ABSTRACT

RACE, GENDER, AND THE STIGMA OF HOMELESSNESS

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This study examines how Americans view the homeless and how their perceptions are influenced by the race and gender of homeless individuals. It seeks to replicate and extend the research of Phelan, Link, Moore, and Stueve and uses their findings as a point of departure. Phelan et al. established twenty years ago that the homeless label imposes a stigma that induces the public to distance themselves from those to whom it is applied. However, Phelan and colleagues did not examine the effects of the race or gender of homeless persons on social distance. Drawing upon attribution theory and using data from experimental vignettes administered to a sample of public university students, this study is the first to examine the relationship between the race and gender of homeless persons and the propensity of subjects to avoid them. Intervening variables measuring how blameworthy and dangerous subjects find the homeless to be are also assessed to determine whether these factors mediate the effects of race and gender on social distance. Results indicate that the race of homeless persons is associated with perceived dangerousness but not with blame or social distance. Furthermore, subjects’ desire for social distance from homeless persons is partially explained by perceived blameworthiness and dangerousness.
RACE, GENDER, AND THE STIGMA OF HOMELESSNESS

BY

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

How do Americans view the homeless, and how are these perceptions influenced by the race and gender of homeless individuals? To answer these questions, this study seeks to replicate and extend the research of Phelan et al. (1997) and uses their findings as a point of departure. Phelan and colleagues established twenty years ago that the homeless label imposes a stigma that induces the public to distance themselves from those to whom it is applied. However, Phelan et al. did not examine the effects of the race or gender of homeless persons on social distance. Using data from experimental vignettes administered to a sample of public university students, this study is the first to examine the relationship between the race and gender of homeless persons and the propensity of subjects to avoid them. Given the increasing proportions of African-Americans and women among the homeless since the 1980s, a better understanding of how this stigmatization varies by race and gender is needed (Gowan 2010; Johnson 2010; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004). Drawing upon attribution theory and research, intervening variables measuring how blameworthy and dangerous subjects find the homeless to be are also assessed to determine whether these factors mediate the effects of race and gender on social distance. It is important to understand the mechanisms underlying public attitudes toward the homeless because they help shape government policy formulations and impact the self-conceptions of homeless persons (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010; Toro et al. 2007).
Homelessness in the United States

Disagreement and ambiguity persist among experts and government officials as to how homelessness should be defined (Jencks 1994; Lee et al. 2010; Rossi 1989). Issues such as whether individuals living in residential treatment facilities, transitional housing, and domestic violence shelters should be counted among the homeless have not been settled definitively. Many researchers have followed Rossi (1989) in defining the homeless as a subcategory of the poor who do not have “customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling” (p. 10). For Rossi, conventional dwellings include homes, apartments, mobile homes, single-room-occupancy hotels, and boarding houses. The current HUD definition consists of four categories: “people who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided if they were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation before entering the institution” (NAEH 2012:1). Neither of these definitions includes persons living doubled up with others or the residents of hospitals, prisons, or jails.

After declining in the decades following World War II, homelessness increased dramatically in the U.S. throughout the 1980s (Burt 1991; Jencks 1994; Rossi 1989; Snow and Anderson 1993). Efforts to address the issue initially focused primarily on the provision of emergency shelter (Burt et al. 2001; Gowan 2010). Millions of taxpayer dollars were spent and thousands of shelters were built without reducing homelessness, which prompted the Clinton administration to introduce the Continuum of Care initiative in 1994 (Culhane and Metraux 2008; Herring and Lutz 2015; Lyon-Callo 2008). Rather than simply offering “no-questions-asked” overnight accommodations, homeless assistance providers shifted their focus to rendering
the homeless “housing ready” through the provision of physical and mental health treatment, employment assistance, and other services.

With the lack of success of the Continuum of Care initiative, homelessness became a taken-for-granted aspect of American life. Advocates responded by advancing the “housing first” movement in the early 2000s as part of an effort to end chronic homelessness through the provision of permanent supportive housing (Culhane and Metraux 2008; Gowan 2010). Recent decreases in the homeless population have been attributed in part to the use of housing first models, which seek to provide the chronically homeless with stable housing rapidly rather than waiting until they have been rendered housing ready (Hopper 2012; Lee et al. 2010). The annual point-in-time count conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which requires assistance providers to perform a single-day count of local homeless populations as part of their applications for federal funding, was 647,258 as of 2007 (U. S. HUD 2015b). This number had fallen 12.75% to 564,708 by the time of the 2015 count. Alternative counting methods that examine administrative databases indicated that 1.49 million Americans utilized shelters and transitional housing in 2014 (Culhane et al. 1994; U.S. HUD 2014). This number represented a decrease of approximately 6.88% since 2008 (Lee et al. 2010).

Despite the successes attributed to the supportive housing movement, the homeless continue to face stigmatization (Phelan et al. 1997; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004; Stuart 2016). Although supportive housing does provide security and a sense of well-being, it could also be seen as a containment strategy that does not offer social inclusion and can isolate recipients (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Hopper 2012; Padgett 2007). American responses to homelessness, including the supportive housing movement, could be thought of as efforts to
finally provide an adequate level of community-based treatment to the mentally ill. Persons with severe mental disorders are now less likely to be cared for in psychiatric hospitals as a result of deinstitutionalization and account for a substantial portion of the homeless population (Jencks 1994; Lippert and Lee 2015; Markowitz 2006; Mechanic and Rochefort 1990; Rossi 1989). At least 30 to 40% of homeless persons suffer from psychiatric disorders, which commonly include depression, schizophrenia, and suicidal ideation (Bassuk and Beardslee 2014; Fitzpatrick et al. 2007; Folsom and Jeste 2002; Lippert and Lee 2015). Including substance-related disorders, which frequently co-occur with and exacerbate mental illnesses, this figure is likely closer to 75% (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Lee et al. 2010; Markowitz 2011; Rossi 1989).

Homeless Demography

Although the homeless of the 1980s were younger in comparison to their predecessors from earlier eras, the average age of homeless single adults has increased over the last three decades (Brown et al. 2016; Rossi 1989; Snow and Anderson 1993). This is likely the result of a cohort effect among individuals born during the second half of the baby boom generation (1954-1967) who have maintained an elevated rate of homelessness as they have aged (Culhane et al. 2013). There is also evidence that homelessness is increasing among young single adults who face high rates of unemployment. Administrative data provided by HUD in 2014 indicated that 34.2% of shelter residents were aged 31 to 50, while 22.8% were 18 to 30, 17% were 51 to 61, and 22.3% were children (U.S. HUD 2014). As a result of the assistance provided by the Social Security program and an average life expectancy of just 64 years among homeless single adults,
only 3.8% of persons residing in homeless shelters were aged 62 or older in 2014 (Culhane et al. 2013; U.S. HUD 2014).

The homeless population that has emerged since the early 1980s has included a considerably higher percentage of women, children, and racial/ethnic minorities (particularly African-Americans) than was the case in earlier eras (Burt et al. 2001; DeWard and Moe 2010; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004). Although there were only a handful of women among the homeless during the 1960s, their share of the homeless population had increased to 21% by the mid-1980s (Rossi 1989). In 2015, HUD estimated that 39.7% of homeless individuals were women (U.S. HUD 2015a). While most homeless single adults are men, homeless families are primarily headed by single women with young children (Culhane et al. 2013). Women accounted for 78.4% of sheltered adults heading families with children in 2014 (U.S. HUD 2014).

The proportion of individuals who self-identify as Latino (i.e., those who are ethnically categorized by HUD and other federal agencies as Hispanic and not White) among the homeless population has increased along with their share of the total U.S. population (Conroy and Heer 2003). Latinos made up 15.8% of the sheltered homeless population and 17.1% of the total U.S. population in 2014 and were thus underrepresented slightly among the sheltered homeless (U.S. HUD 2014). Self-identified non-Hispanic Whites are also underrepresented among the homeless population, although much more appreciably, as they accounted for 62.4% of the total U.S. population and only 40.1% of the sheltered homeless in 2014. Conversely, African-Americans have been overrepresented among the homeless population since the 1980s (Culhane and Metraux 1999; Johnson 2010; Rossi 1989). Persons self-identifying as African-American
comprised 12.6% of the total U.S. population in 2014 and 40.6% of the sheltered homeless population (U.S. HUD 2014).

Public Attitudes Toward the Homeless

Public attitudes toward poor people in general have been found to be consistently negative (Lee, Jones, and Lewis 1990; Phelan et al. 1997). The public are inclined to blame the poor for their plight and to emphasize individual-level characteristics including immorality and a lack of thrift, effort, or ability as the causes of poverty. Attitudes toward public assistance for the poor in general are more ambiguous. People would like the government to help disadvantaged groups but perceive the social welfare system to be inefficient and ineffective. Greater support is expressed for the notion of assisting the poor than for definitive policies that would actualize these sentiments.

Several studies have found that the public may have a more nuanced understanding of homelessness than of poverty in general (Lee et al. 1990; Lee, Link, and Toro 1991; Toro et al. 2007). The public recognizes multiple causes of homelessness but tends to emphasize structural-level factors and bad luck over individual-level shortcomings. Although Americans are less compassionate toward the homeless than Europeans, they still regard homelessness as a serious problem and a majority would be willing to pay more in taxes in order to address the issue. This discrepancy in attitudes toward the homeless compared to poor people in general may be the result of a methodological artifact. Concentrating on the homeless as a defined category may make them seem more human and thus more difficult to blame for their circumstances. Indeed, studies examining the effect of familiarity on attitudes toward the homeless have found that
exposure to homeless individuals tends to make them seem more real and less of a vague category of persons, thereby diminishing stereotypes and increasing tolerance (Lee, Farrell, and Link 2004).

In contrast to these studies, Phelan et al. (1997) pointed out a number of aspects intrinsic to homelessness that may make it more stigmatizing than poverty in general, including the visibility, disruptiveness, and unaesthetic appearance of homeless individuals and the association of homelessness with other stigmatizing conditions such as mental illness and substance abuse.

To assess stigmatizing attitudes toward the homeless, Phelan et al. (1997) examined how much blame and perceived dangerousness their subjects attributed to persons depicted as experiencing either homelessness or poverty caused by either a physical disability or mental illness. They also examined how likely their subjects would be to support government assistance for and desire social distance from their vignette characters. They found that homelessness increased social distance but did not have a significant effect on their other outcome measures. Their findings indicated that the homeless label was as stigmatizing as the mental illness label, but there were no statistically significant interactions between the two. Therefore, they found no evidence that the stigmatizing qualities of homelessness were derived from its association with mental illness. Unlike homelessness, mental illness increased perceived dangerousness and support for government assistance significantly.

Subjects may have reacted sympathetically to the man portrayed in the vignette employed by Phelan et al. (1997) because he was said to be dedicated to finding work and negative stereotypes of the poor were excluded to isolate the stigmatizing effects of homelessness and mental illness. The fact that subjects were asked to respond to an individual rather than a group
may have made them more likely to react positively as well because, as Lee et al. (1990) pointed out, it may be more difficult to blame an individual than an indistinctly defined group. Phelan et al. (1997) did not find that homelessness is less stigmatizing than poverty in general. They inferred from their findings that the public would like to assist the homeless but also perceives them as having negative and undesirable characteristics. They concluded that although the public tend to perceive homelessness as being caused by structural-level factors, they also believe that homeless individuals should be avoided or excluded.

Researchers have found that respondent characteristics including race, gender, education level, and political affiliation significantly influence beliefs about homelessness and its causes (Lee et al. 1990; Lee et al. 1991; Toro et al. 2007). Whites, males, and political conservatives are more likely to believe in individual-level causes and to endorse punitive policies. Higher levels of education increase support for tolerance but reduce support for government assistance. People who believe homelessness is caused by individual-level factors are less likely to consider it to be an urgent issue and more likely to favor punitive approaches to addressing the problem over increased government assistance. Content analyses have shown that media coverage of the homelessness issue has grown harsher since the 1980s (Lee et al. 2010). Stories that focus on the deviance of the homeless, the disorder they create, and the steps that should be taken to manage them are now more commonplace.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is a well-established approach to explaining how stigmatizing attitudes produce discriminatory responses that provides a useful framework for an analysis of
homelessness stigma (Corrigan et al. 2003; Weiner, Perry and Magnusson 1988). Making an attribution is an imprecise process that involves intuitions of unobservable “intangibles” such as “character, motive, belief, desire, and intention” from “that which is, in fact, observable: other people’s words and deeds” (Gilbert and Mallone 1995:21). Attribution theory holds that the perceived causes of stigma-inducing traits or behaviors dictate responses to stigmatized individuals (Weiner et al. 1988). When the stigmatizing characteristics of individuals are regarded as having been caused by external, environmental factors beyond their control, they are viewed as less blameworthy than when their stigmatizing traits or behaviors are considered to have an internal, personal cause. Studies have demonstrated that internal attributions of responsibility for stigma-inducing characteristics increase the likelihood of discriminatory responses such as withholding assistance, social distancing, and favoring coercive treatments or punishment (Corrigan et al. 2003; Markowitz and Watson 2015).

Corrigan et al. (2003) provided a conceptual model of the attributional process in public discrimination toward persons with mental illness. They found that the effects of information provided to subjects about the controllability of the cause of a person’s mental illness were mediated by the responsibility beliefs and emotional reactions of subjects. Persons who were portrayed as being in control of the cause of their condition were more likely to be regarded as blameworthy, which tended to induce emotional reactions of anger and fear among subjects leading to discriminatory responses. Alternatively, persons whose conditions were depicted as being beyond their control were seen as less blameworthy and elicited sympathy from subjects leading to more helpful responses. Subjects who were more familiar with mental illness felt more pity and less anger and fear toward persons with psychiatric disorders and were thus less
likely to avoid them and more likely to offer them assistance. Corrigan et al. (2003) also found support for the danger appraisal hypothesis. The effects of perceived dangerousness on the behavioral responses of subjects were driven largely by the emotional reaction of fear and tended to induce discriminatory responses without mediating responsibility attributions.

Another aspect of the attributional process that presents difficulties to researchers using attribution theory and is pertinent to the stigmatization of the homeless is “the fundamental attribution error” or correspondence bias (Gilbert and Mallone 1995; Phelan et al. 1997). This common cognitive bias leads people to consistently mistake the situationally driven behaviors of others as indicative of distinctive and lasting personal dispositions. Uninformed members of the public may thus be inclined to perceive situationally dictated behaviors of homeless individuals as representative of their enduring dispositions, which likely encourages them to blame the homeless for their misfortune, thereby exacerbating the stigma of the homeless label.

Attribution theory is an appropriate framework for assessing the causal explanations of the public regarding homelessness in consideration of the findings of researchers who examined public attitudes toward the homeless (Lee et al. 1990; Lee et al. 1991; Toro et al. 2007). Consistent with the precepts of attribution theory, they found that respondents who believe homelessness is caused by individual rather than structural factors are less likely to consider it to be an urgent issue and more likely to favor punitive approaches to addressing the problem over increased government assistance. Internal or external attributions of blame regarding the perceived causes of homelessness therefore help dictate whether responses will be punitive or sympathetic (Corrigan et al. 2003; Weiner et al. 1988).
Homelessness Stigma, Racism, and Gender-Based Discrimination

Erving Goffman (1963:3) contended that individuals who possess stigmatizing attributes are “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” Phelan et al. (1997:334) inferred from the results of their experimental vignette that “homelessness is stigmatized more severely than poverty and, generally, more severely than mental illness.” An important aspect of homelessness stigma is social distancing, which Corrigan et al. (2003:164) defined as “the desire to not interact with people” who are stigmatized. For their part, Phelan et al. (1997:328) conceived of social distancing in terms of “social rejection,” which they believed “lies at the heart of stigmatization,” particularly of the homeless, who are often subjected to antivagrancy laws that seek to remove them from prominent areas (Herring and Lutz 2015; Snow and Anderson 1993; Stuart 2016). These “quality of life” ordinances are designed to limit the visibility and disruptiveness of the homeless population, which are among the factors that add to the intensity of their stigmatization (Phelan et al. 1997). The homeless are also frequently unable to properly clean and groom themselves, which may render them aesthetically unappealing. Furthermore, homelessness may be associated with other stigmatizing conditions such as mental illness and substance abuse, and negative public attitudes toward these groups may generalize to homeless individuals. Consequently, ethnographic researchers have documented numerous strategies, both verbal and performative, used by homeless persons to disavow or attenuate the effects of the homeless label, which they associate with “dirtiness and moral depravity” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Perry 2012:444; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004; Snow and Anderson 1987).
Goffman (1963:4) considered race to be among the “tribal stigmas” or those “that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family.” Stigma and discrimination are closely linked and discrimination is the functional rationale behind the application of stigma (Phelan, Link, and Dovidio 2008). Systemic racism, which originated with the founding of the United States as a consequence of the slave economy, has been reproduced over time by the hegemony of Whites through which beliefs and stereotypes that perpetuate the oppression of Blacks are made to seem natural and legitimate (Crenshaw 1995; Feagin 1999; Phelan and Link 2015). The social meanings associated with race are constructed and transformed through the socio-historical process of racial formation, which involves the social construction of racial projects that seek to reallocate resources among racial groups through political struggle (Omi and Winant 2014). Those who seek to construct race in a way that denies its continuing significance perpetuate systemic racism. This grants continued dominance over governmental and commercial institutions to Whites and affords them greater access to psychological and socioeconomic resources. Systemic racism is reflected in processes such as mass incarceration, which has disproportionately marked Black men with criminal records, and residential segregation, which has contributed to concentrating African-Americans in socially isolated neighborhoods where poverty and unemployment are endemic (Massey and Denton 2011; Pager 2003; Wilson 2011).

Gender-based discrimination is created and maintained by means of the taken-for-granted process of gender construction (Lorber 2011). Tasks are allocated differentially based on gender status within both families and the formal economy and men are thought of as providers while women are considered to be caregivers. Gender construction therefore produces the expectation
that adult men should be able to support themselves (Gowan 2010; Rossi 1989; Snow and Anderson 1993). Men are also more likely than women to be seen as accountable for their own misfortune and to be perceived as dangerous to others. Impoverished and impaired men may thus be viewed less sympathetically by the public and they are given less access to both charity and welfare assistance in comparison to their female counterparts. In summary, the potent stigma associated with homelessness likely contributes to producing discrimination against homeless individuals, including social distancing, which limits their opportunities to exit homelessness. For African-American and male homeless persons, racial and gender construction generate additional beliefs and stereotypes that work alongside homelessness stigma to further exacerbate the difficulties they face.

Model and Hypotheses

A conceptual model of the effects of race and gender on social distance from homeless persons is presented in Figure 1. This figure shows that the effects of race and gender on social distance are expected to be partially mediated by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness. This model is consistent with prior attribution theory and research, qualitative fieldwork among the homeless, and studies that examined the relationship between race, gender, blame, perceived dangerousness, and social distance in the context of mental illness stigma. James Kluegel (1990) found that a majority of White Americans attribute the Black-White gap in socioeconomic status to internal causes such as a lack of drive and motivation among poor Blacks. The precepts of attribution theory therefore indicate that subjects are more likely to blame homeless African-Americans for their economic misfortune. Whaley and Link (1998)
also found that Whites who believe a higher proportion of the homeless and mentally ill are Black are more likely to affirm racially relevant negative stereotypes about the homeless and to perceive the homeless as dangerous. Furthermore, ethnographic investigations have demonstrated that, along with the stigma of homelessness, racial discrimination presents homeless African-Americans with additional barriers to exiting the streets and shelters (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Duneier and Carter 1999; Gowan 2010).

Figure 1: Race and gender, attributions, and response model.

Qualitative researchers have also observed that, despite their frequent disadvantages and impairments, homeless men are given less access to supportive services in comparison to homeless women (Gowan 2010; Snow and Anderson 1993). This relative scarcity of public sympathy and support for homeless men reflects gendered expectations that adult men should be able to provide for themselves. Homeless men are thus more often seen as responsible for their own difficulties and they are more likely to be perceived as dangerous to others. Both male and female subjects have been found to have greater social tolerance for mentally ill females in comparison to their male counterparts, and this relative lack of social tolerance for men is explained in part by the fact that they are considered to be more dangerous than women (Schnittker 2000). Regarding familiarity with homelessness, researchers have demonstrated that subjects who have greater levels of contact with the homeless are more sympathetic toward
them, consider them to be less dangerous, and are more likely to attribute homelessness to structural rather than individual-level causes (Lee et al. 2004). I therefore propose the following hypotheses:

- **H₁**: Subjects will desire greater social distance from homeless persons they perceive to be African-American than those they identify as White.
- **H₂**: Subjects will desire greater social distance from homeless persons they perceive to be male in comparison to those they identify as female.
- **H₃**: Subjects who believe homeless persons are to blame for their situation will be more likely to favor social distance.
- **H₄**: Perceived dangerousness will increase subjects’ preference for social distance.
- **H₅**: The effects of race and gender on social distance will be partially mediated by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness.

Furthermore, I will examine the possibility that subjects who have greater familiarity with homelessness will perceive lower levels of dangerousness, view homeless persons as less blameworthy, and be less inclined to prefer social distance.
METHODS

The decision to use a particular method of inquiry is best determined by the specific research question being asked (Lamont and Swidler 2014). This study is not attempting to examine homelessness stigma as it occurs naturally but is assessing the abstract theoretical processes that apply to homelessness stigma while isolating them from other processes that could make them difficult to discern (Zelditch 1969). Experimental vignettes have an advantage over other methods in eliciting responses from subjects concerning normative attitudes because they can be used to isolate causal effects within situations while randomizing extraneous variables (Finch 1987). Experimental vignettes question subjects in a contextualized manner about distinct circumstances, acknowledging that meanings may be situational.

While most studies examine attitudes toward the homeless as a group, using an experimental vignette elicits responses to a particular person. As Lee et al. (1990) pointed out, focusing on the homeless as individuals makes them seem less indistinct, more human, and consequently more difficult to blame for their misfortune, which likely mitigates the stigma imposed upon the homeless vignette characters (Phelan et al. 1997). Yet, this may be balanced out by the fundamental attribution error, which could intensify the stigma directed at the vignette characters because it leads people to believe that situationally driven behaviors are indicative of persistent dispositions (Gilbert and Mallone 1995). Nevertheless, I am primarily interested in the covariance of the race and gender of homeless persons and the outcome variables regardless of these considerations.
Factorial experiments, such as the one employed in this study, consist of two or more variables with multiple levels (Campbell and Stanley 1971; Wilson, Aronson, and Carlsmith 2010). In this case, a 2 x 2 design was used as there were two independent variables (race and gender) which each had two levels. The levels of the race variable were African-American and White, while the levels of the gender variable were male and female. There were thus a total of four experimental conditions. The random assignment of subjects to experimental conditions statistically homogenized the treatment groups and assisted in controlling for extraneous variables that could have influenced the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

Sample

This study’s subjects were drawn from the student body of a large, public Midwestern university. Subjects were all enrolled in sociology classes during the Spring 2017 semester. The survey was prepared and administered online using Qualtrics software. Utilizing an online survey was beneficial to conducting the experimental vignette because it allowed for multiple versions of the survey to be randomly presented to subjects. Subjects were contacted by professors who were provided with an email script that they could use to recruit their students. Before beginning the survey, subjects were asked to complete a separate questionnaire that collected their names, course numbers, and the names of their professors. This information was later sent to professors, which allowed them to provide their students with extra course credit as a reward for participating. Collecting this information by means of a separate questionnaire allowed subjects to remain anonymous. Participation was voluntary, and subjects were assured that refusal to participate would not have negative consequences. After excluding 10 participants
who did not complete the survey, the sample consisted of 195 subjects in total, with 46 assigned to the Black female condition, 52 to the Black male condition, 46 to the White female condition, and 51 to the White male condition.

Experimental Vignettes

Subjects were first asked to read the following vignette describing a homeless person with a lifelong history of poverty, replicated from Phelan et al. (1997). They depicted a 30-year-old single White man because these attributes were typical of the chronically homeless. Following the example of Phelan and colleagues, the person was portrayed in a relatively positive light and negative stereotypes of the poor were omitted to isolate the effects of race and gender. The italicized portions were varied and the four distinct names were included to create the four experimental conditions:

______ is a 30 year old single woman/man. _She/He_ is currently homeless and lives in shelters for homeless people. _____ has always been a poor woman/man, having come from a large family that had to get along with a very small income. _She/He_ quit school before finishing high school in order to get a job at a fast food restaurant. Since then, _she/he_ has held a number of low paying jobs but has been unemployed for over a year. _____ feels unhappy about her/his current life circumstances. _She/He_ is eager to get a job and has a realistic sense of the kind of work she/he can do. (Phelan et al. 1997:329)

The effects of the race and gender of the homeless individuals depicted in the vignettes were assessed by manipulating their names. Many experimental studies have used names to manipulate race and gender (Abascal 2015; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll, Bernard, and Paik 2011). Because subjects are strongly pressured to respond in socially desirable ways to questions involving race and gender, stimuli that examine these variables must be both implicit and deniable in order to be valid. As indicators of race and gender, names have the benefit of
being discreet and tacit signals of racial and gender-based distinctions. Despite their subtlety, names are also unequivocal indicators of race and gender. In fact, prior studies have found that more than 80% of subjects correctly classify distinctive African-American and White names.

Maria Abascal (2015) drew her names from those used by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) and from the New York City Bureau of Vital Statistics 2011 Baby Names Report. She then pretested her names using an online experimental survey. She selected names that were least strongly associated with class and most strongly associated with race to limit class-based bias in her results. She found that more than 81% of her subjects had correctly identified her names. I chose African-American and White names Abascal used, selecting one of her names for each of the four race and gender conditions. Unlike Abascal, I used only first names so as not to overcomplicate the experiment design. The following names were used: Keisha (Black female), Jermaine (Black male), Carrie (White female), and Greg (White male).

Response Measures

After reading the vignette, subjects were administered 12 items measuring the dependent variable (social distance) and the intervening variables (blame and perceived dangerousness). Coded responses for the four sets of items used to examine each variable were added together and then averaged to form scales ranging from 1 to 4. The italicized portions were varied and the appropriate names were included to correspond with the vignettes.
Social Distance

Social distance was assessed using the following two items replicated from Phelan et al. (1997): “How willing would you be to have _____ live in your community,” “to have _____ as a close friend?” Two additional items replicated from Markowitz and Engelman (2016) were also used: “How willing would you be to spend an evening socializing with _____,” “to work closely with _____ at your job?” Response options for each of these items were “definitely willing,” “probably willing,” “probably unwilling,” and “definitely unwilling.” Each item was coded from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating greater social distance. Preliminary factor analysis indicated that the second item, which asked if respondents would be willing to have the vignette character as a close friend, did not load well on any factor and was not well correlated with the other three social distance items. This item was therefore removed from the scale, which increased the alpha reliability coefficient for the social distance items from .563 to .704.

Blame

To assess the level of blame subjects attributed to the persons depicted in the vignettes, the following item replicated from Phelan et al. (1997) was used: “Do you think _____ is to blame for her/his current situation?” Three additional questions drawn from Markowitz and Watson (2015) were also asked: “Do you think _____ is responsible for her/his current situation,” “this situation is not really _____’s fault,” “_____ is not to blame for this situation?” Response options for these four items were “definitely yes,” “probably yes,” “probably no,” and “definitely no.” They were coded from 1 to 4, with the first two being reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater blame. The alpha coefficient for the four blame items was .679.
Perceived Dangerousness

To examine perceived dangerousness, subjects were administered the following two questions replicated from Phelan et al. (1997): “Do you think _____ would be dangerous to be around,” “should be watched closely by the local police?” Two items drawn from Markowitz and Watson (2015) were also used: “Would you be afraid of _____,” “Do you think _____ would be a danger to the community?” Response options for these four items were “definitely yes,” “probably yes,” “probably no,” and “definitely no.” These items were reverse coded from 1 to 4 so that higher scores indicated greater perceived dangerousness. The four perceived dangerousness items had an alpha coefficient of .833.

Preliminary factor analysis indicated that factor loadings were greater than .707 for the social distance and perceived dangerousness items included in the scales and .458 for the blame items, supporting the validity of the measures used.

Additional Measures

The race experimental condition variable was coded 1 for White and 0 for Black, and the gender experimental condition variable was coded 1 for male and 0 for female. Familiarity with homelessness was assessed using the following seven items drawn from Corrigan et al. (2003): “Does your job involve providing services/treatment for homeless persons,” “Have you observed, in passing, a person you believe may have been homeless,” “Have you observed homeless persons on at least a weekly basis,” “Have you worked with a person who was homeless at your place of employment,” “Have you ever had a friend who was homeless,” “Do you have any relatives who have been homeless,” “Are you currently or have you ever been
Response options for these items were “yes” and “no.” They were coded 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no” and then summed to form a scale ranging from 0 to 7 (alpha = .491). The effects of social desirability were considered using a four-item short form version of the Crowne and Marlowe (1960) social desirability scale (alpha = .512).

Background questions were also included to collect demographic information on subjects’ age (coded in years), gender (male = 1, female = 0), race/ethnicity (White = 1, not White = 0), marital status (married = 1, not married = 0), political affiliation (liberal = 1, moderate = 2, conservative = 3), and residential environment (city = 1, suburb or rural/small town = 0). Subjects’ socioeconomic status was assessed based upon their parent’s highest level of education (1 = some high school, 2 = high school graduate, 3 = some college, 4 = college graduate, 5 = graduate degree).

Analysis Strategy

All data analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 23) software. A series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations were estimated to determine the main effects of the race and gender of the vignette characters on blame, perceived dangerousness, and social distance while including the background variables. First, the effects of race and gender on blame and perceived dangerousness were estimated in equations 1 and 2, respectively. It was expected that African-American race and male gender would exert positive effects on both blame and perceived dangerousness in these equations. Next, the effects of race and gender on social distance were estimated in equation 3. As predicted with my first and second hypotheses, it was expected that African-American race and male gender would increase social distance. In
equation 4, the effects of blame and perceived dangerousness were added to equation 3 to
determine whether attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness mediate the effects of race and gender on social distance.

Consistent with my third and fourth hypotheses, blame and perceived dangerousness were expected to have positive effects on social distance in equation 4. As predicted with my fifth hypothesis, it was also expected that the effects of race and gender on social distance would be partially mediated by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness. A Sobel-Goodman mediation test was performed and evidence for mediation would have been found if the effects in equations 1 through 3 were all significant in the predicted directions, blame and perceived dangerousness had significant unique effects on social distance in equation 4, and the effects of race and gender on social distance were reduced after including blame and perceived dangerousness in the model (Baron and Kenny 1986; IDRE 2016). The Sobel-Goodman test was performed to determine whether the independent variables influenced the dependent variable via the mediating variables. Familiarity and the social-demographic variables were included in equations 1 through 4 to examine their main effects on blame, perceived dangerousness, and social distance. Finally, interaction effects involving the vignette characters’ race and gender were examined to determine whether the effects of one of these independent variables vary as a function of the other.
RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the regression analysis can be found in Table 1. A correlation matrix of all these variables is also presented in the Appendix. As is apparent from the demographic characteristics shown in Table 1, the sample of public university students was young, racially and ethnically diverse, and predominantly female. Subjects’ average age was 21.7 years, 67% were female, 51.8% were White, 24.1% Black, 20% Latino, 2.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Native American, and .5% other. Also, consistent with the relative youth of the sample, only 3% of subjects were married. Subjects tended to be progressive in terms of their political affiliations (mean = 1.74) as 36.9% were liberal, 51.8% were moderate, and only 11.3% were conservative. A majority of subjects reported residing in the suburbs (52.8%) while 24.1% lived in rural areas and 23.1% were urbanites. The average level of education of subjects’ fathers (mean = 2.72) was between “high school graduate” and “some college.” In comparison, subjects’ mothers were slightly better educated, as their average level of education (mean = 3.00) was “some college.” Father’s education level was used as a measure of subjects’ socioeconomic status in the regression analysis. Estimating the series of equations using mother’s education level yielded only minor substantive differences and did not change the effects of the main variables.
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (N = 195)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race condition (White)</td>
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<td>.50</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gender condition (male)</td>
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<td>.50</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td><strong>Mediating Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Dangerousness</td>
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<td>.56</td>
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<td>Gender (male)</td>
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<td>Father's education (1-5)</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political affiliation (1-3)</td>
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<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential environment (city)</td>
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<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crown-Marlowe (social-desirability) scale</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Mean differs significantly from scale midpoint (p < .001).

*b Mean differs significantly from scale midpoint (p < .01).

To evaluate responses to the vignette characters, one-sample *t* tests were conducted on the blame, danger, and social desirability scale variables using the scale midpoints of 2.5 as test statistics. The means of all three variables differed significantly from their scale midpoints using two-tailed tests (blame: t = -2.61, *p* < .01; danger: t = -20.22, *p* < .001; social distance: t = -15.24, *p* < .001). Given that responses were below the scale midpoints for all three variables, subjects therefore generally did not perceive the vignette characters as blameworthy (mean = 2.40) or dangerous (mean = 1.70) and were not inclined toward social distance (mean = 1.85) in
relation to them. However, these results do demonstrate that subjects were, on average, more likely to view homeless persons as responsible for their impoverished circumstances than they were to perceive them as dangerous or to favor avoiding them.

Regression Analysis

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. First, the blame scale variable was regressed on the race and gender of the vignette characters while including familiarity, social desirability, and the background variables. The results of this equation show that, consistent with expectations, White race exerted a nonsignificant negative effect on blame. However, against expectations, male gender also had a nonsignificant negative effect on blame. Subjects were thus less likely to regard White and male vignette characters as responsible for their homelessness in comparison to their African-American and female counterparts.

Additionally, there were three statistically significant effects among the background variables. Compared to White subjects, their counterparts from other racial and ethnic groups were more likely to blame the vignette characters for their misfortune ($p < .01$). The Crowne-Marlowe scale was negatively associated with blame as well ($p < .05$), indicating that subjects who were inclined to provide socially desirable answers were less likely to state that they found the vignette characters blameworthy. On the other hand, political affiliation was positively associated with blame ($p < .05$). Conservative subjects were thus more likely to believe that the vignette characters were personally responsible for their homelessness.
Table 2

Effects of Race and Gender on Homelessness Stigma (N = 195)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Equation (1) Blame</th>
<th>Equation (2) Danger</th>
<th>Equation (3) Social Distance</th>
<th>Equation (4) Social Distance</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race condition (White)</td>
<td>-.077 (.076)</td>
<td>.189* (.078)</td>
<td>.138 (.084)</td>
<td>.082 (.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender condition (male)</td>
<td>-.049 (.076)</td>
<td>.128 (.078)</td>
<td>-.035 (.083)</td>
<td>-.073 (.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediating Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Dangerousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
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<td>.011 (.013)</td>
<td>-.004 (.014)</td>
<td>-.010 (.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>-.006 (.085)</td>
<td>.085 (.087)</td>
<td>.176 (.093)</td>
<td>.145 (.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (White)</td>
<td>-.288** (.088)</td>
<td>-.215* (.090)</td>
<td>-.304** (.097)</td>
<td>-.161 (.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education (1-5)</td>
<td>.010 (.034)</td>
<td>-.015 (.035)</td>
<td>.019 (.038)</td>
<td>.023 (.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-.063 (.260)</td>
<td>.061 (.266)</td>
<td>.345 (.286)</td>
<td>.335 (.258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political affiliation (1-3)</td>
<td>.162** (.062)</td>
<td>.145* (.064)</td>
<td>.138* (.069)</td>
<td>.049 (.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential environment (city)</td>
<td>.075 (.096)</td>
<td>-.054 (.098)</td>
<td>-.036 (.106)</td>
<td>-.032 (.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>-.015 (.031)</td>
<td>-.069* (.032)</td>
<td>-.091** (.034)</td>
<td>-.062* (.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowne-Marlowe (social-desirability) scale</td>
<td>-.073* (.031)</td>
<td>.024 (.032)</td>
<td>.023 (.034)</td>
<td>.029 (.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses.  
*p < .05; **p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

Next, the danger scale variable was regressed on the race and gender of the vignette characters while holding the background variables constant. Contrary to expectations, subjects
were significantly more likely to perceive White homeless persons as dangerous in comparison to African-American homeless persons \( (p < .05) \). Consistent with expectations, the male experimental condition was positively associated with perceived dangerousness. In fact, the effect approached but did not exceed conventional levels of significance \( (p < .10) \). Three background variables had statistically significant effects in this equation. Subjects who were more familiar with homelessness were less likely to perceive the vignette characters as dangerous \( (p < .05) \). In comparison to their White counterparts, subjects from other racial and ethnic groups were more likely to view homeless persons as dangerous \( (p < .05) \). Furthermore, political affiliation had a significant positive effect on perceived danger \( (p < .05) \), demonstrating that conservative subjects were more likely to view the vignette characters as dangerous.

The effects of the vignette characters’ race and gender on the social distance scale variable were then estimated in the third equation. Both White race and male gender exerted nonsignificant positive effects in this equation. Contrary to my first and second hypotheses, subjects therefore desired more social distance from White homeless persons and less social distance from male homeless persons in comparison to their African-American and female counterparts. Again, political affiliation exerted a statistically significant positive effect \( (p < .01) \), and subjects’ race (White) had a significant negative effect \( (p < .05) \). Familiarity was negatively associated with social distance as well \( (p < .01) \). Subjects who were more familiar with homelessness were thus less likely to favor distancing themselves from the vignette characters.

The blame and danger scale variables were then added to the third equation to examine whether they mediate the effects of the vignette characters’ race and gender on social distance.
Consistent with attribution theory and my third and fourth hypotheses, blame ($p < .01$) and perceived dangerousness ($p < .001$) both had significant positive effects in this equation. This indicates that subjects who blamed homeless persons for their misfortune and perceived them as dangerous were more likely to desire social distance from them. Additionally, the coefficient of multiple determination more than doubled, adding an additional 16% explained variance ($R^2 = .305$). This demonstrates that much more of the variance in social distance was explained after blame and perceived dangerousness were included in the model (Moore, McCabe, and Craig 2014). The borderline significant effect of the vignette characters’ race was reduced by 41% after including blame and perceived dangerousness in the model. Therefore, a portion of the effect of the race of homeless persons on social distance may be explained by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness.

The requirements for a Sobel-Goodman mediation test were not met concerning the effects of either the race or gender of the vignette characters on social distance (Baron and Kenny 1986; IDRE 2016). Contrary to my fifth hypothesis, I therefore did not find evidence to support the contention that the effects of race and gender on social distance were mediated by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness. Regarding the background variables, while the effect of subjects’ level of familiarity with homelessness ($p < .05$) remained statistically significant, this coefficient was reduced by 32% after blame and perceived dangerousness were included in the model. Additionally, the effects of subjects’ race (White) and political affiliation were reduced by 47% and 64%, respectively, and were no longer significant. The relationships between these background variables and social distance were thus partially explained by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness.
Interaction effects involving the race and gender of homeless persons were examined by regressing the blame, danger, and social distance scale variables on the race and gender condition variables, with and without an interaction product term. No statistically significant changes were observed in the coefficients of multiple determination when comparing the equations that did not include the interaction variable to those that did. Additionally, the effects of the interaction variable were not significant in any of these equations. Thus, the effects of the race and gender of homeless persons on the outcome variables did not vary significantly as a function of one another.
DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships between the race and gender of homeless persons and several important elements of the stigma imposed upon them: attributions of blame, perceived dangerousness, and social distancing. My findings show that much of the desire among subjects for social distance from homeless persons is explained by attributions about the cause of homelessness and perceptions of dangerousness. Hence, persons who consider the homeless to be personally responsible for their circumstances and perceive them as dangerous are much more likely to desire social distance from them. While these results were clear and consistent with prior studies using attribution theory as well as survey research examining public attitudes toward the homeless, this study’s findings concerning the role that race and gender play in homelessness stigma were more ambiguous (Gilbert and Malone 1995; Lee et al. 1990; Toro et al. 2007; Weiner et al. 1988).

Although subjects were significantly more likely to perceive White vignette characters as dangerous, and the White experimental condition exerted a nonsignificant positive effect on social distance, White race also had a nonsignificant negative effect on blame. The propensity of subjects to blame African-Americans for their homelessness more than their White counterparts is consistent with research indicating that Americans tend to attribute the Black-White gap in socioeconomic status to a lack of drive and motivation among poor Blacks (Kluegel 1990). Yet, despite this tendency to find White homeless persons less blameworthy, subjects were significantly more likely to perceive them as dangerous and desired greater social distance from
them. These results therefore parallel those of studies that found support for the danger appraisal hypothesis, which holds that the effects of perceived dangerousness on the stigmatizing responses of subjects are driven largely by the emotional reaction of fear and are unmediated by beliefs regarding personal responsibility (Corrigan et al. 2003). Nevertheless, these findings were unexpected given that they were largely inconsistent with the history of systemic racism in America and with the findings of ethnographic researchers who observed that racism presents African-Americans with additional barriers in their attempts to exit homelessness (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Crenshaw 1995; Duneier and Carter 1999; Gowan 2010; Omi and Winant 2014). Subjects may have been more likely to view White vignette characters as dangerous because whiteness is thought to be inconsistent with stereotypical perceptions of homeless persons. This may have led subjects to believe that the White vignette characters were more likely to be homeless as a result of individual-level causes that could be associated with increased perceived dangerousness such as substance abuse or mental illness rather than structural-level factors.

Concerning the effects of the gender of homeless persons, while the male experimental condition exerted a nonsignificant positive effect on perceived dangerousness, it also had nonsignificant negative effects on blame and social distance. The tendency of subjects to perceive homeless men as more dangerous than their female counterparts is consistent with research regarding the effect of gender on mental illness stigma, which found that men with psychiatric disorders are considered to be more dangerous than mentally ill women (Schnittker 2000). Contrary to these findings, however, higher levels of perceived dangerousness did not lead this study’s subjects to desire greater social distance from homeless men. Subjects were
instead less likely to blame homeless men and favor social distance from them in comparison to homeless women despite their propensity to perceive homeless men as more dangerous. These results were thus consistent with the precepts of attribution theory rather than the danger appraisal hypothesis and they contradict the general tendency of Americans to provide less sympathy and support for homeless men in comparison to their female counterparts (Corrigan et al. 2003; Gowan 2010; Rossi 1989; Snow and Anderson 1993). Subjects may have perceived homelessness as out of character for women because predominant stereotypes promote the notion that most homeless persons are men, which could have made subjects more likely to attribute homelessness among women to individual-level factors.

Several significant main effects were also found among this study’s background variables. Consistent with prior research concerning familiarity with stigmatized persons, including both the homeless and the mentally ill, subjects who had greater levels of contact with homeless individuals viewed the vignette characters as less blameworthy, perceived significantly lower levels of dangerousness, and were significantly less likely to prefer social distance (Lee et al. 2004; Markowitz and Engelman 2016). This study therefore provides further evidence that exposure to homeless individuals tends to render them more human and less of a vague category of persons, thereby diminishing stereotypes and increasing tolerance.

Consistent with prior research regarding the effect of subjects’ race on mental illness stigma, the findings of this study indicate that White subjects were significantly less likely than subjects from other racial and ethnic groups to perceive homeless persons as dangerous and desired significantly less social distance from them (Anglin, Link, and Phelan 2006; Rao, Feinglass, and Corrigan 2007). However, contrary to the findings of Anglin and colleagues,
whose results indicated that White subjects were more inclined to blame mentally ill persons for their violent behavior, White subjects in this study were significantly less likely to blame homeless persons for their misfortune in comparison to subjects from other racial and ethnic groups. The results of this study therefore also contradict those of previous survey research examining public attitudes toward the homeless, which found that White respondents were more likely to believe in internal causes of homelessness and endorse punitive responses to the problem (Lee et al. 1990; Lee et al. 1991; Toro et al. 2007). However, the findings of this study regarding the political affiliations of subjects were consistent with those of surveys that assessed public attitudes toward the homeless. Similar to the findings of these surveys, politically conservative subjects in this study showed a clear trend toward harsher reactions to homeless persons across all the dependent measures.

This study’s limitations include the distinctive sociodemographic characteristics of the public university students sampled, who were predominantly female, younger, and more racially and ethnically diverse in comparison to the general population. Additionally, as Sears (1986: 527) pointed out, there are many idiosyncrasies that distinguish university students from the general public, including “incompletely formulated senses of self, rather uncristallized sociopolitical attitudes, unusually strong cognitive skills, strong needs for peer approval, tendencies to be compliant to authority, [and] quite unstable group relationships.” The use of a college sample could help explain the unexpected results regarding the effect of homeless persons’ race on perceived dangerousness and social distance given that young, college-educated Whites have been found to be more racially tolerant than any other segment of the White population (Bonilla-Silva 2014). This high level of tolerance may have contributed to subjects’
lack of desire to blame and distance themselves from homeless men despite their tendency to perceive them as more dangerous than homeless women. Although I did control for political affiliation, the sample was also predominantly liberal. This could have resulted in part from the fact that subjects were all enrolled in sociology courses and were mostly sociology majors. Race and gender may thus have not been as impactful for them as it would have been for others because they were likely more familiar with these issues. It would therefore be beneficial for future studies assessing the effects of race and gender on homelessness stigma to utilize samples that are more broadly generalizable.

The generally sympathetic reactions of subjects to homeless persons may have resulted from the vignette used in this study, which was replicated from Phelan et al. (1997). Following their example, the vignette characters were portrayed as being dedicated to finding work, and negative stereotypes of the poor were omitted to isolate the effects of race and gender. As Phelan and colleagues suggested, it would thus be useful for future research to examine whether results differ when vignette characters are described in less sympathetic terms. Furthermore, the fact that subjects were asked to react to an individual rather than a group may have made them more likely to respond sympathetically. Asking subjects to react to a specific person rather than a vaguely conceptualized group likely made the vignette characters seem more real to them, which could have made it more difficult for them to respond harshly (Corrigan 2003; Lee et al. 1990).

As is always the case in survey and experimental studies, particularly among those examining racial and gender attitudes, social desirability bias could have influenced the results of this research (Abascal 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2014). Subjects are strongly pressured by the present
normative climate to provide socially desirable answers to questions examining racial and gender attitudes. Although distinctive African-American and White names were used as a means to circumvent this bias, my analysis did reveal a significant relationship between social desirability and blame. Subjects may therefore have chosen responses which made them appear less likely to blame homeless persons than they actually were out of a desire to conform to societal norms. They may thus respond less sympathetically to homeless persons they encounter on the streets than they did in a survey situation. Additionally, several ordinary least squares regression assumptions were violated (e.g., the dependent variables were not continuous, and the sample was not drawn randomly).

The stigma associated with homelessness often has detrimental consequences for the self-conceptions of homeless individuals and it likely contributes to producing discrimination against them in social relations, housing, and employment (Phelan et al. 1997; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004). This stigma also helps drive punitive and exclusionary policy responses to the homeless that criminalize the activities they rely upon to subsist (Gowan 2010; Herring and Lutz 2015; Stuart 2016). Homelessness stigma is therefore counterproductive as it often serves only to exacerbate the problems homeless persons face and makes it more difficult for them to find stable housing. The findings of this study suggest that much of this stigma is explained by attributions of blame and perceived dangerousness. Efforts to diminish the stigma associated with homelessness should therefore focus on decreasing perceptions of dangerousness and encouraging structural-level explanations. The results of this study and others regarding familiarity with stigmatized persons suggest that the best method of mitigating homelessness stigma may be to promote contact between housed and homeless persons (Lee at al. 2004;
Markowitz and Engelman 2016). Although programs that force contact with stigmatized individuals have had only limited, short-term success, any form of contact with homeless persons has been found to reduce stereotypes and increase tolerance (Lee et al. 2010).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

CORRELATION MATRIX OF VARIABLES USED IN REGRESSION ANALYSIS
## Correlation Matrix of Variables Used in Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Race condition (White)</th>
<th>Race (male)</th>
<th>Gender condition (male)</th>
<th>Social distance</th>
<th>Blame</th>
<th>Perceived danger</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender (male)</th>
<th>Race (White)</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Father's education</th>
<th>Political affiliation</th>
<th>Residential setting (city)</th>
<th>Familiarity</th>
<th>Crowne-Marlowe scale</th>
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<tr>
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*p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed tests).