men.

Additionally, Hagen (1987) explored the homeless individual or family unit requesting services during December 1984, and included the total available population of 227 cases. Findings suggest that women and their children were at high risk for becoming part of the situationally homeless due to eviction and domestic violence. On the other hand, men were more likely to experience homelessness as a result of unemployment, alcohol abuse, and jail release. Another study in Stockholm, Sweden sampled 1,364 men and 340 women, and was compared with a control group consisting
of 3,750 men and 1,250 women from the general population between the years of 1996-2002. Homeless women ran a higher risk for mental disorders than women in the general population. Risk of mental disorders amongst homeless women was also higher than that of homeless men (Beijer and Andreasson 2010). Gendered differences between homeless individuals may contribute to the literature on migratory patterns of homeless populations, but these findings do little to assist in answering the question of why transient homeless individuals decide to migrate to certain regions, and whether they are traveling in search of available services and supports.

**Homeless and Transient Youth**

Homeless and transient youth are a migratory population that tends to travel for a variety of different reasons. In a study of newly homeless adolescents in Los Angeles, Milburn et al. (2010) found that young people with a history of racial/ethnic discrimination experienced more emotional distress. Homeless individuals tend to experience emotional distress at a very high rate, and many decide to use travel as a form of coping. However, reasons for traveling tend to be multifaceted for many homeless youth. In another study, Martino et al. (2011) found that traveling homeless youth were almost twice as likely as non-travelers to exhibit recent heavy drinking, 37 percent more likely to exhibit recent marijuana use, and five times more likely to have injected drugs. Traveling homeless youth also had more recent sex partners, were more likely to report having casual or need-based sexual partners, and combining sex with substance use. This study suggests that traveling homeless youth’s deviant peer associations and
disconnection to conventional individuals and institutions may drive their elevated substance use.

A study by Sanders et al. (2008) examined multiple drug use and polydrug use amongst traveling homeless youth. The researchers argued a “normalization thesis”, which suggests that the use of certain drugs have increasingly become a normal part of certain populations, something ordinary and not necessarily “deviant”. This assertion suggests that a drug’s normalization within a population is based on its availability, its acceptability, high rates of use, and supportive cultural references. In another study by Chapple, Johnson, and Whitbeck (2004), the researchers utilized The Midwest Homeless and Runaway Adolescent Project (MHRAP) of 602 homeless and runaway adolescents in four Midwestern states. Outreach workers affiliated with agencies that serve homeless and runaway youth interviewed adolescents on the streets, in shelters, and in drop-in centers during the 18 months between early 1995 and August of 1996. The researchers found that association with deviant peers, prior arrest, sexual abuse, and poor parental monitoring was associated with the number of arrests homeless and runaway youths reported. However, the effects of prior arrest and deviant peers were stronger for boys, suggesting a gendered process of arrest for homeless and runaway youth.

In another study of transient youth, McLoughlin (2013) explored the couch surfing experiences of ten young men and four young women in South Australia. The research included face-to-face interviews with individuals between the ages of 15-25 who had experienced couch surfing for a period lasting at least two months. The research
findings suggest that young people who leave home during their school years and do not have access to parental support face significant barriers in negotiating labor and housing markets. A similar study compared ‘runaways,’ ‘throwaways,’ and youth removed from home by authorities. In a review of research on homelessness and adolescents, Toro (1999) argued that those removed from home had the worst family background, whereas the runaways had the best. Because few other variables differentiated the groups, it appears that the trauma of homelessness may largely over-ride the effects the different routes may have had on outcomes. Transient and homeless youth travel for a multitude of different reasons. These findings may assist in explaining why this population tends to leave their previous residence, but does not answer why they decide to travel to certain cities or towns, and whether they are moving in search of available services and supports.

**Transience and Homelessness by Region**

*International Homelessness and Transience*

Transient and homeless populations throughout the world have different motivations that contribute to their migratory nature. In a study conducted by McLoughlin (2013) in South Australia, early home leavers tend to seek out alternative avenues of help with their living situations (i.e. couch surfing) because of a poorly responsive welfare state. Concerns about safety and security, fear of the stigma of being labeled homeless, and a reluctance to leave familiar local settings are significant factors driving couch surfers’ avoidance of formal accommodation services, social workers, and homeless shelters. Another study of First Nations homeless population of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, found two major patterns: Homeless people who fit the first pattern
tended to move in a short-term, circulatory fashion between friends’ and family members’ homes in an effort to maintain social ties without overstaying their welcome, or to try to improve their personal or financial circumstances. The second type of mobility pattern was characterized by First Nations individuals who tended to dwell primarily in the city or on the reserve, but who often split their time in long visits to either of the locations to maintain social connections and resources. The reserves are a place where many homeless First Nations people find refuge and assistance from their extended families, and sometimes from their band in the form of group social assistance (Peters and Robillard 2009). These findings contribute to the literature on adolescent travelers and First Nations homeless population, but do not completely address why transient homeless individuals decide to leave their previous residence and travel to certain cities or towns, or whether they are deciding to travel for services and supports in another region.

In a study of homeless men and women in Stockholm, Sweden, Beijer and Andreasson (2010) found that younger homeless women had the highest risk of mental disorders. Alcohol use disorders were equally common among homeless men and women, but women had more drug use disorders. In this sample, women also had higher risk of schizophrenia and personality disorders. They concluded that the elevated risk for mental disorders amongst the homeless was mainly related to substance use disorders. The researchers also argued that over half of the homeless women and nearly half of the homeless men had a psychiatric diagnosis, whereas this was the case for only 3-4 percent of the control groups. The study provides evidence that homeless women had higher
risks for psychiatric disorders than homeless men, especially younger homeless women. Furthermore, the difference between homeless women and women in the general population was larger than the difference between homeless men and men in the general population. Another study investigated community and housing satisfaction in England. Dorling, Shaw, and Brimblecombe (2000) argue that a better housing policy would increase the quality and quantity of social housing. Better housing policies would also lead to greater opportunities for the homeless and others in housing need, less concentration of the worst-off in social housing, and a better quality of housing for all those who do live there. International rates of mental illness and substance abuse amongst the homeless in Sweden, as well as differing housing policies for the homeless in England can potentially contribute to the literature on why people decide to migrate from their previous city of residence. However, these findings only partially assist in understanding why transient homeless decide to migrate to Northern California, and whether they are migrating primarily to access local services and supports.

Specific methodological decisions must be made when exploring the topic of transient homelessness. The traveling homeless tend to reside in environments where modes of transportation from region to region are easily accessible. Harrell (2008) investigates the homeless population in Heathrow airport in London, England. The article examines how many of London’s homeless men and women pose as travelers stranded by travel delays by wearing travel-related accessories and clothing. Harrell found that like many legitimate travelers, Heathrow’s homeless are in search of escape—from debt, from legal troubles, from family responsibilities. They often have mental
health or substance abuse problems, and they often refuse help. During the day, some homeless individuals travel into London to beg, busk, or take drugs, while others remain in the airport, scrounging food from sympathetic restaurant workers. In addition, Cloke, Johnsen, and May (2007) suggest that rural homelessness is under-researched because of the common assumption that homeless people are centered mainly in urban areas. The researchers conducted three case studies in rural England, and found that the assumption that homeless individuals move to large cities to gain access to services is largely inaccurate. However, the study does address the fact that some homeless individuals move throughout rural areas based on the seasons and the services available at various locations. Some decided to move based on the destinations determined by hitchhiking or other means of travel, while others moved to escape prominent drug scenes in urban areas. The methodological decision to collect data in urban areas moves closer to the research question of why transient homeless individuals travel to the River District in Northern California and why the bus depot is the primary sampling location for the proposed study.

Another study conducted in Australia examined public perceptions and attitudes about the homeless. Just like public perception and attitudes regarding homelessness in the United States, Australia experiences similar sentiments amongst the general population. The Australian National University administered a national mail-out survey with 3,000 participants. Respondents believed that the most common cause of homelessness was mental illness and substance/alcohol abuse (89%). Also, only 20 percent of respondents believed that all members of the community were responsible for
people being homeless. Framing homelessness as a human rights issue involves fostering a sense of responsibility and involvement within the general community (Batterham 2009). An additional study by Gray et al. (2011) examined 120 homeless males in two Canadian cities and analyzed the participants’ mobility and its impact on their health behaviors, access to social services, and housing situations. The researchers found that homeless men decided to move for the following reasons: relationships with family/friends/significant others (28%), employment and employment services (14%), housing (13%), desire to travel (12%), drug/alcohol treatment programs (7%), and food/clothing services (6%). When respondents were asked about their motivation to leave a particular area, they cited lack of housing services, employment, travel, and family as the most important factors. International public opinion polls and large quantitative studies can potentially contribute to the literature on why transient homeless individuals decide to migrate to certain regions. Unfortunately, these quantitative studies do not address the nuanced reasons and detailed accounts of why transient homeless individuals decide to travel to Northern California, like qualitative studies would. These quantitative studies also do not address whether transient homeless individuals travel in search of available services and supports in particular regions.

*Homelessness and Transience in the United States*

Moving back to homelessness within the United States, public concern about homelessness arose in the 1980s as the prevalence of homelessness increased and became more visible in metropolitan cities around the country (Breakey 1997). Downtown redevelopment, gentrification, the closure of SRO hotels, and shelter relocation have
produced an uneven distribution of homeless people in metropolitan areas (Lee and Farrell 2004). The majority of homelessness in the United States has and continues to be centered in urban areas (Tsai et al. 2015).

However, Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield (2003) attempt to analyze the homeless population in rural areas. They examined four prominent forms of migration by the homeless and found that there are “local” homeless people moving out of rural areas, “local” homeless people moving within rural areas, homeless “incomers” moving to rural areas, and itinerant/transient homeless people moving through rural areas. A related study explored the experiences of homeless families in rural and non-urban communities. Rife (1992) interviewed 247 homeless families, including 480 children in 21 rural Ohio counties and found that over two-thirds were headed by young single females. The most frequently cited reasons for homelessness were family conflict or dissolution and economic factors.

Conversely, Tsai et al. (2015) examined the difference between metropolitan and micropolitan areas of Nebraska. The research analyzed housing satisfaction, with those living in micropolitan areas reporting higher rates of being white, unmarried, living in transitional settings, and were far more transient, but reported greater social support and housing satisfaction compared to metropolitan homeless. Housing satisfaction coupled with economic factors tend to contribute to an individual’s transient nature. When individuals are not able to find certain resources in a city or town, they tend to move to other regions, with many moving to areas in which they have never visited before. This puts these individuals in a state of unknown, which increases their vulnerability and
makes it more difficult to get out of a cycle of transient homelessness. However, these findings only address the reasons for why transient homeless individuals decide to migrate from their previous residence, but do not fully explain why certain groups decide to travel to Northern California from out of town, or whether they travel in search of available services and supports in the region.

**Migratory Nature of Homeless and Transient Individuals**

Reasons for becoming transient or homeless tend to be multi-dimensional and difficult to explain within a single framework. Individuals decide to travel for a variety of different reasons, but when speaking about the migratory and non-migratory homeless, specific methodology discussed in the literature must be examined in order to understand the distinction between the two groups. Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) discuss how homeless individuals are considered migrants (“movers”) if they have been a resident of an area for less than five years, whereas non-migrants (“stayers”) were those who stayed in an area for five years or more. The research also found that many homeless individuals move in search of a job or to improve life opportunities in some other way. Additionally, Lindquist, Lagory, & Ritchey (1999) assessed 63 migrant and 98 non-migrant individuals in Alabama and measured their demographic features, psychological assets, social resources, life stressors, life circumstances, and psychological health. The researchers found that the two groups had comparable demographic characteristics, stressors, and levels of psychological resources, with social connections being a key protective factor against depression for people in both groups. However, one key difference between the groups was that personal resources (such as a
sense of resourcefulness) were closely tied to the mental health outcomes of migrant homeless more than for non-migrant individuals. They concluded that overall, moving did not decrease the distress of being homeless for the migrant individuals, just as the non-migrant individuals were not better off for having stayed in place.

Despite the insecurity that migration can potentially create, Kozoll, Osborne, and Garcia (2003) argue that migrating, or becoming “homeless,” is a choice that some families make to maintain their family structure. For people in this situation, homed and homeless is not a dichotomy. Rather, the operative word is family. The structure of the family is analyzed as a lifeworld (Habermas [1984] 1987), or system of values and experiences that defines choices and ways of acting. Importantly, migrant workers travel as families and often as extended families, where the unit of the family is assumed. Individuals doubled up in conventional housing with relatives or friends are often treated as a ‘hidden’ homeless population (Etner Wright et al. 1998). Similarly, a study of adolescent couch surfers examines how the reliance on informal living arrangements is one way in which young people are contending with the risks of leaving home early “for themselves” instead of a formalized welfare system (McLoughlin 2013).

Moreover, a few studies on homeless individuals and their migratory nature have analyzed the distance in which chronically homeless adults travel (Tsai, Mares, and Rosenheck 2011). One study found that the median distance that participants traveled from their previous residence to their current residence was 4.6 miles, with 12 percent of respondents traveling more than 100 miles. Although the homeless population is often perceived as being significantly mobile and transient, Parker and Dykema (2013) found
that homeless individuals were considerably less mobile and transient than the general population. The sample consisted of 674 homeless individuals who were temporarily housed in a winter homeless shelter in a medium sized city in South Carolina. The researchers found that about 46 percent of the homeless population surveyed was born in-state, whereas only 41 percent of the general population was born in state. Similarly, 78 percent of the homeless individuals surveyed reported an in-state zip code for their most recent permanent residence.

Another study examined the traveling homeless and their excessive alcohol and drug use. The traveling homeless tend to use drugs and alcohol to deal with the problems associated with being impoverished. Tompkins et al. (2003) found that alcohol use is associated with an increased likelihood of migration from place of birth at time of accessing care services. On the other hand, a history of drug use is associated with a reduced possibility of migration from the place of birth. This suggests that drug users may have more of an interdependent social structure as a result of their need to acquire drugs. This form of social structure may indirectly provide some degree of social cohesion and coping ability for many homeless individuals. These findings are informative when addressing the various motivations that contribute to transient homeless’ decisions to migrate. However, these studies do not address the multitude of factors that may attract certain transient homeless individuals to the River District in Northern California, and whether these individuals are migrating in search of available services and supports in the region.
Migratory individuals all have different reasons for why they decide to travel. Some individuals, like migratory laborers, use this transit experience as one of the key shared sites of common identification for a migrant population whose mode of inhabitation is through circulation and mobility. A sense of community and solidarity is formulated when individuals do not have the physical structure (i.e., a house) that would keep a family together (Crang and Zhang 2012).

_Coping Strategies Amongst the Traveling Homeless_

In order to maintain psychological well-being while being homeless, coping mechanisms used by the traveling homeless are extremely important in maximizing their life chances. A study by Lindquist, Lagory, and Ritchey (1999) found that migrant and non-migrant homeless persons share similar demographic characteristics, stressors, and levels of psychological resources. They argued that mastery was the most salient resource for the mental health of migrants. Another study by Rowe and Wolch (1990) analyzed social ties and support systems as coping mechanisms for homeless women in Skid Row, Los Angeles. The study found that homeless women develop both peer and “homed” social networks as a means of coping with their circumstances. Many studies have detailed how personal relationships and peer support can act as a significant coping mechanism in dealing with being homeless. Personal networks can assist in satisfying essential needs for the survival of homeless individuals. Self-reports from local surveys indicate that a surprising number of homeless people stay in touch, albeit sporadically, with domiciled family members and friends (Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt 2005).
Additionally, Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) found that migration may actually improve coping status and better a person’s quality of life by changing environments and allowing her or him to take advantage of different opportunities in different locations, or escape undesirable situations and improve social ties. The migratory nature of transient homeless individuals can be used as a coping mechanism for the stressors associated with being homeless. However, Tompkins et al. (2003) found that coping status may also be affected by migration, in that moving around may be accompanied with problems, which, in turn, affect the homeless individual’s ability to cope, such as the weakening of social ties and supports. Even though migratory patterns may assist transient homeless individuals in coping with their vulnerable state, the findings fail to address the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals traveling to Northern California, and whether this population moves in search of available services and supports in the area.

*Psychological Well-Being Amongst the Homeless*

For many suffering from homelessness, the use of shelters means that they become increasingly isolated and feel forced to conform to the view of themselves imposed by fellow homeless individuals, the caretakers, and society at large. It is detailed that homelessness is more than simply lacking a roof over one’s head, but also a process of institutionalization into the environment of the emergency shelter (Rollinson 1998). As a consequence of becoming attached to the homeless shelter life, Grunberg and Eagle (1990) propose a shelterization thesis, where shelter residence encourages passivity and dependence, weakening clients’ drive to escape homelessness as shelter-
dwellin peers become their reference group. In many instances, a homeless person’s significant others are impoverished themselves, and less able to lend material compared to emotional support (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). The shelterization thesis aids in explaining why individuals may travel from certain cities or towns. Unfortunately, this framework does not completely explore the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals deciding to migrate to the River District of Northern California, or whether this population is traveling in search of services and supports.

Being homeless can present a plethora of difficulties, and many homeless individuals have different ways of dealing with those stressors. In many instances, past traumatic experiences have translated to adults becoming homeless. A study conducted by Benda (1991) analyzed drifters and hypothesized that the best predictor of present afflictions would be similar past difficulties. Also, mobility was expected to be a secondary predictor of present problems. However, data revealed that the prevalence and incidence of problems were high for the geographically mobile as well as for those who remain in one locality. An additional study published by the VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans surveyed 113,400 veterans who used VA homeless services to examine their migration across the VA’s service networks. The study revealed that about 15 percent of the veterans migrated during their period of homelessness, and that migration tended to occur in the earlier episodes of chronic/long-term homelessness, rather than for veterans who experienced short-term homelessness. Furthermore, there was not a trend of migration from rural to urban areas, and in fact,
there was actually a small tendency for homeless individuals in the Los Angeles area to move away from urban centers. The role of climate had a modest impact on migration, with increased veteran movement slightly increasing with temperature gains. Overall, the study revealed that homeless veteran migration is more the exception than the norm (Metraux 2015). In another study, Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel (1993) found that mobility patterns amongst the urban homeless are less tied to individual characteristics and more related to availability of certain services and location of resources. These findings address the mobility patterns of transient homeless individuals and the various factors that contribute to their migration. Conversely, Higate (2000) details ex-servicemen and how they are disposed to, and equipped for, a life on the road, and may be “addicted” to traveling and fleeting fixedness to place. In this study, the ex-servicemen romanticize their lives “on the open roads” and view it as a choice. Also, Wakin (2005) argued that individuals use trailers and recreational vehicles they travel with as a form of privacy and safety, but may not control the land on which they are parked. However, these studies do not address why transient homeless individuals decide to migrate to Northern California’s River District area.

Moving closer to the research question at hand, Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) propose that not all plans to move are voluntary, as homeless persons may be forced to leave their city of residence, by, for example, so-called 'Greyhound therapy', in which a homeless individual is given a bus ticket to a distant city. An article by Hubert, Reese, and Sanders (2013) found that since July 2008, Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas has transported more than 1,500 patients to other cities via Greyhound bus,
sending at least one person to every state in the continental United States. Additionally, May (2003) addresses how a majority of homeless individuals tend to move to cities after they have become homeless in another place. He found that the majority of traveling homeless individuals have recently come to urban areas because of the wider opportunities for accommodation and work they believed the city had to offer. Bachrach (1987) furthers this notion by suggesting that perhaps there is more than one answer to this question, and that mobility patterns may depend on geographic access, availability of services, and community attitudes.

Moreover, Vorsino (2010) corroborates the previous finding that details how shelters are experiencing single homeless individuals coming from out of town. The findings suggest that a considerable proportion of homeless individuals tend to migrate in search of better employment opportunities. There have been a few peer-reviewed articles throughout the country, and some in other parts of the world that have attempted to address the question of why homeless individuals tend to migrate to certain cities and towns, and whether they travel in search of available services and supports (Rahimian, Wolch, Koegel 1992; Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel 1993). There has even been an unpublished article in Olympia, Washington that has addressed the very question that is being proposed in the present study (Godby, Mukai, and Martin 2012). However, there has yet to be a study that has explored why there are a significant proportion of transient homeless individuals that come to the River District of Northern California. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature.
Chapter 3: METHODS

Overview:

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to investigate the community needs of individuals residing in the River District of a medium-sized city in Northern California, with a focus on transient homeless adults residing in the area and the different service needs that they may represent. The study is an attempt to understand the different motivations and factors that contribute to transient homeless individuals’ decisions to travel to the River District, and to explore the various services they may be seeking/not seeking. The study will also be conducted with community stakeholders, including property owners and business owners, business managers and employees, representatives from the Business Improvement District (BID), and local social service providers. The research will explore the attitudes and perceptions that members of the community have regarding the homeless population in the area. In attempting to understand why transient homeless individuals travel to the region, along with the community perceptions of this population, the study seeks to address the following research questions: What are the various motivations that transient homeless individuals report for traveling? What are the perceptions that transient homeless individuals have of Northern California, with respect to available services and supports? What are the perceptions that property and business owners have of the homeless in the region? What are the perceptions that local business managers and employees have of the homeless in the region? What are the perceptions that community stakeholders have of the homeless in the region?
Qualitative methods allow for a detailed account of the experiences of transient homeless individuals more than quantitative methods alone. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) argue that, “Qualitative research is grounded in an essentially constructivist philosophical position, in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time” (2016:169). Qualitative methods will be utilized to explore the various factors and motivations that contribute to transient homeless individuals deciding to travel from out of town. Qualitative methods are understood as, “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell 4:2014). The use of a qualitative approach will provide a unique and detailed account of transient homeless individuals’ realities and decisions to travel.

Because transient homelessness is relatively understudied, and often understood as a rational cost-benefit analysis by individuals to access more resources (Tsai et al. 2015), the research hopes to document more nuanced reasons, and the broader social context, in which some individuals choose to travel to the River District and the implications that may follow. A grounded theoretical approach seeks to shed light on these various motives and factors that might contribute to transient homelessness in Northern California, particularly with respect to adults who are housing-insecure and
traveling by bus, and the complex challenges these individuals experience accessing services and supports. Creswell (2014) argues that, “Grounded theory is a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants. This process involves multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information” (2014:14). Drawing on qualitative data collected from a community needs assessment conducted with individuals who participated in a homeless outreach program, as well as various stakeholders and members of the community, the present study hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of the social phenomenon of “transient homelessness” in Northern California.

Sample and Procedures:

The present study will use a non-probability, theoretical sampling methodology. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) point out that, “in qualitative research, the logic of selection is grounded in the value of information-rich cases and emergent, in-depth understanding not available through random sampling” (2016:148). To fully understand transient homelessness in Northern California, the study will utilize a theory-based sampling methodology by accompanying the Navigators as they initiate contact with homeless adults in the River District area. Theoretical sampling means that the researcher, “examines individuals who can contribute to the evolving theory” (2016:148). To ensure that the theory-based sampling is sound and only includes transients,
individuals that have traveled to the city within the past 30 days will be the only participants that will meet the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Many service providers are concerned with the ‘magnet myth’ of social services, which argues that, “a city’s progressive politics, forgiving nature, and the increasing access to services attracts more homeless to a region” (OMG 2015). The majority of social services offered to the homeless are located in the River District area of Northern California, therefore participants were purposefully selected from this surrounding area. Individuals are included as a respondent if they are willing to participate in the study, have traveled to the area within the past 30 days, and are located in the River District area. A time frame of 30 days was agreed upon to ensure that individuals had traveled to the region recently, and can be defined as transient.

The research sample includes 32 homeless individuals that traveled to the River District within the past 30 days. Community members include 22 business employees and managers, five property owners and business owners, one representative from the Business Improvement District (BID, and two social service providers. Although homeless participants all traveled to the region within the past 30 days, there were some differences among them on the following parameters: length of stay in Sacramento, race, age, gender, and methods of traveling to the city. Also, the differences between community stakeholders, local business managers and employees, as well as property and business owners included the following parameters: age, race, gender, and length of time either living or working in the River District area.
The following charts provide a distribution of respondents with respect to gender, age, race/ethnicity, length of stay in Sacramento, and methods of travel for respondents interviewed.

There were almost twice as many male to female respondents. Five out of the twelve female participants were interviewed with another male.
The average age of respondents was 38 years old. Six respondents were between the ages of 18-24, nine fell within the range of 25-34 years of age, four were between the ages of 35-44, ten were between the ages of 45-54, and three were between the ages of 55-64, with no respondents over the age of 65.

The sample included 17 White/Caucasian, ten Black/African-American, three Hispanic/Latino(a), and two Asian/Pacific Islander respondents.
Seven of the respondents were in Sacramento for a few days or less, three were here for about a week, five had been here between 1-2 weeks, five had been here for 2-3 weeks, and 12 had been in Sacramento for about a month.

The most common form of travel for participants was the Greyhound bus (21 out of 32 respondents). Eight respondents report either hitchhiking to Sacramento (5) or had
received a ride from a friend or family member (3). The remaining respondents traveled by train/Amtrak, plane, or using their own vehicle.

The following charts provide a distribution of community members with respect to race/ethnicity, gender, age, and length of time either living or working in the River District.

The sample included 40 percent White/Caucasian, 27 percent Hispanic/Latino(a), 13 percent Black/African-American and Other race respectively, as well as seven percent Asian/Pacific Islander respondents.
Like the transient homeless respondents, there were twice as many male to female respondents.

The average age of respondents was 38 years old. 60 percent of respondents were either between the ages of 20-30 or 31-40, while 23 percent fell within the range of 41-50 years of age, and 17 percent were 51 years of age or older.
50 percent of community members had been in the River District for two years or less, while 30 percent had been there between 3-10 years. 20 percent of respondents had been in the River District for more than 10 years.

*(Research Design)*

An ongoing review of the literature was conducted to inform the present study. Two topics were identified: differences between transience and homelessness by region, as well as the migratory nature of transient homeless individuals. The purpose of the review was to understand where transient and homeless individuals reside and whether there are distinctions between these two groups depending on region, as well as the reasons for why transient homeless individuals decide to travel.

Following the review of the literature, the researcher developed and defended a proposal for the present study. This included the background and context, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and proposed methodological approach. Following the proposal defense, the researcher acquired approval from the IRB to
proceed with the research. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that, “The IRB approval process involves outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants’ confidentiality and informed consent” (2016:171). When conducting semi-structured interviews with participants, individuals were given an informed consent document to read and sign that explained that their identity would remain anonymous and that their responses would be confidential. They were also reminded that they do not have to answer any question they did not want to and could end the interview at any time.

The research was conducted in conjunction with a local non-profit organization that works with the homeless and their deployment of outreach efforts and resources to the River District between November-December of 2015. The local non-profit is a central service/advocacy hub in the area that connects individuals experiencing homelessness with the appropriate local service provider(s). During the last year, the organization has been deploying street outreach workers—aka their Street Navigators—throughout the region to engage homeless individuals who may be interested in accessing/enrolling in services. Because Navigators are trained in crisis intervention, they are able to assist individuals with their immediate and long-term needs.

Within the context of these encounters, Navigators asked individuals that they came in contact with if they had recently traveled to the area within the past 30 days. If the individual indicated that they had, they would be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher about their reasons for travel. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) assert that, “Semi-structured interviews are used to facilitate more focused
exploration of a specific topic, using an interview guide” (2016:155). The semi-structured interviews were documented using a recording device. The researcher and Navigators stressed that the interview is confidential, short, and not connected to their individualized assessment of needs, which they may also complete with the Navigator.

In addition, the researcher used a recording device while conducting semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders, property and business owners, as well as business managers and employees. Although participants signed informed consent documents that detailed the confidentiality and anonymity of the data, they were still reminded that their interview is confidential and anonymous. These interviews seek to gauge the community perceptions and attitudes regarding the homeless in the River District, concerns of particular issues, and possible ideas of solutions.

**Analysis:**

Data analysis began by assigning numeric codes to categories of each question asked. After reading through each additional question, new codes were added to the conceptual framework of why individuals decide to come to Northern California and why they decided to leave the last city they were in. After the initial coding of categories, the number of descriptors increased to capture more themes as they emerged. As the themes had been finalized for each question, narratives were then written for each category to cross-check the data and serve as a secondary analysis. Narratives were then cross-checked with an additional researcher to ensure reliability in coding.

The data analysis process forces the researcher to fragment the data by separating interviews by category and then combining these categories to synthesize the overall
explanation of the participant’s reality. Bloomberg and Volpe articulate it best by stating, “The coding process fragments the interview into separate categories, forcing one to look at each detail, whereas synthesis involves piecing these fragments together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation” (2016:175). Because the literature on transient homelessness is understudied and extremely diverse in its findings, a grounded theoretical approach seeks to explain the lifeworld (Habermas [1984] 1987) of this vulnerable population.
Chapter 4: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSIENT HOMELESS

The purpose of the study is to investigate the subjective perceptions of community members regarding transient homeless individuals that travel from out of town, and what community members think this population needs most. Because there is little empirical data analyzing local community perceptions of homelessness, a grounded theoretical approach was implemented to explore the community perceptions of transient homelessness in Northern California, what they believe is most difficult for the homeless, and what services this vulnerable population is most in need of. The community members in the particular study include business employees and business managers, business owners and landowners, as well as various stakeholders, including high-ranking officials of the Business Improvement District (BID) and local non-profit organizations that assist the homeless in the area.

Feelings about the Homeless

To understand the perceptions that community members have of the transient homeless in the area, participants were asked how they feel about this population. Half of respondents mentioned that the homeless tend to affect business (50%). A little less than half of the community members discussed how homelessness in the area has changed over time (40%). Fewer participants held positive sentiments toward the homeless (37%), while even fewer had neutral attitudes toward the homeless in the area (33%). About a third of respondents either mentioned services or negative attitudes (30%) when prompted about their perceptions of the homeless.
Many community members believe that the homeless hurt the businesses in the area because of the perception from paying customers. Some business employees and managers, as well as business owners discuss how the homeless will cause disruptions by “loitering,” “stealing,” or “damaging property,” while community stakeholders mention that the amount of homeless in the area “affect property values.” Some business employees speak about how the homeless will be on the business property when they get to work in the morning. Patrick, a white male in his mid-forties, works for an auto-repair shop in the area. “The homeless will often sleep next door to the property,” Patrick said, “sometimes walk through the parking lot, and occasionally walk into our business.” Jeff, another Latino male employee in his mid-twenties works for a landscaping supply store in the area. Jeff spoke about how the homeless tend to sleep in front of the business before he gets to work in the morning and he has to tell them to leave. He said, “A lot of the homeless sleep on the grass or sleep in the bushes. Some of them try to come into the business and start yelling, and I have to tell them to leave.” Both Patrick and Jeff had shared similar stories as to what their experiences were with the homeless. Even though the homeless were on the property of the businesses, it did not seem like they had many issues dealing with this population once they told them that they had to leave. Business owners and business managers may have different perceptions of the homeless compared to business employees because they are concerned with protecting the private interests of the business they either manage or own.

1 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Moreover, a business employee who works for a local motel in the area discussed how the visiting guests perceive the homeless. The employee is an Asian female in her mid-forties named Myra. “Guests want to walk around the complex and down the street, but they think that it is not safe because of the homeless in the area.” Myra also mentioned that she feels like the homeless are harmless and they don’t bother anybody, but the guests have the perception that the area is dangerous because of the number of homeless, which hurts business. A local motel business manager held similar sentiments to what Myra had toward the homeless. Patricia is a white female in her mid-forties. Because of Patricia’s status as a worker in a hotel, she believes that the guests who visit perceive the homeless as different, and therefore they tend to hurt business. Patricia proclaimed, “A lot of greeting cards and reviews of the hotel say that it hurts the business when the homeless are around. But we cannot do anything about it because we do not have any control of our back parking lot.”

Furthermore, a few business managers talk about how the homeless affect business by “loitering” on the property. A manager of a local gas station in the area mentioned that the homeless would hang around the gas station. Her name is Monica and she is a Latina female in her late-twenties. She discussed how, “The homeless will hang around the gas station, but I am used to them because they are my regulars.” Other business employees in the area speak about how the homeless will try to panhandle to customers. This business employee works for a local transportation company. He is a

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3 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Middle-Eastern male in his late-forties. His name is Alex⁶ and he stated that, “A lot of the homeless will try to come into the [business] and try to panhandle to customers, but the security usually keeps them out.” Alex also mentioned that he used to work at another transportation company nearby and they used to have more issues with the homeless panhandling because the business was open to the public. For the business employees and managers in the area, many were more concerned with how business is affected by the perception of the homeless, and less concerned about how the homeless affect the sale of commodities. It is also evident that these community members were attentive to how the homeless are perceived by paying customers.

Alternatively, some local business and landowners spoke about the homeless “stealing” and “damaging the property” of the businesses. Because business and landowners are the controllers over the means of production (Henslin 2002), their unique disposition as land and business owners formulates their perceptions of the homeless and how they affect their own businesses. A few business owners mentioned that the homeless would come into the business and try to steal items. His name is Steve⁷ and he is an Indian male in his mid-forties. He is the owner of a motel in the area and he said that, “The homeless try to steal stuff from the business sometimes.” Another owner of a separate motel in the area indicated that the homeless detract from business and cause damages to the property. This motel owner’s name is Victor⁸ and he is an Indian male in his mid-forties as well. He proclaimed that the homeless, “Will unplug the ice machine

⁶ All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
on the property and try to charge their phones. They will also try to wash their clothes in the washer/dryer on the property that is reserved for guests. I feel like I am the bad guy and discriminated against because of my heritage, but I just want them off of my property.” Because business and landowners, as well as business employees and managers have a unique disposition to attract paying customers to their respective businesses, their perceptions of the homeless tend to be negative. This speaks to the notion that businesses are purely interested in producing capital and view the homeless as detracting from this venture. These empirical findings add to the anecdotal literature regarding businesses and how they seek to protect profit by pushing out homeless individuals in a particular region (Forte 2002).

Furthermore, various stakeholders within the community believe that the homeless are “affecting property values” in the area. We will call this community member Barbara, and she is a white middle-aged female. She is a high-ranking official for the Business Improvement District (BID) in the area. Barbara mentioned that, “Property values and rental rates suffer because of the amount of homeless around.” Business employees, managers, landowners, business owners, and various community stakeholders all mention how the homeless affect business in one way or another. This bolsters the already anecdotal evidence in the literature regarding perceptions of the homeless. All community members interviewed believe that the homeless negatively affect businesses and property values (Brennan 2013).
Homelessness Over Time (40%)

Another sizeable number of community members discussed how the homeless population has either increased or decreased over time. A couple of business employees and owners speak about how the homeless population is “very large.” Some business employees and managers talk about how homelessness has “gotten better over time,” while local residents discuss how homelessness in the area has “gotten worse over time.” Some business employees mention that the area has a very large homeless population. One employee named Peter ⁹ is in his early-forties and is an African-American male. He works for a local restaurant and he said that, “The homeless population is really bad.” A local motel owner in the area shared similar sentiments to what the employees had. Both business employees and business owners mention how bad the homeless population is in the region. A local resident named James ¹⁰ mentioned that he had been living in the River District for nearly 40 years and had recently seen an increase in homelessness to the area. These perceptions may be shared by community members because there is an abundance of services offered to the homeless in the River District, but also that the business owners and employees notice how this population affects business.

Moreover, some business employees discuss how the homeless population used to be worse than it is currently. A motel business employee named Jose ¹¹ is a Latino male in his mid-twenties. He proceeded to state, “The homeless population in the area isn’t as bad as it was about a year ago, because the owners of the motel put up a fence around the

⁹ All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
complex and it keeps them out.” A few business managers share similar sentiments to what Jose spoke about by mentioning how the homeless population has gotten better over time. A white female in her late-twenties is the manager of a local apartment complex. “When I first started here, the homeless problem was pretty bad, but now the issues are starting to die down,” said Jessica. “A white van has been picking up the homeless in the area and helping them out. I think it has been helping the problem.” Both business employees and business managers have discussed how the homeless population has diminished over time, despite the amount of services offered in the area. The worry for many service providers and the local Business Improvement District (BID) is that if there are more services offered in the region, the more homeless will be attracted to that particular area because they know that they can access services. These narratives actually contradict the ‘magnet myth’ of social services; that a service rich area is actually seeing less homeless than in the past (Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel 1993). This finding could potentially be explained by services actually working and assisting with the issue of homelessness, and therefore the region is not acting as a magnet for homeless individuals.

As mentioned previously, a local landowner named James discussed how the homeless population has “gotten worse” over the years. James is a white male in his mid-forties and he said that, “A lot of homeless people are finding their way to the [area]. I think that more people are being attracted to [the region] in general, and I don’t think it’s because of the services being offered.” This finding also contradicts the notion that homeless individuals seek certain areas because they are rich in resources. James

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12 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
believes that homeless individuals decide to move to urban areas because they are densely populated and not necessarily because they have more resources than other areas (Tsai et al. 2015).

Positive Perceptions (37%)

A few community members mentioned positive perceptions of the homeless. Some business employees and community stakeholders discuss how the homeless are “stigmatized,” “harmless,” and are “not violent people.” A couple of business employees, managers, and owners speak about how the homeless issue is “sad,” while only one business owner discussed how the homeless are “good/nice people.” Some business employees in the area discuss how the homeless are stigmatized and prejudged based on their appearance. One business employee named Anthony\textsuperscript{13} is an African-American taxi cab driver in his early-fifties. He said that, “It is difficult for the homeless to stay clean. I think that people see them as dirty. This gives them a stigma because people don’t want to interact with them because they look different from other people.” Another community stakeholder furthers the narrative told by Anthony. His name is Jeff\textsuperscript{14} and he is a white male in his early-forties. He is a high-ranking official of a local non-profit organization that works with the homeless and he proceeded to state that, “The homeless are just people like you and me. They just happen to be un-housed and are perceived differently than we are in the general population. They have goals and ambitions that they want to attain.” The stigmatization of homeless individuals leads to cities and towns throughout the country implementing laws that prohibit individuals from

\textsuperscript{13} All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
being homeless. The literature regarding the stigmatization of homeless individuals found that over half of the cities surveyed had laws restricting or prohibiting sitting or lying down in public (Bauman et al. 2011). Community perceptions of the homeless are closely tied to these groups’ employment, as well as how closely they work with this vulnerable population. Because Anthony’s social status as a taxi-cab driver and Jeff’s unique position as a high-ranking official of a non-profit that works with the homeless, their attitudes pertaining to the homeless formulate a more empathetic mindset that is different from many that perceive the homeless negatively.

As mentioned earlier, Myra works at a local motel and she stated that, “The homeless are harmless, even though the guests think they are scary.” She is accustomed to working around the homeless and views them empathetically, whereas the general public tends to stigmatize many homeless individuals because they are different from the general population. A study by Agans et al. (2011) found that lower levels of education could best predict increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless. Myra’s status as an Asian female in her mid-forties working as an employee at a local motel may correlate with the literature pertaining to increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless being mediated by lower levels of education. Because Myra has a lower socioeconomic status compared to other members of the community groups (i.e., business owners, land owners, managers, etc.), her education level can potentially correspond with her social status. It can be inferred that her lower level of education enables her to sympathize with impoverished groups who may also have lower levels of education.
Another positive perception of the homeless held by business employees indicates that the homeless are “not violent people.” A few business employees mentioned that the homeless are not violent, like the common paradigm surrounding homelessness might be framed. Danielle\textsuperscript{15} is a Latina female in her mid-twenties. She is a barista in the region and she said, “The homeless in the area are not violent, but sometimes there are fires [down the way] that are accidentally caused by the homeless.” Danielle understands that many homeless individuals are not violent people, but that they may get a negative stereotype because of their oppressed status in society.

Alternatively, some business employees, business managers, and business owners believe that the homeless issue in the area is “sad.” For example, an employee of local restaurant named Christina\textsuperscript{16} is a Latina female in her early-twenties. She proceeded to state that, “It’s sad how many homeless are in the area.” One business owner in the region named Marcus\textsuperscript{17} shared similar sentiments. He is a Latino male in his early-forties. He is the owner of a local fast food restaurant and he also seemed to think that the homeless issue in the area, “Is very sad.” These narratives by business owners regarding the positive perceptions of the homeless in the area concur with the anecdotal literature in the field (Kemmick 2014). An additional business manager feels bad that there is such a large homeless population. Patricia\textsuperscript{18} is the manager of a local hotel and she said, “I feel bad that there is such a large homeless population in the area. I feel bad because it’s somebody’s daughter or son or father or mother that is experiencing this.

\textsuperscript{15} All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
There are people that care for these people and they are out on the streets.” These narratives contribute to the literature regarding how the general public perceives homeless individuals, and how it is more of a governmental issue or an issue for their family, and the burden is not necessarily placed on the general community (Batterham 2007). Even though these community members hold very different societal positions in terms of employment, there is still consistency between all groups in their lack of ownership of the homelessness issue. They tend to feel empathetically toward the homeless, but fail to mention how they are addressing the problem themselves. However, this is not just the fault of community members within the current study, this is a societal issue that needs to be addressed at the federal level. There is a need for additional funding to address homelessness and to end this issue completely.

Furthermore, a few business owners in the area indicate how the homeless are actually “good/nice people.” As mentioned earlier, Steve is the owner of a local motel and he stated that, “Some of the homeless are good people.” Marcus, another business owner substantiates this narrative by stating that, “A lot of homeless in the area are nice people. They just don’t know how to function in mainstream society.” This empirical finding seeks to bolster the already anecdotal evidence in the literature regarding positive perceptions of the homeless (Kemmick 2014). Some business owners have negative perceptions of the homeless depending on the context in which they are speaking, while other business owners tend to only have positive perceptions of the homeless. There are inconsistencies in how certain community members perceive the homeless, but what remains consistent across all narratives is the lack of ownership of this issue. Many
community members accept the homeless as part of the River District community, almost as a part of the scenery, but few actually discuss how they would assist the homeless. There needs to be a shift in paradigm surrounding the homeless, and not just by local and state levels, but at a broader societal level. Without federal acknowledgement of the homeless issue, there will continue to be “magnet” cities and states throughout the country where many homeless will decide to migrate to in order to access services and supports. A change in societal framework surrounding the homeless can potentially put an end to this issue.

Neutral Perceptions (33%)

Some community members mentioned various neutral perceptions of the homeless in the area. A few business employees and owners indicated that the homeless issue in the region is “calm,” “that security keeps the homeless away,” and that they “do not have an issue with the homeless” in the area. A few business managers discussed how they have mixed feelings regarding the homeless. One business employee named Joseph is a white male in his late-twenties. Joseph is an employee for a local hotel and he said that, “For the most part, it’s pretty calm around here.” Joseph’s feelings toward the homeless could be spurred by how much security is around the hotel where he works. Another business employee discussed how security keeps the homeless off of their property. Alex, who was mentioned earlier, works for a local transportation company and he said that, “I don’t see a lot of homeless around here because security keeps them out of the [business].”

19 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Victor, the owner of a local motel who was discussed previously said that, “The motel across the street put up a fence to keep the homeless out of the complex. I’m also about to put up a fence to keep them out.” Many business employees and owners believe that increased security keeps the homeless off of their property and allows for business to run smoothly. This correlates with the literature regarding businesses attempting to push homeless individuals out of certain regions for the sake of protecting corporate interests (Brennan 2013). Both business owners and employees have neutral perceptions of the homeless, but hold these attitudes because security keeps this population from disturbing their respective businesses. These community member groups would view the homeless as a nuisance if the security did not keep them off of the property. These community member groups seek to protect their economic interests as either an employee who is trying to keep their job or as a controller over the means of production.

Furthermore, some business employees in the area mentioned that they “do not have an issue with the homeless” because they just tell them to leave whenever they are affecting business. As mentioned previously, Patrick works for an auto-repair shop. He said that, “The homeless cause issues in the area but I understand that they have no place to go. I do not feel like the homeless are much of a nuisance.” A few business owners in the region share similar sentiments toward the homeless by not having very many issues with the homeless either. One business owner named Lupita20 is a Latina female in her mid-forties. She is the owner of a restaurant in the region and she said that, “The homeless are fine in the area. I do not ever have any problems with them.”

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20 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
statement contributes to the broader anecdotal literature pertaining to business owners and employees acknowledging that there is a homelessness issue in the area, but that the homeless do not affect their business in any way (Kemmick 2014). There is a need for increased accountability of the issue of the homelessness. All community members in the River District area acknowledge the homeless issue, but few actually discuss how they are taking action to assist the homeless themselves. These community members mention that the homeless are part of their community, but, however, they do not treat them as one of their own community members. All members of society need to offer help to assist the homeless in climbing their way out of this vulnerable state. A societal shift in paradigm pertaining to the homeless is necessary in order for homelessness to be eradicated.

Moreover, a couple of business managers discussed how they have “mixed-feelings” regarding the homeless in the area. One manager named Robert21 is a white, middle-aged male who works for a local grocery store. He proceeded to say that, “I have mixed-feelings about the homeless around here. I have both positive and negative views about the homeless.” As discussed earlier, Monica is a manager of a local gas station and she mentioned how the homeless are her regulars and that she never has an issue with them being around the gas station where she works. Business employees and managers, as well as some business owners in the region do not really have any issues with the homeless, which contradicts the anecdotal literature regarding businesses believing that the homeless detract from the production of capital. However, some anecdotal literature points to business owners accepting the homeless, and tend to view this population as a

21 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
part of the community (Kemmick 2014). Many community members have accepted the homeless in the River District because services and supports are nearby. Unfortunately, many do not take ownership of the issue and only give superficial answers about how homelessness affects them. Very few community members seek to assist the homeless by acknowledging their acceptance as one of their own and assisting them like they would any other member of their community. Members of society need to address the social problem of homelessness like they would any other issue that affects their community. Because many community members (i.e., business owners, managers, and employees) go home and do not have to interact with the homeless outside of typical business days and times, their lack of ownership resonates throughout their narratives about the homeless in the River District.

**Services (30%)**

A few community members discuss the services offered in the area. A couple of business employees and managers mention that the region is a “central location for the homeless,” while a few business employees and community stakeholders speak about how the homeless “need more services.” Both business employees and managers discuss how “services are helping” with the homeless issue. The area being explored for the present study acts as a central location for the homeless because the majority of homeless services in the region are concentrated in this particular area. Some business employees mention that the homeless congregate in the region because there are a lot of services nearby. For example, Natasha\(^{22}\) is an employee of a mail currier service and has been

\(^{22}\) All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
working with the company for 36 years. Natasha is an African-American female in her early-fifties and she said that, “The homeless population was much worse before the [local transportation service] was put in. I think that the word has gotten out that [local service providers] are in the area and that it can assist the homeless.”

Some business managers also mentioned that the area had a lot of services to offer the homeless, which made it so that the homeless decide to congregate locally. As mentioned previously, Patricia is the manager of a local hotel and she said that, “There are a lot of services in the area. It makes sense that there would be a lot of homeless around here.” This narrative contributes to the literature regarding homeless individuals being attracted to certain regions where there are more resources offered to the poor (Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel 1993).

In terms of what services community members think the homeless need most, a few business employees and community stakeholders mention that the homeless need more mental health services. Abraham is a white male in his mid-forties who works for a restaurant supply store. He said that, “The homeless need help with mental health issues.” Jeff, who was mentioned earlier, furthers Abraham’s point by stating, “There is a portion of the homeless population that are mentally ill and many do not get the help they need.” These narratives corroborate with the literature pertaining to the typologies of the transient homeless, mentally ill individual (Solarz and Bogat 1990; Schwartz et al. 1983).

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23 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Other employees in the region believe that the homeless need assistance with drug addiction. As discussed previously, Danielle is a barista in the area and she stated that, “I think that there are a lot of homeless who live [in the area] and use a lot of drugs.” This statement contributes to the literature regarding the typologies of the transient homeless. The literature states that the transient substance abuser tends to move from city to city to avoid dealing with an underlying substance abuse problem (Koegel and Burnam 1987; Martino et al. 2011).

A few business employees and community stakeholders in the region believe that there needs to be “more services” offered to the homeless. Anthony works as a taxi cab driver and he proclaimed, “There needs to be more services in the area. It is a problem that the homeless are forced to take their stuff around with them wherever they go because it will get stolen or confiscated. This makes it so that the homeless are forced to stay in certain places longer than others.” Jeff also agrees that there needs to be more services offered to the homeless in the area. These narratives are contradictory to the literature and to the worry for many social service providers. Many service providers agree that the more services that are offered in a particular region, the more that individuals will come to seek out those services (Godby, Mukai, and Martin 2012).

Additionally, some business managers indicate that there are services in the area, but many don’t seek them out because of mental health issues. As discussed previously, Patricia is the manager of a motel in the region and she said that, “There are a lot of services offered in the area, but a lot of homeless individuals don’t take advantage of these services because they have mental health issues.” This statement corroborates with
the literature pertaining to the typology of the young, transient, mentally ill male (Solarz and Bogat 1990; Schwartz et al. 1983). This narrative also lends assistance in explaining public opinion polls regarding the homeless in both the United States and Australia. An Australian poll indicated that 89 percent of respondents believed that homelessness is caused by mental illness and substance/alcohol abuse (Batterham 2007). Again, it is evident that many community members acknowledge the issues that many homeless individuals face, and some even address the typologies mentioned throughout the literature. However, there is still a lack of acceptance of this vulnerable population into their own communities, and only an acknowledgement of their vulnerability. Many do not feel the need to support the homeless in the form of giving time or money, and instead view their situation objectively, as opposed to subjectively.

Moreover, a few business managers in the area discuss how certain “services are helping” with the homeless issue. As mentioned previously, Jessica is the manager of an apartment complex in the region and she believes that services have been assisting the homeless. Likewise, a business employee named Danielle shared similar sentiments to Jessica’s. Danielle said that, “Homeless people hanging around [service providers] are actually the people that want the help, and those that are just hanging out on the streets and asking for money are not those people.”

Negative Perceptions (30%)

Some community members mention various negative perceptions of the homeless. A few business owners believe that some homeless are “violent or bad people,” while a couple of business employees indicate that the homeless are “scary” or that they “feel
unsafe” around the homeless. A couple of business managers and owners discuss how some homeless just made some “bad choices,” while other community stakeholders mention how the homeless negatively “affect property values.” Some business owners in the area believe that the homeless are violent people. For example, Victor is the owner of a motel in the region and he said that, “The homeless tried to hit me with a stick when I told them to get off of the property. I have it all on video.” Another business owner, who happens to be the owner of a separate motel in the area as well, believes that the homeless are “bad people.” These negative perceptions of the homeless held by business owners, particularly property owners of motels in the area, corroborate the literature regarding various businesses trying to protect their investments by attempting to get rid of the homeless in a particular region (Brennan 2013).

Additionally, some business employees, who happen to be motel employees, mention that the homeless in the area are “scary.” Of these individuals that mentioned this, they did not actually perceive the homeless as scary, but the guests who stayed at their respective motels perceived the homeless as such. For example, Ryan24 is an employee at a local motel. Ryan is an Asian male in his early-forties and he said that, “The guests write reviews about how scary it is because of all the homeless.” Another employee of a separate motel in the area mentioned that guests tend to be scared of the homeless also.

24 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Moreover, a few business employees in the area indicate that they “feel unsafe” around the homeless. For example, Jesse\footnote{All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.} is a Latino male in his mid-twenties. He is an employee for a local transportation company and he stated that, “The homeless sometimes make me feel unsafe.” These findings further the discourse in the literature regarding safety with the homeless. A Gallup (2007) poll found that 51 percent of respondents agree that communities are safer when people do not live on the streets.

Alternatively, a few business managers in the area believe that some homeless individuals made “bad choices,” which contributed to their stint of homelessness. Monica is the manager of a local gas station and she said that, “Some of the homeless individuals made their own choices, which led to their homelessness.” Another business owner discussed how some homeless individuals made poor choices that contributed to their homelessness as well. These narratives contribute to the broader literature pertaining to the general public believing that homelessness is mainly caused by drug or alcohol abuse, which many in the general public perceive as a choice (Gallup 2007).

However, only one community stakeholder in the region indicated that the homeless tend to negatively “affect property values.” This statement contributes to the anecdotal literature pertaining to how various stakeholders perceive the homeless in business districts, and how the homeless tend to be pushed out of certain regions that are expanding due to business ventures (Brennan 2013).
Most Difficult for the Transient Homeless

When community members were asked about what they believed to be most difficult for the homeless, half of the respondents mentioned that not having their own place is most difficult (50%), while fewer participants discussed structural issues that limit the homeless in the area (37%). About a third of community members mentioned that psychological barriers limit the opportunities of the transient homeless in the area (33%), whereas a few others discussed weather as being the most difficult for the homeless (13%). Interestingly, some community members were rather confused by the question of what they perceive to be most difficult for the homeless, and instead insisted on answering what they believe to be most difficult for themselves when dealing with the homeless in the area. Some community members mentioned negative sentiments geared toward the homeless in the area (13%).

Finding Housing/Shelter (50%)

When discussing what community members believed to be most difficult for the homeless, about half of the respondents mentioned that not having their own place is most difficult. A couple of business employees, local landowners, and community stakeholders discuss how difficult it is for the homeless to find “housing/shelter.” Community members also mentioned “not having a place to be/to go,” “not having a car,” “not having a place to get washed/cleaned,” and “not having a place to receive mail” as being most difficult for the homeless. A multitude of business employees in the region spoke about the difficulty of “finding housing” for the transient homeless. One employee in particular discussed the lack of housing in the area. Peter is a restaurant
employee in the area and he proclaimed that, “There just aren’t many residential
neighborhoods and shelters for the homeless in the area.” A local landowner of the area
named James discussed how a lack of shelter would be most difficult for the homeless as
well.

Additionally, a couple of community stakeholders in the area mentioned that a
“lack of housing” would be most difficult for the homeless. Barbara26 is a high-ranking
official of the Business Improvement District (BID) in the area and she said, “Not having
housing for the homeless around here is probably the most difficult thing for them to deal
with.” Jeff, a high-ranking official of a local non-profit organization concurs with
Barbara’s sentiments pertaining to the importance of getting the homeless housed as well.
These findings further the argument that there needs to be more affordable housing for all
citizens. A Gallup (2007) poll found that 51 percent agree that communities are safer
when people do not live on the streets, while 41 percent completely agree that
communities should construct more affordable housing to serve all of its citizens.

Furthermore, a couple of business employees in the area mention the difficulty
that is experienced by the homeless when they “don’t have a place to be/to go.” One
employee who works for an auto-repair shop in the area argued, “There are a lot of
homeless that roam around the area because they don’t have any place to be. Since there
[are service providers], and the prison drop off site is close by, there are a lot of homeless
just roaming around.” This finding corroborates with Duneier’s (1999) exploration of
homeless individuals in New York City. He describes an environment where homeless

26 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
individuals tend to find themselves in niches throughout cities and towns, where services, mixed land use, access to transportation, a tolerant atmosphere, and other related elements foster the idea of a sustaining habitat.

Another business employee in the area discussed how difficult it is for the homeless because they “don’t have a warm place to be.” Marissa\textsuperscript{27} is a security guard in the region and she spoke to me about her stint of being homeless. She is an African-American female in her early-thirties. She indicated that, “Most of the homeless just need some place warm to stay.” This empathetic side of community members contributes to the literature pertaining to the general public’s perceptions of the homeless. The study found that increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless were best predicted by a greater likelihood of personally experiencing a bout of homelessness in the past (Agans et al. 2011).

Additionally, a business owner proceeded to discuss how the homeless find it difficult when they do not have any place to keep their belongings and do not have a warm place to stay. She suggested that “having a car” would enable the homeless to keep their belongings safe and for them to stay warm in cold weather. Lupita\textsuperscript{28} is the owner of a restaurant in the area and she said, “It’s probably really difficult for the homeless in the area because they don’t have a place to put their stuff. They have to keep everything in shopping carts. If they had cars, they would have a warm place to sleep and keep their stuff.” The quotation by Lupita is a noble proposition, but nearly half the cities

\textsuperscript{27} All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
throughout the country have actually made it illegal to sleep in your own car, an increase of 119 percent since 2011 (Bauman et al 2011).

A taxi cab driver spoke with me about the homeless in the region and what he thought was most difficult for them. His name is Anthony and he seemed to think that the homeless need a place to get washed and cleaned in order to be perceived as “presentable” to others. The stigma that is attached to many homeless individuals in the area deters many people from helping with the homelessness issue. A Gallup (2007) poll found that only 70 percent of the general population would be willing to volunteer their time to work directly with people who are homeless, and an even smaller proportion of the sample (54%) say that they would be willing to pay additional taxes to fund programs that help the homeless. There seems to be a stigma attached to homeless individuals, with only half of the respondents believing that their tax dollars should not be allocated to that particular vulnerable population. These results highlight a lack of personal engagement with and ownership of the issue. Homelessness is viewed as a problem for individuals, their families, and governments, but not for the general community (Batterham 2007).

Another business employee in particular worked for a local mail currier service in the area and her experiences with the homeless are completely dependent on her status as somebody that works in this field. Her name is Natasha and she proceeded to say that, “I think it is difficult for the homeless who have mail but are not able to get it because the shelters will not let them use their address. I see them coming over to the office all the time and waiting for mail to arrive.”
Some community members in the region discussed structural issues that limit the homeless. Business employees tended to mention that “not having food” was most difficult for the homeless, whereas business owners and employees both agree that “not having money” is most difficult. A couple of business employees discuss how a “lack of opportunity” limits the possibilities for the homeless, while business owners mention how difficult it is for the homeless to “function in society.” Business employees, managers, and community stakeholders all agree that there needs to be “more tax dollars” being dedicated to homeless services. A plethora of business employees in the area indicate that “not having food” is most difficult for the transient homeless. An employee of a local motel spoke about how difficult it is for the homeless when they do not have food. Myra is an employee of a local motel and she agreed that finding food is most difficult for the homeless in the area.

Additionally, a business owner mentioned that “not having money” would be the most difficult obstacle that the homeless must maneuver. Steve is the landowner of a motel in the region and he proceeded to say that, “I think that having no money is really difficult for the homeless.” A business employee in the region furthered those sentiments by discussing how it difficult it is for the homeless because they don’t have any money as well. Marissa is a security guard and she stated that, “Just not having any source of income must be really difficult for the homeless. I know that when I was homeless, it was really difficult when we did not have any money to spend on anything.” This empathetic side of community members corroborates with the findings from the literature.
pertaining to the general public’s perceptions of the homeless. The study found that increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless were best predicted by a greater likelihood of personally experiencing a bout of homelessness in the past (Agans et al. 2011).

Moreover, a few business employees in the area believe that there is a “lack of opportunity” that holds the homeless back. Peter is a restaurant employee and he said that, “The homeless around here don’t have a lot of opportunity and I think that it is really difficult to succeed without it.” This finding contributes to the literature pertaining to the general public’s perception of the homeless. Agans et al. (2011) found that those with increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless blamed them less and saw structural barriers as more likely causes of homelessness compared to unsympathetic people. However, this narrative also contradicts the literature pertaining to the migratory nature of migrant workers. Kozoll, Osborne, and Garcia (2003) argued that migrating, or becoming “homeless,” is a choice that some families make to maintain their family structure. Because there is a lack of work and opportunity in the area, it would make little sense for the homeless to be traveling from outside of the region to try to find work nearby.

Furthermore, a business owner proceeded to mention that the homeless in the area find it difficult to succeed because they don’t know how to “function in society.” Marcus is the owner of a fast food restaurant and he stated that, “It’s really difficult for the homeless because they don’t know how to function in mainstream society… it’s really difficult for them to hold jobs and stuff.” However, no other community members
discussed in their narratives of the homeless how difficult it would be for this population to function in society after experiencing homelessness.

Some business employees in the area mention how difficult it is for the homeless because there are “not enough tax dollars” being dedicated to services for this population. For example, Marissa is a security guard in the area and had experienced a bout with homelessness in the past. She proclaimed that, “There just is not enough money being given to services to get the homeless off of the streets.” This finding contributes to the literature regarding public perceptions of the homeless and where the public believes their tax dollars should be allocated. Batterham (2009) found that only 54 percent of participants would be willing to pay additional taxes to fund programs that would help the homeless, which contradicts Marissa’s understanding of the homelessness issue. This personal narrative also contributes to the literature pertaining to increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless being best predicted by personally experiencing a bout of homelessness in the past (Agans et al. 2011). A few business managers and a community stakeholder concur that there needs to be more tax dollars allocated to dealing with the homelessness issue in the area. Robert is the manager of a local grocery store and he said that, “There is just a lack of government services to offer the homeless everywhere.”

Psychological Barriers (33%)

Indeed, some respondents mentioned that psychological barriers limit the opportunities of the transient homeless in the region. A few business managers and one business owner spoke about the difficulty for the homeless who are “addicted to drugs.” A plethora of business employees, as well as a business owner and a business manager
discussed how “mental illness” makes it difficult for the homeless in the area to get back on their feet. A number of business employees, as well as a business manager in the region mentioned that it is most difficult to get the homeless that need help to actually “want to accept the help offered to them.”

A couple of business managers in the area discuss how difficult it is for the homeless because many are “addicted to drugs.” Monica is the manager of a local gas station and she proclaimed that, “We actually lost one of our regulars to a drug overdose at the beginning of the year. I think it is really difficult for the homeless around here to get off of that stuff.” Another business owner in the area furthers this personal narrative put forth by Monica. Marcus is the owner of a fast food restaurant and he proceeded to say that, “I think it is very difficult for the homeless because many of them are addicted to drugs and it is very hard to fit into mainstream society when you are doing that stuff.” This finding contributes to the broader literature regarding the general public’s perception of the homeless and how the majority believes that drug/alcohol abuse (89%) is the leading cause of homelessness (Batterham 2009).

Moreover, an abundance of business employees in the area think that it is most difficult for the homeless because they have some form of “mental illness.” One business employee named Abraham works for a restaurant supply store and he seemed to think that the majority of the homeless are hampered by some form of mental illness. Another business manager mentioned that mental illness is the most difficult obstacle for the homeless. Patricia is the manager of a local hotel and she concurs that mental illness is most difficult for the homeless in the area. Likewise, one business owner believes that
mental illness keeps the homeless from being a contributing member of society. Marcus is the owner of a fast food restaurant in the area and he proclaimed that, “The homeless that have a mental illness find it difficult functioning in society and trying to find work.” These narratives correlate with the literature pertaining to the general public’s perception of the most common causes of homelessness. Batterham (2009) argued that a majority of respondents sampled believed that one of the most common causes of homelessness was mental illness (67%).

Additionally, a couple of business employees in the area believe that it is most difficult for the homeless to “want and accept the help” that is offered. Danielle is a barista in the area and she believes that, “You can only try to help these people, but you cannot actually force them to be a certain way if they do not want to be. Some homeless people are happy with their situation and do not actually want the help. You can only bring a horse to water but you cannot force them to drink. I believe that we should not force it on them if they do not want it.” An additional business employee weighed in on this issue as well. Myra is an employee of a local motel and she stated that, “Some of the homeless around here are given a place to stay but they are not used to living inside. Some of them insist on walking around and sleeping on the ground, even if they have shelter.” This finding corroborates with the book by Duneier 1999 entitled Sidewalk. Mitchell Duneier conducted an ethnography of homeless individuals and found that some insist on sleeping on the floor of their own place because they have been used to living on the streets for an extended period of time.
Weather (13%)

Some community members mentioned weather as being the most difficult for the homeless. A few business employees in the area indicated that the “weather” is most difficult for the homeless, while only one business manager mentioned the same. One business employee spoke about how difficult it is for the homeless who don’t have a “blanket or jacket for the cold weather,” while another business manager held similar sentiments. A couple of business employees spoke about how difficult it is for the homeless because of the cold weather. For example, Alex29 works for a local transportation company and he stated that, “I think that dealing with the cold weather is probably the most difficult for the homeless around here.” A business manager in the area also mentioned how difficult it is for the homeless when the weather gets cold.

Moreover, one business employee in the area spoke about how many homeless don’t have “blankets or jackets for the cold weather.” Charlie30 is a gas station employee in the region. He is a white male in his mid-twenties and he said that, “Not having blankets or jackets for the cold weather is probably pretty difficult.” An additional business manager discussed the difficulties faced by the homeless who don’t have blankets or jackets for the cold weather as well. Monica is the manager of a different gas station and she proceeded to say that, “Me and my coworkers during the holidays will pitch in a lot of money to get them some warm stuff. One of our regulars passed away from pneumonia a few months ago because of the cold. It is really sad because you get

29 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
used to seeing your regulars and then one day you find out that they aren’t coming back. I think having a blanket or jacket to keep them warm means a lot to them.”

**Most Difficult for Community Members**

*Negative Attitudes (13%)*

Some community members were rather confused by the question of what they perceive to be most difficult for the homeless, and instead insisted on answering what they believed to be most difficult for themselves when dealing with the homeless in the area. Some individuals spoke about negative sentiments geared toward the homeless. One business owner mentioned that it is difficult when the homeless “take drugs,” “steal,” and begin “screaming/shouting.” Another business owner discussed having issues with the homeless “screaming/shouting,” “not having enough police presence,” “the homeless being violent,” and “the homeless using property amenities,” while a community stakeholder spoke about how the “concentration of services attracts homeless” to the area. A business employee also mentioned that the homeless in the area “choose to be homeless,” and therefore make his job more difficult.

One business owner discusses the difficulty in dealing with the homeless that are disruptive to business by “taking drugs,” “stealing,” and “screaming/shouting.” Steve is the owner of a motel in the area and he stated that, “Whenever the homeless take drugs, it’s really difficult to control them.” He also said that the homeless would steal stuff from the motel. Both Steve and another motel owner named Victor shared similar sentiments in terms of how the homeless will disrupt business by “screaming/shouting.” Steve indicated that, “It’s really difficult when the homeless start yelling and shouting.
They are really difficult to control when they are acting like that.” Victor is also an Indian male in his mid-forties and he stated that, “Some of the homeless will start cursing at me and calling me names. They will make fun of me because I immigrated to this country and they make fun of the way I look and talk. They will tell me to go back to my country.” Being that both of these accounts of the homeless screaming and shouting to disrupt business were coming from business owners, it can be assumed that these narratives support the findings regarding public perceptions of the homeless. Because these business owners may have higher levels of education as evidence of their business management skills, lower levels of education tend to best predict increased levels of sympathy toward the homeless. This finding correlates with the education levels of many business owners, particularly those who own businesses in the area (Agans et al. 2011).

**What the Homeless Need Most**

The final question that was asked of community members was what they believed the homeless needed most. A majority of community members mentioned that housing/shelter would be of the most assistance (77%), while half of the respondents discussed services as being the most important in assisting the homeless (50%). Another salient theme found throughout the interviews with community members was various levels of support that they believed would assist the homeless the most (23%).

*Housing/Shelter (77%)*

In terms of what community members believe would assist the homeless the most, a majority of respondents mentioned that “housing/shelter” would be of the most assistance. All groups of community members, including business employees and
managers, business owners and landowners, as well as community stakeholders all agree that the homeless need housing or shelter the most. Some business employees discuss how the homeless need shelter to stay clean. For example, Anthony is a taxi cab driver in the area and he stated that, “There needs to be a place where the homeless can be inside. They will be able to stay clean and warm, and take care of whatever business they need to.” A couple of business managers in the area further this notion that the homeless need housing the most as well. A local landowner corroborates these narratives by mentioning that there needs to be more housing for the homeless in the area. James is a local resident of the region. He proceeded to state that, “I believe that the homeless just need a place to stay.” A couple of business owners in the area believe that the homeless need housing or shelter the most as well. A couple of community stakeholders indicated that they believed that the homeless would benefit the most from housing. Jeff is a high-ranking official of a local non-profit organization and he stated that, “I believe that the homeless need housing the most, and then services should be brought to them.” These narratives contribute to the broader literature pertaining to public perceptions of what the homeless need most. A poll in 2007 found that 41 percent of respondents agree that communities should construct more affordable housing to serve all of its citizens (Gallup 2007).

**Services (50%)**

Furthermore, half of the community members discussed services as being the most important in assisting the homeless. A few business employees, managers, and business owners mentioned that the homeless would benefit most from “food services.” Some business employees and a community stakeholders discussed “mental health
services” as being the upmost importance for the homeless in the area. Also, a couple of business employees, business owners, and a few community stakeholders mentioned that the homeless would benefit most from “general services.” A few business employees discuss how the homeless need food services the most. Myra is an employee of a local motel and she proceeded to state that, “The homeless around here probably need food the most.” A couple of business managers in the region concur with the previous statement by Myra. Likewise, one business owner in the area mentioned that the homeless need food services the most as well.

Moreover, a few business employees in the region mentioned that “mental health services” would help the homeless the most. Abraham is an employee at a restaurant supply store in the area and he seemed to think that mental health services would assist the homeless the most. An additional community stakeholder believes that mental health services would help the homelessness issue the most. Barbara is a high-ranking official of the Business Improvement District in the region. She stated that, “I believe that mental health services would probably help the homeless the most.” These narratives correlate with the previous literature pertaining to public perception of the homeless. It was found that 67 percent of the general public agreed that mental illness or related mental disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder were the leading cause of homelessness (Gallup 2007).

Additionally, a business employee in the region mentioned that the homeless need more resources. Marissa is a security guard and she stated that, “The homeless need more resources and other forms of help to get back on their feet.” A business owner
furthers this notion regarding various services that would help the homeless the most. Marcus is the owner of a fast food restaurant in the region and he proceeded to state that, “There needs to be more services around here to help with the homelessness issue we have.” A few additional community stakeholders mentioned that some general services might be able to assist with the homeless issue as well.

Support (23%)

Another salient theme found throughout the interviews with community members was various levels of support that they believed would assist the homeless the most. Some business employees mentioned that just “having some money to spend” would be enough support. A few business employees, managers, and business owners mentioned that “having somebody to care/emotional support” would be of the most help for the homeless in the area. One business employee in the area spoke about how money would be of the most assistance to the homeless. Jose is an employee at a local motel and he argued that just having some spending money would assist the homeless the most.

Alternatively, a few business managers in the region spoke about how the homeless just need somebody to care about their situation. Monica is the manager of a local gas station and she stated that, “Just having somebody that shows that they care would help the homeless out emotionally. Just having that support system would be of the most help.” A few business employees indicated that just having some compassion would help the homeless out the most. Danielle is a barista in the area and she proceeded to state that, “I think that compassion would help out the homeless the most. I do not think they are looking for hand-outs from anybody, but just need somebody to care about
their situation.” A few business owners in the area further this narrative provided by Danielle by discussing how the homeless need the emotional support the most. These narratives contribute to the broader literature pertaining to homeless and their reliance on support networks. Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2005) found that personal networks could assist in satisfying essential needs for the survival of homeless individuals. Self-reports from local surveys indicate that a surprising number of homeless people stay in touch, albeit sporadically, with domiciled family members and friends. This literature and the findings go to show the importance of relationships and how certain homeless in their most vulnerable state still try to stay in contact with those who are close to them.

This chapter discussed the subjective perceptions of community members regarding transient homeless individuals that travel from out of town. It also explored what community members think this population needs most. Some key findings detail how many community members have accepted the homeless in the River District because services and supports are nearby. Unfortunately, many do not take ownership of the issue and only give superficial answers about how homelessness affects them. Very few community members seek to assist the homeless by acknowledging their acceptance as one of their own and assisting them like they would any other member of their community. Members of society need to address the social problem of homelessness like they would any other issue that affects their community. Even though these community members hold very different societal positions in terms of employment, there is still consistency between all groups in their lack of ownership of the homelessness issue.
They tend to feel empathetically toward the homeless, but fail to mention how they are addressing the problem themselves.
Chapter 5: TRANSIENT HOMELESSNESS IN THE RIVER DISTRICT

The purpose of the study is to investigate the subjective motivations and perspectives amongst some transient homeless individuals that travel from out of town. Interviews were qualitatively analyzed using an inductive approach to uncover the various factors that might contribute to transient homelessness in Northern California, particularly with respect to adults who are housing-insecure and traveling by bus, and the complex challenges these individuals experience accessing services and supports. The study hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of the social phenomenon of “transient homelessness” on the West Coast. Particularly because transient homelessness is understudied, and often understood as a rational cost-benefit analysis by individuals to access more resources (Tsai et al. 2015), the research hopes to document more nuanced reasons, and the broader social context, in which some individuals choose to travel and the implications that may follow.

A grounded theoretical approach (Charmaz 1995) was applied to code the data and identify key themes. To understand the various factors and motivations that contributed to transient homeless individuals leaving their previous residence and coming to Northern California, respondents were asked two of the following questions: a) can you tell me a little about yourself and what brought you here, and b) can you describe to me the reasons why you left the last city you were in? While many transient homeless individuals were reluctant to describe themselves in-depth, most were willing to elaborate on the various reasons for why they were traveling. At a general level, respondents evoked a number of push and pull factors that had contributed to their decisions to move
away from their previous residence and why they had stopped in Northern California. That is, respondents implied a distinction between why they had left the previous city they were in (i.e., the push factors), as opposed to why they were in Northern California specifically (i.e., the pull factors).

**Push Factors**

More often than not, transient homeless individuals were far clearer on why they had left their previous city than why they had traveled to Northern California specifically. Focusing first on how respondents described the “push factors” that had led them to leave their previous location revealed four salient themes. These themes include moving for a “change of scene/fresh start” (56%), moving because of “lack of resources in their home city” (44%), moving after a “sudden loss/significant life event” (31%), and moving “in search of job opportunities” (28%).

*Change of Scene/Fresh Start (56%)*

When discussing why transient homeless individuals had left their previous city, respondents most commonly spoke to the dual-sentiment of “needing to leave” some negative situation and “needing a fresh start” somewhere new. Many transient homeless individuals, for example, reported leaving the last city due to an interpersonal conflict with a family member, partner, or friends more generally. One participant named Jessica[^31] is a white female in her mid 30s. Jessica proceeded to state that, “There were just some problems with some people. I am not really sure what happened with them, I am still trying to figure that out myself, but I just needed somewhere else to go.”

[^31]: All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Jessica’s choices in traveling from the previous city she was in could be explained by Rife’s (1992) study of 247 homeless families. The researcher found that the most frequently cited reasons for homelessness were family conflict or dissolution. Another study by Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) found that migration may actually improve coping status and better a person’s quality of life by changing environments and allowing her to take advantage of different opportunities in different locations, or escape undesirable situations and improve social ties.

Some transient homeless individuals also hinted at having legal issues, or that they had “run ins” with authorities in the last city. One respondent named Marco32 is a Latino male in his early 50s. Marco said, “I was a taxi cab driver [in the previous city] and I had too many traffic tickets, so they took my license. I wasn’t able to drive there anymore, so I decided to move.” Despite the specific situations that respondents were escaping from, all of these individuals emphasized that they were seeking a “fresh start,” and “a different scene,” in a new city. That is to say, they were traveling for something new and different, even if in most cases they had little idea of what a new and/or different life in the area would look like. Marco’s narrative of the reasons for his travels could be bolstered by the literature that discusses the specific methodological distinctions between migrant and non-migrant homeless individuals. Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) found that many transient homeless individuals move to improve life opportunities in some other way. Since Marco lost his driver’s license in the previous city he was staying

32 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
in, it is possible that he decided to travel to improve life opportunities in one way or another.

Indeed, some transient homeless individuals reported being in a state of perpetual transience for some time, and that Northern California was little more than a temporary stop in an ongoing search for a better life. One white male in his early 20s reported that he had been kicked out of his house when he was 17 years old and has been traveling ever since, from city to city, hoping “to start over” in some place. His name is Ron and he said, “When I was kicked out of my house when I was 17, I began living in a squat house with a bunch of other people. I began learning about the traveling lifestyle and I fell in love with it. I have had a few jobs here and there but I get bored easily and I have not found anything that fits what I like to do.” Ron’s narrative regarding his preferred transient lifestyle could be explained by a study conducted by Tsai, Mares, and Rosenheck (2011). The researchers found that White homeless individuals reported greater community satisfaction in areas where there is a higher level of education. The area’s lower levels of education could explain Ron’s reluctance with not being able to find a region that he feels comfortable staying in. Ron’s decisions to travel could also be explained by a study conducted by Gray et al. (2011), which examined 120 homeless males and their mobility patterns. The researchers found that 12 percent of respondents had a “desire to travel.” An additional study lends assistance in explaining why Ron may decide to travel from city to city as well. Higate (2000) details ex-servicemen and how they are disposed to, and equipped for, a life on the road, and may be “addicted” to

33 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
traveling and fleeting fixedness to place. The ex-servicemen romanticize their lives “on the open roads” and view it as a choice.

*Lack of Resources in Home City (44%)*

A related narrative implicated by transient homeless individuals when discussing the rationales of their travel, and one that often bled over into the “change of scene/fresh start” themes discussed above highlighted the “lack of resources” that individuals experienced in their previous city or region. This narrative often made reference to the lack of resources in the previous community, such as the dearth of affordable housing, job opportunities, and social services available. One African-American male in his early 50s named Nick, spoke about how he had a certain set of skills that he could not use in the previous location he was in. Nick proclaimed, “I used to live on the East Coast, but they made laws that limited my ability to harvest cannabis. I read on the internet that California allows you to have more square feet to grow marijuana compared to where I was previously, so I decided to move out here and try to open up my own business growing and distributing.” This narrative contributes to the literature pertaining to the typologies of the transient “economic relocator.” This particular typology tends to move because of the perception of a potentially better economic situation in a different location (Hall and Maza 1990; Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). Another study by Gray et al. (2011) asked respondents about their motivation to leave a particular area and found that participants left their previous city because of a lack of housing services, employment, travel, and family. An additional study by Vorsino (2010) found that a considerable

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34 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
proportion of homeless individuals tend to migrate in search of better employment opportunities.

However, some individuals also spoke about their own lack of resources; how in the last city they lacked money, a stable job, family, or friends that they could rely on. In speaking about these issues, many respondents highlighted the fragmented nature of their support networks of family and friends. Similarly, some respondents implied that they had “burned bridges” with their support networks. For example, an Asian male in his late 20s named Charles\textsuperscript{35} discussed this very issue. Charles stated, “I was staying at a mental hospital in another city and my mom invited me to stay with her. I tried staying with her for a little while but she is evil. You can just see it in her eyes. She is why I am homeless now also.” This narrative contradicts the findings of First Nations homeless population of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Peters and Robillard (2009) discuss how certain homeless individuals move in a short-term, circulatory fashion between friends’ and family members’ homes in an effort to maintain social ties without overstaying their welcome, or to try to improve their personal or financial circumstances. A related study explored the experiences of 247 homeless families and found that the most frequently cited reasons for homelessness were family conflict or dissolution and economic factors (Rife 1992). Conversely, a study by Tompkins et al. (2003) correlates with the narrative told by Charles. The researchers found that coping status may be affected by migration, in that moving around may be accompanied with problems, which, in turn, affect the homeless individual’s ability to cope, such as the weakening of social ties and supports.

\textsuperscript{35} All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
In some aspects, the lack of resources theme emphasized that for some respondents, the search for new resources was part of their rationale for traveling. However, more broadly, the theme highlighted how the previous town really had held little in terms of keeping respondents wedded to the location. As some respondents implied, there was very little keeping them in the region in the first place and that they might as well try someplace new. A study by Kozoll, Osborne, and Garcia (2003) argued that migrating, or becoming “homeless,” is a choice that some families make to maintain their family structure. Many migrant workers travel as families and often extended families, where the unit of the family is assumed. Many migratory laborers use this transit experience as one of the key shared sites of common identification for a migrant population whose mode of inhabitation is through circulation and mobility (Crang and Zhang 2012).

*Sudden Loss/Significant Life Event (31%)*

Another recurrent theme cited for travel touched upon a significant life event that the respondent had recently experienced, often in terms of a sudden loss of a loved one, a relationship, and/or a job. The event, or chain of events, had disrupted and changed the life of the individual, resulting in a prolonged stage of “transition” for the individual from life before the significant event and now life after it had occurred. For example, a white male in his mid 30s spoke to this. His name is Jonathon and he stated, “My mom passed away when I was living on the East Coast, so I decided to move out to California because that was the last bit of family I had.” Some literature bolsters Jonathon’s

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36 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
narrative by emphasizing family as an important factor in traveling. Gray et al. (2011) examined 120 homeless males and asked respondents about their motivation for leaving a particular area. Being that Jonathon’s only remaining family resided in California, a substantial amount of respondents from the study mentioned that family was one of the most important factors in their decisions to travel.

Some individuals reported that they still struggled with the substantial change of status that they had experienced (e.g., from married to divorced, from employed to unemployed, etc.), while others were unsure how to make sense of their life anymore. One older African-American male in his mid 50s indicated that he had gotten divorced after 23 years of marriage. His name is Albert and he decided to “move away” because he saw little purpose in life in his home city. Albert said, “I was married to my wife for 23 years and we got a divorce recently. We were living up in Oregon together, but I have a new girlfriend now, though. We decided to move to California because my girlfriend’s mother is sick, and now I am just trying to figure everything out.” Despite Albert’s narrative of already finding a girlfriend to fill the void of his ex-wife, respondents sometimes hinted that they had little in the way of informal sources of support to help them adapt and navigate their ongoing transition from the significant life event. A study by Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2005) found that personal relationships and peer support could act as a significant coping mechanism in dealing with being homeless. Personal networks can assist in satisfying essential needs for the survival of homeless individuals. Albert’s vulnerable situation could have easily spiraled out of control, but

37 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
with having a girlfriend after 23 years of marriage to his now ex-wife, he is able to better cope with his vulnerable state.

In Search of Job Opportunities (28%)

For some respondents, their reasons for travel were explicitly to find employment. These individuals described being *pushed* to travel due to the economic realities of their previous city; that the labor market was too competitive, that there were few good jobs available, and/or that their particular industry had closed down. These respondents found themselves in the area in hopes that they would be able to find employment, even temporary work to get themselves in a better economic footing. One white female in her mid 20s named Felicia\(^{38}\) had moved from the East Coast to try to find work. She proceeded to state that, “There were not many jobs on the East Coast, so I decided to move out here to try to find some work.” The narrative told by Felicia corroborates with the literature pertaining to the “hobo” of the late 19\(^{th}\) century and early 20\(^{th}\) century. Sheil (2004) describes the typology the “hobo” as a person who moved or wandered according to the seasons and job opportunities. The hobo is a necessity to the community as a worker who took on undesirable or difficult jobs. Felicia’s narrative also correlates with the typology of the “economic relocator” (Hall and Maza 1990; Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). The economic relocator tends to move because of the perception of a potentially better economic situation in a different location. An additional study assists in explaining the narrative discussed by Felicia. Gray et al. (2011) found that 14 percent of homeless men decided to move because of employment and employment services. A

\(^{38}\) All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
further study explored the methodological distinctions between migrant and non-migrant homeless individuals. The study found that many homeless individuals move in search of a job or to improve life opportunities in some other way (Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel 1992). Vorsino (2010) contributes to the previous literature pertaining to migration and employment opportunities. The research found that a considerable proportion of homeless individuals tend to migrate in search of better employment opportunities. As will be discussed next, some of these individuals believed that the region represented better economic opportunities due to the fact that it was a medium sized city in California, because of the downtown expansion projects, and/or its geographic location in a state known to have a large economy.

**Pull Factors**

As previously discussed, most transient homeless individuals were far more descriptive when discussing the reasons for why they were traveling away from a city (the aforementioned *push* factors), than they were explaining why they had come to the region specifically (the *pull* factors). Many participants cited a multitude of different factors that contributed to their decisions to travel to Northern California, but these were often vague and general answers, suggesting that some respondents were still uncertain about their decision to come to the area, or at the very least, were still trying to figure it out. With respect to how respondents explicitly answered the question of “why they traveled here?”, most mentioned “plans fell apart/not part of the plan” (47%), “coming for family” (28%), “more jobs in the area” (22%), and “more resources for the poor” (19%).
Almost half of the transient homeless individuals sampled had not anticipated being in Northern California for an extended period of time, but nonetheless, found themselves staying for longer due to unforeseen circumstances and challenges. Many of these individuals were intending to “move up north” or “down south,” but had run out of funds, to the extent that they were now effectively stranded in the area. An older male named Albert, for example, indicated that he had traveled to Northern California from Oregon with his girlfriend with the intention of only visiting the city for a week or two before continuing to his destination city. Unfortunately, their traveling funds had run out quicker than anticipated, and now the couple was trying to find employment in the area, with the hopes of rebuilding their reserves to continue their journey in the next few months. Albert proclaimed, “My girlfriend told me that her mother was sick, so we came down here. It has been a few weeks and I ran out of money, so now I am going to start looking for a job. I think this area has a lot of opportunity to find some work.” Even though Albert did not intend on having to find employment when moving to the area with his girlfriend, his pattern of migration coincides with a study by Gray et al. (2011), which analyzed participants’ mobility. The researchers found that 28 percent of homeless men moved because of relationships with family/friends/significant others, while 14 percent moved because of employment and employment services.

Furthermore, a white male in his late 20s named Alex had lost his bus ticket on the way to his destination city and found himself stuck in the region without a means of transportation.

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39 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
traveling further. Alex stated, “I was trying to go to Crescent City to find some work, but when I got off of the bus, I lost my ticket. I did not have any money to get another one, and now I am here.” Though some transient homeless individuals found themselves in Northern California due to happenstance, if not some bad luck, it was not always apparent that these individuals had a concrete destination either. Indeed, some individuals seemed willing to give the area a try, especially since they were now here, even if they had little previous knowledge of the region itself. A study by Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) corroborates with the narrative told by Alex. Researchers found that many homeless individuals move in search of a job or to improve life opportunities in some other way.

*Coming for Family (28%)*

A little over a quarter of transient homeless individuals indicated that they were *pulled* to Northern California because they had “family in the area.” In some situations, respondents claimed that they had been invited by family to move to the area after having to deal with their own life crisis/event or the inviting family member experiencing a similar situation. It was not always clear, however, to what extent family members had actually been informed of the participant’s “visit,” or if the family members were really willing to take the respondent in. Indeed, in more than one case, respondents described being somewhat disconnected from the very family members that they were trying “to connect with” in the region. For example, Josh\(^{40}\) is a white male in his mid 20s who recently traveled from Oregon. He said, “I decided to move down here because I have

\(^{40}\) All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
family in [a nearby suburb] and was hoping to get in touch with them. I have been traveling around the country but it really sucks when you do not have family.” Because Josh did not fully disclose whether he was invited to stay with family or not, his narrative can assist in understanding the study exploring First Nations homeless population in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Peters and Robillard (2009) found that some homeless individuals tended to move in a short-term, circulatory fashion between friends’ and family members’ homes in an effort to maintain social ties without overstaying their welcome, or to try to improve their personal or financial circumstances. Another study by Gray et al. (2011) examined 120 homeless males in two Canadian cities and found that 28 percent of homeless men decided to move because of relationships with family/friends/significant others.

Nonetheless, other transient homeless individuals described more harmonious family dynamics. One white female respondent in her early 40s reported that she had been asked to come to the area by her grandfather because he was sick. Her name is Janice and she stated, “I was living out in Minnesota and my grandfather told me he was sick. I just had to find a way to get out here.” Though it was not clear that the grandfather knew of the respondent’s precarious housing situation, the pull of family seemed to be a core motivator for the respondent to move. Etner Wright et al. (1998) argue that individuals doubled up in conventional housing with relatives or friends are often treated as a ‘hidden’ homeless population. Another study details self-reports of local surveys indicating that a surprising number of homeless people stay in touch, albeit

41 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
sporadically, with domiciled family members and friends (Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt 2005).

*More Jobs in the Area (22%)*

Some transient homeless individuals were *pulled* to the area because they had heard that they would be able to find employment. Some of these individuals (about half) had heard that the region is “a good area for jobs,” had recovered from the recession quicker than other locations, and was experiencing economic development with the new downtown expansion projects. A Latino male in his late 40s named Zach\(^{42}\) details his knowledge of the area. Zach said, “I used to live [around here] about 15 years ago. I heard that there was going to be that [downtown expansion project] going in and I thought I might be able to find some work. It really sucks to be homeless in Las Vegas because everybody is spending money around you and you have none.” The narratives told by transient homeless individuals contribute to the literature regarding the “hobo” who moved or wandered frequently according to the seasons, job opportunities, and community ties (Sheil 2004). An additional study by Gray et al. (2011) found that 14 percent of homeless males moved for employment and employment services, while a study by May (2003) found that the majority of traveling homeless individuals had recently come to urban areas because of the wider opportunities for accommodation and work they believed the city had to offer.

Other respondents, in slight contrast, were generally attracted to the West Coast because of the greater economic/business opportunities that the region offered relative to

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\(^{42}\) All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
the rest of the country. For instance, one African-American male in his early 40s named Larry moved out West because he had heard from family that California has more jobs than back East. Larry stated, “Some of my family members were saying that Northern California might have work. I figured that I might as well check it out because most of my family got locked up not too long ago anyways.” This finding coincides with the typology of the “economic relocator” (Hall and Maza 1990). The economic relocator tends to move because of the perception of a potentially better economic situation in a different location. Another study by Rahimian, Wolch, and Koegel (1992) argues that many homeless individuals move in search of a job or to improve life opportunities in some other way. Vorsino (2010) also contributes to the literature with findings that suggest that a considerable proportion of homeless individuals tend to migrate in search of better employment opportunities.

Resources for the Poor (19%)

Approximately 1 out of 5 respondents were pulled to the area because they had heard that it was a more livable region for individuals struggling with housing and financial insecurity. Many of these individuals believed that the city offered cheaper and more affordable housing compared to what is generally found in other regions of California. Some individuals also believed that the region offered more programs for the poor and homeless compared to their original residence. This was particularly the case for individuals moving from rural areas. One transient homeless individual in particular

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43 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
traveled to the area from a small Northern California town. Her name is Brooke and she is an African-American female in her early 50s. She explained that, “Coming from [my previous town], there were not that many resources. I heard that [the area] has more programs and cheaper housing than [my previous town].” One of the first documented occurrences of individuals deciding to travel for certain social services transpired during the mid- to late 1960s. The San Francisco Diggers, known as a radical community-action group of activists provided food (Sebald 1975), medical care, transportation (Krah 2009), and temporary housing in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park in Haight-Ashbury. However, the worry for many social service providers is that the greater quantity and better quality of services offered in a particular city, the more that individuals who are in need will travel to those regions in search of those services (Tsai et al. 2015). Duneier (1999) describes an environment where homeless individuals tend to find themselves in niches throughout cities and towns, where services, mixed land use, access to transportation, a tolerant atmosphere, and other related elements foster the idea of a sustaining habitat. A study by Gray et al. (2011) found that homeless men decide to move because of employment and employment services, housing, and food/clothing services. An additional study by Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel (1993) found that mobility patterns amongst the urban homeless are less tied to individual characteristics and more related to availability of certain services and location of resources. Bachrach (1987) furthers this notion by suggesting that perhaps mobility patterns may depend on geographic access, availability of services, and community attitudes. However, Cloke, 44 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Johnsen, and May (2007) suggest that the assumption that homeless individuals move to large cities to gain access to services is largely inaccurate. Some decided to move based on the destinations determined by hitchhiking or other means of travel, while others moved to escape prominent drug scenes in urban areas. The present study’s findings tend to concur with this notion, with many traveling for different reasons, like family or events not going to plan.

**Perceptions of the River District**

To understand the perceptions that transient homeless individuals had of the area before arriving in town, the following question was asked of participants in the sample: what sort of things have you heard about the region? Respondents’ perceptions of the city were rather ambivalent, with some individuals highlighting the promising aspects and some focusing on the negative/dangerous aspects. A majority of participants had never heard anything about the area and tended to hold neutral sentiments about the city.

Overall, those who had not heard much or held generic positive perceptions of the city (53%) before arriving tended to give superficial answers pertaining to what they knew, with respondents mainly focusing on knowing the region as a historical city in California, as a big city, or not knowing much about the city at all. For the individuals that had heard something about the city before arriving, a quarter mentioned positive aspects (25%) and mainly heard about the city from family members, whereas negative perceptions (22%) of the town were mainly heard from friends or acquaintances of respondents. For transient homeless individuals that had heard about region before arriving, some participants indicated positive perceptions of the city and spoke to area
having a lot of homeless services and cheap housing, as well as more jobs compared to their previous residence, while individuals who had mentioned negative perceptions tended to highlight the dangerous aspects of the city.

*Did Not Know Much/Generic Positive Perceptions of the Area (53%)*

A majority of respondents had not heard much or held generic positive attitudes about the area before arriving in town. The transient homeless individuals that indicated as such knew that the area was just a big city or a historic city in California. One respondent mentioned that they had not known the actual size of the city until the bus driver told the passengers. Another individual said that he knew that the area was a historical city. Marco said, “I heard that there is gold out here. This is where it all started. I figured I could find a job pretty easily.” The typology of the “economic relocator” could assist in understanding the narrative discussed by Marco. The economic relocator tends to move because of the perception of a potentially better economic situation in a different location (Hall and Maza 1990).

*Promising Aspects of the Area (25%)*

Of the respondents that perceived the area in a positive light, some mentioned that they had heard that the city is increasing in size because of the new downtown expansion projects, while others had heard that the town has a lot of homeless services and cheap housing to offer the poor. Many of these transient homeless individuals had been told by family members that the city offers “cheaper housing and more services for the homeless” compared to their previous residence. Some literature contradicts the narratives told by transient homeless respondents. Cloke, Johnsen, and May (2007) argue
that some homeless individuals decided to move based on the destinations determined by hitchhiking or other means of travel, while others moved to escape prominent drug scenes in urban areas. The researchers argue that the assumption that homeless individuals move to large cities to gain access to services in largely inaccurate. The present study’s findings tend to concur with the argument that transient homeless individuals do not travel for services, and instead have found themselves in the area without a means of traveling further or had family in the area. On the other hand, Gray et al. (2011) conducted a study of 120 homeless males and found that homeless men decide to move because of housing and food services. Another study by Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel (1993) found that mobility patterns amongst the urban homeless are less tied to individual characteristics and more related to availability of certain services and location of resources. These previous two studies concur with the narratives told by some transient homeless individuals who view the area positively.

Others had mentioned that the region was either much warmer or dryer compared to their previous residence. One African-American male in his late 40s named Patrice had spoken to this point. He explained that, “I have been traveling from state to state trying to find some work. I was living in Ohio, Connecticut, and New York. Those places were way too cold, though, so I decided to move out here to California where it is much warmer.” A study by Metraux (2015) surveyed 113,400 veterans who used VA homeless services and found that climate had a modest impact on migration, with increased veteran movement slightly increasing with temperature gains.

45 All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
Another transient homeless individual said that the only thing he had ever heard about the city was that there might be jobs here because of the downtown expansion projects. Some literature corroborates with Zach’s statements. Gray et al. (2011) argues that 14 percent of homeless male individuals decide to move because of employment and employment services. An additional study by Vorsino (2010) suggests that a considerable proportion of homeless individuals tend to migrate in search of better employment opportunities.

**Negative Perceptions of the Area (19%)**

In terms of the transient homeless individuals that had heard about the city before arriving and had identified the area as a negative or dangerous town to live in, most mentioned that they heard that the region is rough or that there are a lot of mentally ill people that reside in the city. One respondent named Felicia\(^{46}\) stated, “There are a lot of crazy and strange people living around here.” This narrative discussed by Felicia contributes to the literature pertaining to community attitudes toward the homeless. A Gallup (2007) poll found that 67 percent of the general public believes that mental illness or related mental disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder are the leading causes of homelessness. Also, a common profile of transient homelessness found throughout the literature discusses the young, transient, mentally ill male (Solarz and Bogat 1990; Schwartz et al. 1983). Another study by Beijer and Andreasson (2010) found that homeless women ran a higher risk of mental disorders than women in the general population.

\(^{46}\) All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
population. Risk of mental disorders amongst homeless women was also higher than that of homeless men.

Others had said that the area is “ruthless and scary”. One participant by the name of Jonathon\textsuperscript{47} stated that, “You come [to the city] on vacation, you leave on probation, and you are back on violation”. This narrative told by Jonathon could potentially be bolstered by a study conducted by Tsai, Mares, and Rosenheck (2011), which found that White homeless individuals reported greater community satisfaction in areas where there is a higher level of education. The city selected for the present study may have a lower level of education, which could contribute to explaining why Jonathon held such negative sentiments toward the area.

This chapter discussed the various motivations that transient homeless individuals report for traveling. It also explored the perceptions that transient homeless individuals have of Northern California, with respect to available services and supports. Cloke, Johnsen, and May (2007) suggest that the assumption that homeless individuals move to large cities to gain access to services in largely inaccurate. Some decided to move based on the destinations determined by hitchhiking or other means of travel, while others moved to escape prominent drug scenes in urban areas. The findings for the present study tend to concur with this notion, with many traveling for different reasons, like family or events not going to plan, as opposed to services, like the magnet myth would entail. Some transient homeless individuals may have different criteria for what they are looking for in certain regions. Needing a change of scene/fresh start does not argue that

\textsuperscript{47} All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of respondents.
transient homeless individuals traveled in search of services. Instead, these individuals understood that their previous location was not working for a variety of different reasons, so they decided to change that environment in order to attain a new sense of belonging. The River District area has a bus depot where the ease of access and the price of travel are cheaper than most other forms (i.e., plane, train, etc.). Many transient homeless individuals may have not made a rational decision to move because of the city and what it had to offer, but more by happenstance, and just needed a new place to go that is far away from their previous city or town.
Chapter 6: DISCUSSION SECTION

A study by Cloke, Johnsen, and May (2007) suggests that the assumption that homeless individuals move to large cities to gain access to services in largely inaccurate. Some decided to move based on the destinations determined by hitchhiking or other means of travel, while others moved to escape prominent drug scenes in urban areas. The present study’s findings tend to concur with this notion, with many traveling for different reasons, like family or events not going to plan.

Many service providers are worried that a plethora of services offered to the homeless will attract more homeless to their respective region. However, only a quarter of the transient homeless sampled indicated that they knew that services were available in the River District. It is difficult to conclude that all transient homeless individuals travel strictly for services, like the magnet myth entails. Instead, many transient homeless individuals sampled found themselves in the River District area after traveling through the bus depot. The eco-system of services offered in the area tends to keep many homeless nearby because of the resources available to the poor. Many transient homeless traveled through the bus depot and found services nearby. It seems that if there were more services offered in a particular region, many homeless individuals would not decide to travel because of the ease of accessing resources in their home city or town. Federal funding needs to be equally allocated to all regions of the country to address homelessness depending on need. Financial support from the federal government should be held to certain standards that are consistent in every city and town throughout the country.
Even though these community members hold very different societal positions in terms of employment, there is still consistency between all groups in their lack of ownership of the homelessness issue in the River District. They tend to feel empathetically toward the homeless, but fail to mention how they are addressing the problem themselves. However, this is not just the fault of community members within the current study; this is a societal issue that needs to be addressed at the federal level. There is a need for additional funding to address homelessness and combat this issue.

Resources/Services

Some transient homeless individuals had traveled to the area because they hoped there would be more resources for the poor compared to their previous location. Many believed that the area offered cheaper and more affordable housing compared to other regions of California. This finding contributes to the anecdotal literature pertaining to the magnet myth of social services. Some had heard that the area would have more resources than their previous location, but it is unclear whether these narratives were because the informing parties were aware of the region and what it had to offer, or that these individuals assumed that a medium sized city in a large economy may have more resources compared to their previous location. The literature in the field would benefit from additional research with a larger sample size and questions that pertained to whether transient homeless individuals specifically moved to an area for available services and supports.

Moreover, some business employees and managers discuss services that would assist the poor. These community members often interact with the homeless, while other
community members, like various stakeholders, are in the interest of assisting this population with accessing services. Both groups of community members understand the importance of services and supports for the homeless. Community stakeholders also observe how services assist the homeless and what services are typically needed for this population. Some transient homeless individuals traveled to the area in search of resources that would assist with their vulnerable state, and many community members understand the importance of these resources for the poor. Increasing federal expenditures for resources and services for the poor should be extremely important in aiding the homeless throughout society.

A few transient homeless individuals traveled because they are searching for more resources in another region. This finding can contribute to the anecdotal evidence pertaining to the magnet myth of social services, and the fact that the city may act as a place where transient homeless travel in search of services. However, a majority of transient homeless individuals for this particular study did not travel to the area because they had heard that there would be an abundance of resources for the poor, but instead had left their previous city or town because they did not have enough resources to survive.

Business owners, employees, and managers concur that the homeless need help accessing food services the most. These community groups may experience the homeless trying to find food around their businesses that they either own or work for. Additionally, a few business employees argue that the homeless need mental health services the most. Employees are constantly interacting with this population on a daily
basis and believe that these services would assist the homeless they interact with the most. Community stakeholders may also hold these sentiments because they work with the homeless and understand that this population may need a multitude of different service options. Community stakeholders tend to give multiple answers regarding services when asked about what would assist the homeless the most. The general population needs to be more informed about homeless issues and more empathetic of their vulnerable state. It is unfortunate that only community stakeholders, who work closely with the homeless, understand that multiple services are necessary to the survival of this population.

Some transient homeless individuals mention that there is an abundance of mentally ill individuals in the River District. Business owners, managers, and employees mention how difficult it is for the homeless who suffer from mental illness. A few community members discuss how addiction to drugs can act as a psychological barrier inhibiting homeless individuals. These community members consistently interact with homeless individuals who have some form of mental illness. The River District has mental health services and tends to attract certain homeless individuals that suffer from these difficulties. However, there is little evidence in the present study that confirms that transient homeless individuals specifically migrate in search of services in the region. In fact, only a quarter of the transient homeless sampled indicated that they knew that services were available in the region. It is difficult to conclude that all transient homeless individuals travel strictly for services, like the magnet myth entails. Instead, many transient homeless individuals sampled found themselves in the River District area after
traveling through the bus depot. The eco-system of services offered in the area tends to keep many homeless nearby because of the resources available to the poor.

Many community members agree that the transient homeless individuals may have been attracted to the River District because of the plethora of services and the lack of resources in their previous city or town. Because both community members and the transient homeless agree that there is a need for services for the poor, the federal government should emphasize the importance of allocating more funds to address homelessness in every section of society. Only local efforts contribute to the magnet myth of social services. With local regions increasing expenditures to address their own homelessness issue, certain cities and towns throughout the country will act as magnets for transient homeless individuals who reside in areas that have fewer services and supports to offer the poor. Federal policies and additional funding are necessary to bring all states and localities up to a minimum standard in order to eliminate certain magnet regions. Many community members have accepted the homeless in the River District because services are nearby. Unfortunately, however, many do not take ownership of the issue and only give superficial answers about how homelessness affects them. Very few community members seek to assist the homeless by acknowledging their acceptance as one of their own and assisting them like they would any other member of their community. Members of society need to address the social problem of homelessness like they would any other issue that affects their community. Because many community members (i.e., business owners, managers, and employees) go home and do not have to
interact with the homeless outside of typical business days and times, their lack of ownership resonates throughout their narratives about the homeless in the River District.

**Housing/Shelter**

Furthermore, some transient homeless individuals believed that the area offered cheaper and more affordable housing compared to other regions of California. This finding contributes to the anecdotal literature pertaining to the magnet myth of social services. Some had heard that the area would have more resources than their previous location, but it is unclear whether these narratives were because the informing parties were aware of the region and what it had to offer, or that these individuals assumed that a medium sized city in a large economy may have more resources compared to their previous location.

Moreover, all community members agree that the homeless *need* housing/shelter the most. Many transient homeless individuals decided to move from their previous location because of a dearth of affordable housing in that particular region. All community members are employed and it can be assumed that they have a residence of their own as well. These community member groups sympathize with the homeless and their lack equal amenities. Both the transient homeless respondents and community members concur that housing should be of the upmost importance in dealing with homelessness issues. Luckily, many organizations in the area stress the importance of the housing first model, which emphasizes providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a housing first approach from
other strategies is that there is an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing (NAEH 2006).

All community members also mentioned that accessing shelter/housing would be most difficult for the homeless in the area. Community members concur that shelter/housing is most difficult for the homeless to access and also what the homeless need most. There is a need for federal policies that allow for transient homeless individuals to access housing easier and at a faster pace. Transient homeless are the unhoused population of the United States and their own transience has created a refugee status for them within their own country. They are being forced to move from city to city in order to find resources and gain access to services and supports. Many transient homeless individuals decide to travel as a form of survival, by either attempting to access more resources than their previous location had or to try to stay warm and dry. A plethora of transient homeless individuals for this particular study did not necessary travel to the area because they had heard that there would be an abundance of resources, but instead had left their previous city or town because they did not have enough resources to survive. It makes sense that many transient homeless individuals would want to be homeless in California for the weather and the liberal atmosphere surrounding the abundance of services and supports for the poor. However, to combat the “magnet myth” of social services, federal policies should stress the significance of transient homeless individuals accessing housing at a faster pace and a higher success rate. With easier access to housing at the federal level, and not just through local and state governments, there would not be a typology of the transient homeless individual. With
an equal dispersion of resources for the poor throughout our society, there would be no magnet cities or states, and local communities would be able to appropriately care for their most vulnerable populations. With these implementations, our society may be able to manage more humanely our homelessness issue.

Housing/shelter can also assist with homeless individuals staying warm in cold weather areas. The influence of weather can also contribute to the perpetual transient state of the homeless in the area, and may cause many to travel from region to region as a survival strategy. Future quantitative research should emphasize weather as a determining factor for many transient homeless’ decisions to travel. Some transient homeless individuals may have different criteria for what they are looking for in certain regions. Needing a change of scene/fresh start does not necessarily entail that transient homeless individuals traveled in search of services, like the magnet myth asserts. Instead, these individuals understood that their previous location was not working for a variety of different reasons, so they decided to change that environment in order to attain a new sense of belonging.

Many transient homeless individuals migrated to the River District because they were seeking cheaper and more affordable housing compared to their previous location. Community members tend to agree with the importance of housing homeless individuals and the difficulties that are experienced when this population is unhoused. Many local organizations that work with the homeless adhere to the housing first model and believe that services should be brought to these individuals. These community members interact with the homeless on a daily basis and view their situation empathetically. Local
community stakeholders are also informed enough to understand that housing the homeless is a cheaper alternative to having this population live on the streets and cost the state more money in emergency care services. There is a need for additional funding that allows for the ease of accessing cheaper and more affordable housing for the unhoused refugees of our society. There is also a need for financial support dedicated to various services that address homelessness in individuals’ home region, and not force this population to travel to other areas as a form of survival. Federal policies can eliminate magnet cities and towns by enabling additional funds to address homelessness at the societal level.

**Employment/Money**

Additionally, some transient homeless individuals traveled to the area in search of job opportunities because they were unable to find work in their previous location. Some mentioned that the area is a good place for jobs or that the economy is growing because of the new downtown expansion projects being conducted. Others were attracted to the area because it is a medium sized city in California and hoped that the large economy would foster some form of employment. Many community members concur with these narratives and agree that the transient homeless in the area need employment the most. A few local landowners discuss how the homeless population has increased over time. The new downtown expansion projects be conducted could be contributing to an influx of transient homeless to the area seeking employment. Also, both business employees and owners discuss the need for the homeless to find employment. These community members both work on a daily basis and understand the value of gainful employment in
order to survive in society, and therefore believe that finding work would assist the homeless in the area the most. Easier access to employment opportunities in certain regions would greatly benefit many impoverished refugees who travel from region to region in search of work. Much like the “hobo” of the late 19th century and early 20th century, many transient homeless refugees travel in search of employment depending on the seasons and work available (Sheil 2004). It does not appear that the transient homeless individuals sampled traveled to Northern California because they knew it was a hub for jobs, but more because they knew that their previous location was not working in terms of employment. They also knew that the city is a medium sized town in Northern California and that there may be a possibility of finding more work in a large economy, like California. These narratives do not necessarily indicate that transient homeless migrate in search of job services, like the magnet myth would entail, but instead sought an area with a larger economy than their previous location.

Likewise, a few business employees and owners discuss how the transient homeless in the area need support in the form of a job or some sort of income. Both groups of community members value working for a paycheck, which informs their opinion on what would assist the homeless the most. Because both the transient homeless and community members agree that employment is important for survival, more funds need to be allocated to promoting business in areas with high concentrations of impoverished groups. There also needs to be a shift in framework pertaining to the stigmatization of homeless individuals, to enable easier access to various employment opportunities.
Almost half of transient homeless individuals mention that plans fell apart or something did not go according to plan, and therefore found themselves in Northern California with no other place to go. Some mentioned that they ran out of funds while traveling and effectively found themselves stranded without a means of continuing to their destination city or town. These narratives contradict the magnet myth of social services, and tend to argue that individuals did not intend on being in the region, but instead found themselves here without a means of traveling further. Some business employees argue that homeless individuals need spending money to support themselves. With spending money, these transient homeless individuals would have the ability to travel to their destination city or town without becoming stranded in the area. However, according to the National Law Center of Homelessness and Poverty, the number of cities with outright bans of panhandling increased by 25 percent between 2011 and 2014, while the number of cities with restrictions on begging in specified public places, such as near banks or schools, rose by 20 percent (Wiltz 2015). It is unfortunate that many homeless individuals are prohibited from asking for money from willing citizens in order to keep themselves alive. Because this vulnerable population is so heavily stigmatized, they are stripped of the freedoms that a typical citizen would have when asking for money from a fellow citizen. These laws may be preventing some transient homeless from being able to travel to their destination and unintentionally costing local governments more than anticipated in services and supports.
Also, various community members agree that the homeless need somebody to care about their situation and their vulnerable state. Many transient homeless individuals sampled moved from their previous city or town because they had experienced a sudden loss/significant life event. Some mentioned a sudden loss of a loved one, a relationship, and/or a job, while others discussed a change of status, like going from married to divorced. Emotional support can be especially helpful for transient homeless individuals who had experienced a loss of a loved one or a relationship. These events make it difficult to cope with their vulnerable situation without personal relationships. These significant life events can cause many transient homeless individuals to question their place in the previous location and try to seek a change.

Some transient homeless respondents had traveled because of family in the region. A few mention that they were invited by family to come stay with them, while others discuss how they moved to the area in hopes that they would be able to connect with family. Many community members agree that the homeless need emotional support from others. This finding is a testament to the empathy that many community members share pertaining to the homeless in the area. These community member groups understand that family can play a significant role in filling this void. However, this finding from community members does not address how they would personally address the homeless issue. These community members agree that family needs to assist the homeless in the area, as opposed to the larger community taking ownership. They are ridding themselves of owning the homelessness issue in their own community, and instead insist on passing it off to family or various organizations. Also, this finding
contradicts the magnet myth of social services, with many transient homeless knowing
the area because of their familial connections, as opposed to what services are offered to
the poor.

Many of these individuals did not come to the area because they knew that the
region was rich in resources for the poor, but more likely traveled because they knew that
they just needed a change. The River District area has a bus depot, where the ease of
access and the price of travel are cheaper than most other forms (i.e., plane, train, etc.).
Many transient homeless individuals may have not made a rational decision to move
because of the city and what it had to offer, but more by happenstance, and just needed a
new place to go that is far away from their previous city or town. Future research on
transient homelessness in a different city or state without a bus depot and services nearby
would be useful to expand the literature in the field of homeless migration and urban
sociology. All groups, especially managers and employees constantly interact with the
homeless and tend to feel empathetically. They give narratives about how many
homeless individuals just fell down on their luck. It is easy for these employees and
managers to have compassion for the homeless because of their continuous interaction
with this population. These community members are also closer in terms of
socioeconomic status compared to the impoverished transient homeless individuals
sampled. With this connection, many employees and managers may find it easier to
empathize with the homeless compared to how business and landowners may feel about
the homeless in the River District.
Negative Perceptions/Aspects

A few transient homeless individuals interviewed discuss the negative aspects of the city. Some mention that the area is rough or scary, or that there are a lot of mentally ill individuals. Friends or acquaintances of respondents fostered many of these negative perceptions of the area. The lack of positive experiences shared by friends or acquaintances of the transient homeless individuals tend to inform the perceptions that this population has of the area.

However, only a few community members emphasize their negative attitudes toward this population. Some business owners believe that the homeless are violent or bad people. This may be the case because this group of community members has an interest in producing capital, and tend to view the homeless as detracting from this endeavor. A few motel employees believe that the homeless are scary people or that they feel unsafe around the homeless, but these community members are also making these assumptions based on how the guests to their motels perceive the homeless, and not necessarily according to how they perceive the homeless personally. Community members sharing negative sentiments toward the homeless contribute to the negative experiences that many homeless individuals may have of the area. There is a disconnect between community members and the transient homeless in the River District. The homeless tend to be perceived negatively by some community members and a few transient homeless do not enjoy being in the area as well. When community members have negative attitudes toward the homeless, the homeless will also have negative feelings toward the area. There needs to be better communication between the homeless
and community members. The purpose of the study was to bridge this gap between these groups and to create a sociological dialogue of the “conversation that never happens.”

Some business owners have negative perceptions of the homeless depending on the context in which they are speaking, while other business owners tend to only have positive perceptions of the homeless. There are inconsistencies in how certain community members perceive the homeless, but what remains consistent across all narratives is the lack of ownership of this issue. Many community members accept the homeless as part of the River District community, almost as a part of the scenery, but few actually discuss how they would assist the homeless. There needs to be a shift in paradigm surrounding the homeless, and not just by local and state levels, but at a broader societal level. Without federal acknowledgement of the homeless issue, there will continue to be “magnet” cities and states throughout the country where many homeless will decide to migrate to in order to access services and supports. A change in societal framework surrounding the homeless can assist in dealing with this issue.

**Not Knowing Much**

A majority of transient homeless individuals interviewed knew little about the city before arriving. It is evident that many of these transient homeless individuals’ plans to travel were not highly calculated or well thought out. Many just knew that something was not working in their previous location and decided to move in search of new opportunities. Many of the transient homeless individuals sampled are applying survival strategies. Their search for another location may foster confusion amongst the general population because of a lack of rationality (i.e., a solid “plan”). This lack of knowledge
of the area before arriving tends to contradict the magnet myth of social services. Due to the ease of travel through bus depots in different cities around the country and the prime location of services nearby for the current study, many transient homeless individuals found themselves in the River District with services nearby, and for many, saw little motivation to leave. Both community members and the transient homeless sampled understand that there is an abundance of services in the area, which cultivates a niche for many homeless individuals. However, a majority of transient homeless individuals did not travel specifically because services were available in the River District, but instead discovered an eco-system that aids impoverished groups in navigating homelessness. With additional funding toward homeless programs, many transient homeless may find a way to climb their way out of homelessness within their own home city or town.

It appears that many community members acknowledge the issues that many homeless individuals face, and some even address the typologies mentioned throughout the literature. However, there is still a lack of acceptance of this vulnerable population into their own communities, and only an acknowledgement of their vulnerability. Many do not feel the need to support the homeless in the form of giving time or money, and instead view their situation objectively, as opposed to subjectively. There is a need for increased accountability of the issue of the homelessness. All community members in the River District area acknowledge the homeless, but few actually discuss how they are taking action to personally assist the homeless. These community members mention that the homeless are part of their community, but, however, they do not treat them as one of their own community members. All members of society need to offer help to assist the
homeless in climbing their way out of this vulnerable state. A societal shift in paradigm is necessary for homelessness to be properly addressed.
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